

Antioch University

AURA - Antioch University Repository and Archive

Antioch University Full-Text Dissertations &
Theses

Antioch University Dissertations and Theses

2018

Minority Stress, Same-Sex Couples, and Marriage Equality: A Qualitative Interview Study

Angela Lee-Attardo

Antioch University, New England

Follow this and additional works at: <https://aura.antioch.edu/etds>



Part of the [Clinical Psychology Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Lee-Attardo, A. (2018). Minority Stress, Same-Sex Couples, and Marriage Equality: A Qualitative Interview Study. <https://aura.antioch.edu/etds/400>

This Dissertation is brought to you for free and open access by the Antioch University Dissertations and Theses at AURA - Antioch University Repository and Archive. It has been accepted for inclusion in Antioch University Full-Text Dissertations & Theses by an authorized administrator of AURA - Antioch University Repository and Archive. For more information, please contact hhale@antioch.edu.

Running head: MINORITY STRESS SAME-SEX COUPLES MARRIAGE EQUALITY

Minority Stress, Same-Sex Couples, and Marriage Equality:

A Qualitative Interview Study

by

Angela L. Lee-Attardo

B.A., Colgate University, 2008

M.S., Antioch University New England, 2015

DISSERTATION

Submitted in partial fulfillment for the degree of
Doctor of Psychology in the Department of Clinical Psychology
at Antioch University New England, 2018

Keene, New Hampshire



Department of Clinical Psychology

DISSERTATION COMMITTEE PAGE

The undersigned have examined the dissertation entitled:

**MINORITY STRESS, SAME-SEX COUPLES, AND MARRIAGE EQUALITY:
A QUALITATIVE INTERVIEW STUDY**

presented on January 8, 2018

by

Angela L. Lee-Attardo

Candidate for the degree of Doctor of Psychology
and hereby certify that it is accepted*.

Dissertation Committee Chairperson:
Kathi A. Borden, PhD

Dissertation Committee members:
Barbara Belcher-Timme, PsyD
David Arbeitman, PhD

Accepted by the
Department of Clinical Psychology Chairperson

George Tremblay, PhD
on 1/8/18

* Signatures are on file with the Registrar's Office at Antioch University New England.

Acknowledgements

So many individuals have helped me along the dissertation journey in various ways. A big thank you to the eight participants, who were generous enough to share their stories with me, without whom this work would not have been possible. My gratitude also goes out to friends, family, colleagues, and professors who went out of their way to help connect me with these individuals. Everyone in my dissertation seminar was instrumental in helping shape my ideas into a coherent plan for a study; particular thanks are due to Dr. Kathi Borden in her role as my advisor and dissertation chair, for help with ideas, critical feedback, and support. To Dr. Barbara Belcher-Timme and Dr. David Arbeitman, members of my committee, thank you for your interest in the project and your time and energy spent reviewing my work and providing your feedback. Dr. Carissa Krapf, Dr. Kelsey Moran, Jen Moniz, and Teresa Hoffman: Thank you for your time and input in piloting the interview and providing a second set of eyes while analyzing the data. Additional thanks are due to those who provided emotional support and encouragement or gave me a gentle push when I was feeling stuck; chief among these cheerleaders is my husband, Frank Attardo.

Table of Contents

| | |
|---|-----|
| Acknowledgements | iii |
| List of Tables | vii |
| Abstract | 1 |
| Introduction | 3 |
| Problem Statement | 3 |
| Background and context | 4 |
| Statement of Purpose | 8 |
| Rationale and Significance | 8 |
| Conceptual Framework | 9 |
| Motivation to get married | 9 |
| Commitment, or motivation to stay married | 9 |
| Personal commitment | 10 |
| Constraint | 10 |
| The marriage equality movement as relationship constraint | 11 |
| Couple therapy | 13 |
| Same-sex divorce | 14 |
| Summary | 14 |
| Method | 15 |
| Participants | 15 |
| Measures | 16 |
| Motivation to get married | 16 |
| Factors affecting commitment (or, motivation to stay married) | 17 |
| Willingness to utilize couple therapy | 17 |
| Thoughts about divorce among same-sex couples | 17 |
| Data Collection | 17 |
| Demographic questionnaire | 17 |
| Interview | 17 |
| Post-interview questionnaire | 18 |
| Member check | 18 |
| Data Analysis & Synthesis | 18 |
| Transcription of interviews | 18 |

| | |
|--|----|
| Initial read through..... | 18 |
| Second read through | 18 |
| Peer debriefing | 18 |
| Peer coding..... | 19 |
| Grouping of themes..... | 19 |
| Ethical Considerations | 20 |
| Ethical principles that were addressed..... | 20 |
| Ethical recruiting procedures and documents | 20 |
| Informed consent procedures and documents..... | 20 |
| Results..... | 21 |
| Interviews..... | 21 |
| Motivation to get married | 21 |
| Social justice/political motivations for marriage | 21 |
| Motivation for marriage inherent in a good match and love for one's partner..... | 23 |
| No social justice or political motivations or considerations | 24 |
| Factors that affect commitment (or motivation to stay married) | 25 |
| Personal commitment..... | 26 |
| Constraint..... | 27 |
| Willingness to utilize couple therapy..... | 30 |
| Prior experiences with therapy..... | 30 |
| Expectations about therapy and the therapist..... | 30 |
| How are interviewees impacted by the marriage equality movement?..... | 31 |
| Sense of movement and change | 32 |
| Increased salience of differences and challenges..... | 34 |
| Post-Interview Questionnaire..... | 37 |
| Discussion | 40 |
| Overall Findings..... | 40 |
| Implications for Therapists | 42 |
| Limitations and Future Research | 44 |
| Final Thoughts | 45 |
| References | 46 |
| Appendix A: Demographic Questionnaire..... | 50 |

| | |
|---|----|
| Appendix B: Interview Protocol | 53 |
| Appendix C: Follow-Up Questionnaire | 55 |

List of Tables

| | |
|--|----|
| Table 1. Data from Follow-up Questionnaires: Motivation to Get Married and Stay Married | 39 |
|--|----|

Abstract

In June 2015, the marriage equality movement in the United States succeeded at the federal level. This study documents individuals' perceptions of how the fight for marriage equality affected their thoughts, feelings, and behaviors within their own marriages to same-sex spouses. I conducted interviews with eight married individuals (five men and three women) who were married prior to the Supreme Court decision legalizing same-sex marriage nationwide. Areas of inquiry included (a) motivation to get married, (b) factors affecting commitment, (c) willingness to utilize couple therapy, and (d) factors affecting thoughts about divorce. I hypothesized that, for some individuals or couples, the fight to legalize same-sex marriage nationwide may have imposed pressure to promote the cause of marriage equality or fight antigay stigma and prejudice, thereby affecting commitment in their marriage. The primary interest in this study was to better understand the way individuals think about their marriages and how they were affected by the marriage equality movement. I used interpretive phenomenological analysis to analyze the data. Most participants endorsed some degree of political or social justice themes in their reasons for getting married or among the factors impacting their thoughts and feelings about marriage. Fewer participants thought political and social justice concerns would impact their commitment or thoughts about divorce, though this was a factor for two individuals. Participants did not see their willingness to use couple therapy as impacted by the marriage equality movement or by political and social justice concerns. Participants also described the impact of the marriage equality movement and the associated sociocultural/political turmoil on their lives in general. This study has implications for therapists working with same-sex couples or individuals struggling with relationship concerns. Political factors can be present among the motivations of a couple to get married. For some individuals, it is possible these factors impact commitment, though in this study, this was only true for two interviewees. If therapists are aware of the impact

of their clients' political and social justice concerns on their values and their relationships, they will be more likely to form accurate case conceptualizations and targeted interventions to help clients work through their problems.

Keywords: marriage equality, same-sex marriage, commitment, minority stress,
interpretive phenomenological analysis

This dissertation is available in open access at AURA: Antioch University Repository and Archive, <http://aura.antioch.edu/>, and OhioLINK ETD Center, <https://etd.ohiolink.edu>

Minority Stress, Same-Sex Couples, and Marriage Equality: A Qualitative Interview Study

In this study, I sought to understand how same-sex couples perceive the effect of the marriage equality movement on their own marriages. This initial section contains the context and background of the study, the rationale for and significance of the study, and the conceptual framework for the research. This is followed by the method used to recruit participants and collect and analyze data, the results, and discussion.

Problem Statement

At this time in United States history, same-sex couples are newly enjoying the right to legal marriage, which was granted at a federal level on June 26, 2015 (Chappell, 2015). Prior to federal marriage equality, same-sex couples and allies were battling, state by state, for this right. The literature on same-sex couples and same-sex marriage is growing. There has been quite a bit of research on therapy with same-sex couples (e.g., Long & Young, 2007), and some writings on how legally recognized marriage or union affects same-sex couples (e.g., Buffie, 2011; Green, 2013; Hernandez, 2013; Kail, Acosta, & Wright, 2015; Kealy-Bateman & Pryor, 2015; King & Bartlett, 2006; Knochel, 2010; Long & Young, 2007; Thomas 2014). An unpublished dissertation (Piper, 2016) examined the impact of the marriage equality movement on young men who had been adolescents while the movement was on the public stage. Piper's study found that, for the men interviewed, knowing that people were fighting for the right to same-sex marriage helped them to grow up feeling that they should expect that right and to be able to envision their future with a long-term monogamous partner. Among all the important research emerging on marriage equality, to the best of my knowledge, there has been no research on same-sex couples' perceptions of how the fight for marriage equality affected their own marriages and their thoughts, feelings, and behaviors within their marriages.

This study begins to fill that gap in the literature. This knowledge will promote enhanced awareness for therapists of special issues faced by many same-sex couples: (a) the newness of their right to marry, (b) the recent fight for marriage equality, (c) the ongoing fight for LGBTQ+ rights and equality more broadly, and (d) the pressure these may put on the couple. This awareness will allow couple therapists to tailor assessment and treatment to the needs of their clients.

Background and context. The LGBTQ+ community has been fighting for equal rights for many years, facing inequality and discrimination at every turn. The United States in the 1950s found the community fighting for the simple right to sexual intimacy with a same-sex partner (Chauncey, 2013). In the 1970s, when much of the community was fighting police raids at gay bars, others fought in their own way by requesting marriage licenses. Initially there were no laws specifically prohibiting this, but by 1978 15 states had written laws to prohibit the marriage of two individuals of the same sex (Chauncey, 2013; History and Timeline, 2014). In 1996, the federal Defense of Marriage Act, which was later declared unconstitutional by the Supreme Court, defined marriage as a legal union between one man and one woman (Buffie, 2011). Subsequently, individual states continued to make their own laws regarding same-sex relationships.

Activists in Vermont were the first to secure marriage-like rights for its same-sex couples. In 1999, the Vermont Supreme Court ruled that the State must provide the same protections to same-sex couples as different-sex couples, allowing the legislature to choose whether to permit marriage or create a new status providing the same rights (Winning the Freedom to Marry, n.d.). The legislature created the first civil union status, which was fraught with conflict on both sides of the argument—though same-sex marriage activists viewed it as an important step forward, it was only a partial victory. Those with antigay sentiment thought even

this was a step too far (Winning the Freedom to Marry, n.d.). Other states followed Vermont's example and created non-marriage statuses that granted rights to same-sex couples.

In the years leading up to the national legalization of same-sex marriage, support in American society for marriage equality increased. In 2012, President Barack Obama became the first president of the United States to publicly support same-sex marriage (History and Timeline, 2014). A Washington Post ABC News Poll from March 2013 showed that 58% of Americans polled believed that same-sex marriage should be legal. That was an increase of 21 percentage points over the 2003 measurement (Cohen, 2013). Legislative support for marriage equality also gradually increased. In 2004, Massachusetts was the first state to permit same-sex marriage (Chauncey, 2013; History and Timeline, 2014). States that previously had marriage bans began to repeal them (History and Timeline, 2014). This led to changes in the legal status of same-sex relationships all over the country. The United States Supreme Court legalized same-sex marriage at the federal level on June 26, 2015 in *Obergefell v. Hodges* (Chappell, 2015). In addition to the right to marriage, adoption rights for same-sex couples were all but secured with the *Obergefell v. Hodges* decision, given its order that same-sex couples be permitted to marry and enjoy all the related benefits, including adoption. The only state ban still enforced was overturned when courts officially ruled against Mississippi's same-sex adoption ban from 2000 in March of 2016 (Amy, 2016). Rights for same-sex couples have come a long way in the past several decades.

While the same-sex marriage question was battled out in a public forum, real people were dealing with prejudice, discrimination, and minority stress. Minority stress is brought about by such unintended slights as asking a coworker of unknown sexual orientation if she has a boyfriend and such overt heterosexism as antigay bullying and the constant battles being fought in the courts and the media (Buffie, 2011). As Buffie aptly stated:

[Sexual minorities] find the very nature of their *being* [emphasis added] constantly debated within our legislative bodies, the courts, and the mainstream media. They are subject to ridicule and are commonly the targets of demeaning and derogatory slang terms or insensitive jokes. Their morality and value as human beings are frequently questioned by individuals and organizations ignorant or unaccepting of current medical and social science literature concerning the gay population. (p. 986)

Indeed, even the marriage equality movement, which had a goal to achieve equal rights for same-sex couples, could potentially have had a negative impact on some individuals and couples.

Rostosky and Riggle (2015) explain:

Public debates over existing or proposed laws often include negative stereotypes and negative messages about people who identify as gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, and/or queer (LGBTQ) and about same-sex couples that are propagated by those who oppose equality. For instance, recent marriage equality campaigns, and the court cases that have followed, have provided a platform to some groups to convey negative messages about same-sex couples. Television, radio, newspapers and magazines, billboards, bumper stickers, yard signs, social websites, and tweets deliver negative messages that are hard to ignore. (p. 270)

These negative messages have a detrimental impact on individuals just trying to live life.

Simply observing this debate passively can trigger internalized stigma, and actively participating through activism or otherwise speaking out can subject a person to added discrimination and hatred. This can take a toll on an individual and a relationship, causing doubt and frustration. Indeed, Thomas (2014) interviewed same-sex couples who had taken advantage of legal marriage or civil unions in the United States and abroad, and while there were many stories of triumph and good feelings, there was a lot of stress and disappointment as well. There

were failed expectations about family and friends' reactions, negative experiences booking wedding venues and other vendors, and attempts to assert a higher social status through marriage that were met with resistance and disrespect. Some individuals found that announcing their engagement replicated a lot of the dread and negative reaction that coming out did years before. The legal recognition of same-sex marriage, for some couples, raised their expectations of the support and acceptance they should get from the family and friends, only to leave them disappointed or disillusioned (Thomas, 2014). For many, this may lead to the necessity to seek mental health treatment.

When it comes to mental health treatment for LGBTQ+ clients, it is important to consider what is actually helpful. Berke, Maples-Keller, and Richards (2016) considered it to be especially important to define and implement affirmative therapy, given mental health disparities among LGBTQ+ individuals which are thought to be partially due to minority stress. Additionally, increasing acceptance of the LGBTQ+ community and same-sex marriage is affecting the way many individuals and couples interact with society. As same-sex couples become more visible and more accepted in society, they are increasingly willing to seek couple therapy to improve their relationships (Long, Burnett, & Thomas, 2006 as cited in Long & Young, 2007). Same-sex couples that are generally doing well and those that are in distress have many of the same problems and stressors as different-sex couples. However, same-sex couples also have some additional pressures on their relationships, both internally and externally. These include, but are not limited to, (a) different gender role issues, (b) navigating the legal system (especially regarding parenting/adoption and spousal rights), (c) sexual identity, and (d) interacting with extended family. The coming-out process and the struggle for acceptance can continue long after first coming out (Long & Young, 2007; Ritter, n.d.). Additionally, LGBTQ+ individuals face additional pressure and choices when considering careers. For example, will

they be accepted in a career working with children, or will prejudice create barriers? Will a gay man be accepted in a traditionally male-dominated field or be ostracized? Women in a same-sex relationship, whose household income will not include the typically higher salary of a male partner, may consider entering into male-dominated fields to make sufficient earnings (Long & Young, 2007). It is important for therapists to understand the special issues faced by same-sex couples. Couple therapy can be helpful to those in distress (Snyder & Halford, 2012), and its impact depends on a variety of factors including expectations and motivation (Tambling, 2012). The present study sought to increase understanding of one special issue married same-sex couples currently face: the impact of the marriage equality movement on their thoughts, feelings, and behaviors related to their marriages.

Statement of Purpose

The purpose of this study was to enhance the understanding of how married same-sex couples believe the marriage equality movement affected their marriages. Specific areas of inquiry included (a) motivation to get married; (b) factors affecting commitment to one's partner and the marriage; (c) willingness to utilize couple therapy; and (d) the relationships among thoughts on same-sex divorce, couple therapy, marriage equality, and participants' marriages.

Rationale and Significance

A better understanding of these issues will aid couple therapists in assessing, conceptualizing, and treating same-sex couples. Understanding the impact of pressures and motivations external to the relationship will promote enhanced sensitivity and more targeted interventions in couple therapy. Same-sex couples have always faced some pressures that differ from those of different-sex couples (Long & Young, 2007; Ritter, n.d.). Now that same-sex couples have equal marriage rights, they may face different pressures within the context of marriage and couple therapy than different-sex couples do. This study sought to understand that

experience, specifically with regard to the way the marriage equality movement and the ongoing fight against prejudice and discrimination impact commitment in same-sex marriages.

Conceptual Framework

This section describes the literature and theory driving the questions examined in this study.

Motivation to get married. Because marriage has not always been a legal option for same-sex couples (and still is not in many parts of the world), marriage may still feel different and be thought of differently by individuals in same-sex relationships. A qualitative study with same-sex couples in Canada who had recently gained the right to marry showed that for many, the sudden right to marry did not result in a sudden desire to marry (Humble, 2013). Because marriage had never been an option, some couples had never thought of it as possibly applying to them. For some of these couples, they felt that they needed a specific motivator to get married. For some this was to gain legal spousal rights, and for others it was a symbolic act that they thought would bring them even closer together after years of living together like a married couple. Whatever the couples' reasons for getting married, most viewed it as a very meaningful act (Humble, 2013). Schecter, Tracy, Page, and Luong (2008) showed that for many couples who married with the idea that it was just a piece of paper to "make it legal," it actually ended up being a more profound act than they anticipated. They reported feeling even more in love or even more committed than before they married. Clearly, for many same-sex couples, getting married is a very considered and meaningful act.

Commitment, or motivation to stay married. Commitment impacts relationship stability. There are various factors that impact one's commitment in a relationship, and there are also different types of commitment (Rhoades, Stanley, & Markman, 2010). *Personal commitment* is a desire to stay in the relationship. *Moral commitment* is feeling obligated to stay

in the relationship, for example because of the belief that divorce is wrong. *Structural commitment* includes such reasons for staying as poor alternatives to the current relationship or the difficulty of ending the relationship (Rhoades et al., 2010). All of these commitment types promote behavior that helps maintain the relationship.

Personal commitment. There is a lot of research on what makes a happy marriage and what makes people *want* to be married to their spouses. For same-sex and different-sex couples, similar characteristics of the relationship predict relationship quality and longevity: (a) togetherness, (b) shared activities, (c) security, (d) higher expressiveness, (e) greater perception of the relationship as intrinsically rewarding, (f) trust, (g) the perception that conflict is not necessarily destructive, (h) shared decision-making, and (i) social support outside of the marriage (Green, 2012). Gottman and colleagues (2003) found that a lower perceived cost/benefit ratio of the relationship is also related to higher relationship satisfaction. Low levels of contempt, disgust, and defensiveness, as well as higher levels of humor and affection are related to higher relationship satisfaction (Gottman et al., 2003). Couples who are friends with each other, show affection, use humor, and engage in conflict in a healthy way (e.g., without contempt, criticism, and defensiveness) tend to be the happiest (Babcock, Gottman, Ryan, & Gottman, 2013; Driver, Tabares, Shapiro, & Gottman, 2012; Gottman, Coan, Carrere, & Swanson, 1998). These are all characteristics of a couple that predict satisfaction and longevity in the relationship.

Constraint. On the other hand, people often have additional motives for staying in a marriage other than their love for their spouse and their desire to be in the relationship. These factors include perceiving barriers to leaving as being insurmountable or having poor alternatives to staying (Rhoades et al., 2010). These are issues of constraint, or factors that lead one to stay in a relationship even if satisfaction has decreased. Rhoades and colleagues describe *perceived constraint* commitment as internal or external pressure to stay together. This would include, for

example, the notion that one's friends would be disappointed by the couple's break up. Perceived constraint commitment was positively related to relationship stability among unmarried different-sex couples ages 18 to 35. It seems to be a sense of external pressure to maintain a relationship that one truly wants to maintain. *Felt constraint*, on the other hand, was negatively related to relationship stability. Felt constraint is a sense of being trapped in the relationship (constrained to stay, without really wanting to be in it) due to many of the same factors (Rhoades et al., 2010). The idea of constraint is key to the focus of the current study.

The marriage equality movement as relationship constraint. In attempting to understand how the marriage equality movement may have impacted same-sex couples, I proposed that the pressure to stay married to further the cause of marriage equality is a form of constraint on some same-sex marriages. It might be considered either perceived constraint or felt constraint, depending on the couple. A couple that has a high level of personal commitment and relationship satisfaction may have experienced the desire to further the cause as an additional external force keeping the relationship on track (perceived constraint). A couple who was already in distress and wanted to separate might have experienced the desire to further the cause as a pressure that keeps them from leaving a marriage they truly do not want to be in, resulting in a feeling of being trapped (felt constraint). Below are reasons why the marriage equality movement may act as a form of relationship constraint for some same-sex couples.

Knowledge of the factors that contribute to greater or lesser levels of commitment or constraint in same-sex couples can be useful to individuals or couples and their counselors in creating a more thorough conceptualization (Greene & Britton, 2013). One of these factors may be the personal and political meaning that was inherent in the marriage equality movement for many people. Marriage equality in Massachusetts led many same-sex couples to feel more committed to their spouses, more accepted and supported by their families and communities, and

more connected to the LGBTQ+ community (Buffie, 2011; Richardson, 2014). For some couples, marriage is also imbued with political importance. For example, in a study by Schechter and colleagues (2008), some recently married same-sex couples in Massachusetts felt that the legalization of same-sex marriage had worked against the stereotype that same-sex couples are not able to make long-term, loving commitments. These individuals mentioned feeling like role models for younger same-sex couples. Other Massachusetts same-sex couples described marriage equality as an important move for social justice and civil rights (Richardson, 2014). The meaning of the marriage equality movement seems positive for many same-sex couples, and would presumably have a positive effect on commitment through perceived constraint for happily married couples.

On the other hand, for couples who are not as happily married, the salience of the marriage equality movement may play an even more important role, as a form of felt constraint. It has been suggested that married same-sex couples may face an additional pressure on their relationships—to stay married, keep up appearances, and support the cause of marriage equality (Hernandez, 2013). This sort of pressure could impact individuals' views of their marriages and their intention to stay married. It may also impact factors such as expectations about therapy, investment in the relationship, and effort.

For both happy and unhappy couples, those who view marriage as a lifelong commitment may be more likely to work harder at making it better (Amato & Booth, 1997). For many same-sex couples, the desire to support the cause of marriage equality may contribute to the idea that marriage *is* a lifelong commitment. For happily married couples this would likely be experienced as one of many commitment and perceived constraint factors keeping their marriage together. On the other hand, for couples who do not want to stay together but are concerned about how it would “look” if they divorced while the struggle for marriage equality was still

ongoing or newly over, this pressure may act as a type of felt constraint, making the couple feel trapped in the marriage. The political issues tied to the marriage equality movement and the ongoing fight against prejudice and discrimination may make some individuals more likely to view their marriages as a lifelong commitment, for better or for worse.

Couple therapy. Couple therapy is an effective modality of treatment for many people (Snyder & Halford, 2012). There is evidence that couple therapy is effective at increasing relationship satisfaction through such mechanisms as improvements in communication and emotional closeness and decreases in psychological distress (Doss, Mitchell, Georgia, Biesen, & Rowe, 2014). Couple therapy can also help increase relationship satisfaction by decreasing commitment uncertainty (Owen et al., 2014). Uncertainty about commitment to the relationship and identity as a couple may reflect the tenuous nature of the relationship. Becoming more certain about commitment can impact the psychological well-being of the partners (Owen et al., 2014). Many couples who seek couple therapy will experience improvements.

Couple therapy does not work for everyone, however. Many studies of couple therapy show that approximately 50% of couples are doing significantly better by the end of treatment, so there is room for improvement (Jacobson & Addis, 1993). Higher levels of distress, higher age, less emotional affection, lower frequency of sex within the marriage (Jacobson & Addis, 1993), one or both partners suffering from depression (Jacobson & Addis, 1993; Snyder, Mangrum, & Willis, 1993), poor problem-solving skills, and low emotional responsiveness (Snyder et al., 1993) are qualities that predict poor outcomes in treatment. These various qualities of the couple and the individual partners impact the likelihood of success.

Another factor in determining the success or failure of couple therapy, and most important for this study, is expectations. Expectations about therapy and effort in therapy are important for its success (Dixon, Gordon, Frousakis, & Schumm, 2012; Tambling, 2012;

Tambling & Johnson, 2010). Expectations about therapy have been linked to starting therapy, continuing therapy, forming a therapeutic alliance, exerting effort toward changing, and outcomes (Tambling, 2012). All of these factors that contribute to the success or failure of couple therapy are related to one's views about marriage, one's intentions with regard to the relationship, and external factors that impinge on or support the marriage. The factors affecting relationship satisfaction and commitment may impact the likelihood that a couple will seek couple therapy in times of conflict, as well as their expectations about therapy and the effort they invest.

Same-sex divorce. The political and social pressures that affect same-sex couples and the desire to make the marriage healthy and satisfying might also affect their willingness to divorce. Those who feel political pressure to make their marriage work might feel the same pressure to avoid divorce, even in an unhappy marriage. Current measurements of the rates of divorce among same-sex couples are based on limited data, given the recency of the phenomenon. Additionally, not all states have reported divorce rates separately for same-sex and different-sex couples. There has also been some conflict about the way the divorce rate has been calculated for same-sex couples. However, overall, it appears that same-sex couples are currently divorcing at rates fairly similar to different-sex couples, somewhere around 1 to 2% per year (Badgett & Herman, 2011; Badgett & Mallory, 2014; Gelman, 2014).

Summary

The recent legalization of same-sex marriage in many states and the ongoing attention to marriage equality has likely changed the way same-sex couples think about marriage in general and their own relationships in particular. Marriage may be an especially meaning-laden act for many of these couples. Some couples that have been together for years view marriage as a

long-awaited right, and are pleased that they can finally be recognized as legitimate married couples by society. Others have had a more political investment in the institution of marriage, with a desire to defeat stereotypes or support the cause of marriage equality. Some couples may experience both the personal and political meanings of the legalization of same-sex marriage. These factors contribute to views about marriage as a lifelong commitment (or not) and one's intentions to promote a happy marriage and to *stay* married once he or she has gotten married. All of these factors contribute to pressures on and within a relationship that are likely to affect attitudes toward marriage, commitment, couple therapy, and ultimately, outcomes (i.e., marital satisfaction, staying together, or divorcing). In the research for this study, I investigated this topic by interviewing individuals who were married to a same-sex partner.

Method

This section describes the sampling, data collection, and measures used in the study as well as ethical principles that were addressed.

Participants

To locate participants who met criteria for the study, I provided electronic flyers to professors, colleagues, family, and friends to pass along to LGBTQ+ groups and individuals whom they thought might be interested in taking part in the study. I also posted a message on my personal Facebook page, placed an advertisement on Craigslist, made postings in several online message boards and Facebook groups focused on LGBTQ+ interests, and emailed several universities with mental health programs requesting that a message be sent out to students.

Those who responded and took part in the study were three women and five men. Five interviewees identified their sexual orientation as gay, one as lesbian, one as bisexual, and one as queer. Interviewees ranged in age from 25 to 50 ($M = 35.00$). All eight individuals were married to a same-sex spouse at the time of the interview, and one participant's relationship was

described as polyamorous. Two of the interviewees were married to each other. Seven of the eight participants had a bachelor's degree or higher. Among the interviewees, three were employed at a college/university, two were graduate students studying in a mental health field, one was an educator, one was a factory worker, and one was a mental health professional.

Reported combined household incomes ranged from at least \$25,000 to \$200,000+, with four of the eight interviewees reporting household incomes in the \$50,000 to \$99,999 range.

Interviewees reported how long they had been romantically linked to their spouses and how long they had been married. Relationships ranged in length from 3 to 22 years ($M = 9.48$ years) and marriages ranged in length from 1 to 12 years ($M = 5.31$). Two participants reported having children; their children ranged in age from under 5 years to over 18.

Measures

The instrumentation consisted of a demographic questionnaire filled out by the participants prior to the interview, a semi-structured interview developed specifically for this study, and a brief questionnaire filled out after the interview with a checklist of possible motivations for getting married and staying married (see Appendix A, Appendix B, and Appendix C, respectively). The purpose of the post-interview questionnaire was to assess the relative importance of the various motivations for getting married and staying married and to provide a means for participants to include factors that were not elicited by the interview. In preparation to begin data collection, I piloted the interview with two colleagues to ensure clarity of the questions and their usefulness for eliciting meaningful data. This prompted minor edits to the interview protocol based on their feedback. The interview included the areas described in the following sections.

Motivation to get married. What were the reasons that the couple got married? Was one of them a desire to make a political statement or support the marriage equality movement?

Factors affecting commitment (or, motivation to stay married). What are the factors affecting how committed the individual is to her or his spouse? Is a desire to support the marriage equality movement one of the factors?

Willingness to utilize couple therapy. Would the individual be willing to utilize couple therapy if a rough patch came up in the marriage? Why or why not? What are the pros and cons of couple therapy for same-sex couples? How are expectations about therapy related to this decision? Does stigma surrounding couple therapy decrease willingness to use couple therapy? Alternatively, does a desire to keep the marriage together in order to not contribute to stigma surrounding same-sex marriage play into a willingness to use couple therapy? What other factors are relevant (e.g., prior experience with therapy)?

Thoughts about divorce among same-sex couples. How does the individual view same-sex divorce? Is a fear of contributing to antigay stigma a factor in one's desire to avoid divorce?

Data Collection

As described above, data were collected through the interviews, which ranged from approximately 20 to 50 minutes, and two questionnaires.

Demographic questionnaire. Participants received emails containing the demographic questionnaire (described above) and responded by typing responses in the Word document and emailing it back to me.

Interview. Raw material for the qualitative data was collected via semistructured interviews (described above). All interviews were completed via Skype, and the audio was recorded using a digital audio recorder, with the consent of the participants.

Post-interview questionnaire. After the interview, participants received an email containing the post-interview questionnaire (described above) and completed it by typing or marking their responses in Word and emailing it back to me.

Member check. After each interview, I wrote a summary of my understanding of the major points of the interview and emailed it to the interviewees, asking that they read it through and make any corrections or additions necessary to make sure it accurately represented their thoughts, feelings, and experiences. Six of the eight interviewees responded to the member check. One interviewee provided a correction, and this was noted and considered in data analysis.

Data Analysis and Synthesis

Data analysis was completed using Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis, as described by Biggerstaff and Thompson (2008), to interpret and make meaning of the interview data.

Transcription of interviews. The initial step was verbatim transcription of the interview recording, including notations of nonverbal events or qualities that added meaning to the text, including pauses, coughs, interruptions, and notable changes in volume or tone.

Initial read through. After transcription, I conducted an initial read through of the completed transcript while listening to the recording and making text-focused notes on my thoughts, observations, and reflections using comment bubbles in Microsoft Word. It was at this point that member checks took place (see above, Mertens, 2010).

Second read through. In the second read through, I used MaxQDA12 software to make note of themes in the text and among the notes already taken, while attempting to consider alternate interpretations and areas where my opinions biased my understanding.

Peer debriefing. At this point, as suggested by Bloomberg and Volpe (2012), a fellow graduate student in my program engaged in peer debriefing. This colleague read my notes,

pointed out alternate interpretations of certain parts of the text, and suggested alternate themes and new ways to describe themes. I read through her notes and made changes where I thought they were appropriate. I rejected changes when they broke themes down into smaller subthemes, as they would simply be clustered together later in the data analysis, or when the changes were based on what I viewed as a misunderstanding of what the themes were intended to represent. In those cases, I considered ways to more accurately describe the themes in question. In the case of several changes that were not easily accepted or rejected, my colleague and I discussed a resolution.

Peer coding. After all eight interviews had been marked with themes and had been put through the peer-debriefing process, another fellow graduate student in my program coded half of the interviews with my themes. She worked with the original interview transcripts and my code system of themes. Each theme had a memo attached in MaxQDA12 giving a description of the theme. My colleague reviewed the codes and applied them as she saw fit to four randomly selected interviews. Intercoder agreement analysis in MaxQDA12 provided analysis of the extent of agreement between my coding of themes and my colleague's coding in terms the presence of a theme anywhere in the interview. On the four interviews she coded, our analyses matched at 79%, 78%, 84%, and 89%. My colleague stated that she erred on the side of undercoding rather than overcoding when unsure, and that she believed her initial unfamiliarity with the code system caused her to undercode a bit. Regardless, these were considered adequate percentages. Additionally, I retained most of the coding that my colleague placed in the data that I had not initially coded, as I agreed with her on most of these.

Grouping of themes. After peer coding, I used MaxQDA12 software to organize the themes into a hierarchy of clusters to identify patterns of meaning within and between interviews. MaxQDA12 has a tool called MAXMaps, which allows the user to drag themes from

the coding software onto a mapping surface where they are represented by small icons. From there, the user can move the icons around and connect them to each other, thereby visually organizing and creating clusters. I organized the icons into groups based on which interview question they pertained to, to start with, and then shifted some of the icons to other groupings if they fit better there. Within these large groupings, the icons broke down into overarching clusters of meaning and smaller groups within each cluster that pertained to specific emergent themes. I broke apart several groups and reorganized them when it became clear they fit together better in a different way. The final product is represented below in text with supporting quotations from the interviews.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical principles that were addressed. Prior to beginning data collection, this research was reviewed and approved by Antioch University New England's Institutional Review Board. During this research, all efforts were made to conduct the research in an ethical manner, protecting participants' right to informed consent, protection from harm, privacy, and confidentiality.

Ethical recruiting procedures and documents. Prospective participants were informed that the study would concern their experiences in their marriages and their views on how marriage equality has affected their relationships. They were informed that the study might bring up sensitive issues. Participants were informed of the \$15 compensation for their time.

Informed consent procedures and documents. Prior to the interview, participants received a consent document explaining the study, its goals, the possible risks, and the monetary compensation for participating. They had the opportunity to discuss the study with me and ask questions before printing the consent document, signing it, and scanning it back to me.

Results

Interviews

Interviewees shared many ideas in common and had unique perspectives as well. These ideas are generally compatible; where they are not, this is highlighted. Findings presented here are broken down into several levels, starting with a reiteration of interview topics and questions. Within each question, one or more overarching clusters of meaning predominated, and there were several emergent themes within each cluster. Quotations from the interviews are offered here to illustrate each emergent theme. Interviewees' names have been changed to protect their confidentiality.

Motivation to get married. Interviews began with participants sharing about how they met their spouses and what the beginning of their relationships were like. Interviewees described what made them want to get married, and we specifically discussed whether any political or social justice motivations played into their decision. The responses to this section of the interview fell into three main clusters: (a) social justice/political motivation for marriage, (b) no social justice/political motivation for marriage, and (c) motivation for marriage inherent in a good match and love for one's partner.

Social justice/political motivations for marriage. Most of the participants described at least some sense of political meaning involved in getting married. For some, this was an important part of why they chose marriage, and for some this was more of a background consideration. The political and social justice factors involved in marriage for interviewees included a sense of belonging or not being "othered," seeking the benefits of legally recognized marriage, and a more purely political motivation.

Sense of belonging and not being othered. Participants described aspects of getting married that were associated with a desire to have their relationship officially recognized in the

eyes of the law, feeling that their relationship would be legitimized, and being seen as equal to different-sex couples by family, friends, and acquaintances. One interviewee, Chris, shared:

There's definitely like a legitimacy factor . . . I again come from a . . . very conservative family, very religious, evangelical family, and so acceptance and seeing my relationship with [my husband] the same as like my brother and his wife um is definitely a struggle for people in my family. . . . I do think there's a little bit to the fact that you want to be able to say, "I'm married," and "this is my husband." . . . I personally have never liked the word "partner" and would—it just like makes me cringe a little bit. Um, because it, it's, it makes, it feels, it makes the relationship feel *other* in some way.

Another interviewee, Eddie, described marriage as "taking a step . . . toward official recognition." Walter shared that one of his reasons to get married was "being seen as equals to my straight friends—I think that played into it. So that they could see, that yes you were a committed relationship."

Seeking the benefits of legally recognized marriage. Several interviewees described a desire to seek the various benefits that accompany a legally recognized marriage, which include additional rights, the ability to lead a lifestyle steeped in valued traditions, and a sense of additional security in the relationship. Amy stated, "[I]n contrast to either just domestic partners or civil unions, yes, marriage meant something important to me. . . . Recognizing that there's, there's federal benefits to marriage that you don't have with civil unions or domestic partnerships."

Greg explained:

I think the other issue was just a little bit of peace of mind . . . protecting your property rights and also your rights as far as like medical and stuff. . . . There was always a

concern that you are perhaps not gonna be granted the same rights should some medical issue come up.

Another participant, Chris, described the importance to him of the traditional, quintessential lifestyle of a married couple:

I really wanted to be able to have the white picket fence and the wife and two and a half kids. . . . After I came out I realized I could pretty much have exactly that, just have a husband and not a wife.

Purely political motivation. A few participants mentioned that their reasons for getting married included some more purely political motivations like making a political statement and supporting the LGBTQ+ community. Walter shared: “We would have gotten married no matter what, but there was a certain sense of . . . we can now do this so we wanted to say, to whatever powers that be, it should be allowed, and make a statement.” Jason explained:

Two of our good friends, they got married a year before we did, and it was very much a part of—they had one of the like, judicial speeches as like part of their ceremony and things like that. Um, so, I think it was very much a motivator in ours and like it was something that like we felt committed to, like we as a community we fought really hard for these, these laws.

Motivation for marriage inherent in a good match and love for one’s partner.

Participants also shared the many aspects of their relationships that motivated them to marry their spouses. These reasons included a good match with their significant others, such as being at the same point in life, as well as love and the qualities of their partner that attracted them to each other and made them want to be together.

Good match/same place in life. Several interviewees shared things they had in common with their partner that made them a good match for each other and made marriage a good fit.

These factors included similar perspectives on love, shared goals, and readiness to commit. Lori explained, “We had both kind of already had our like major huge heart break of our lives [laughs] I think and um...we didn’t really think that...love like existed and we were kind of both in that same place.” Kate shared, “I guess we had a lot of the same goals in life. We wanted the same things. You know, we both wanted marriage, and we both wanted—you know, we both want kids.”

Love for and attraction to spouse. Interviewees described qualities of their partners or things they brought to the relationship that made them want to create that life-long commitment. These included a sense of safety, sexual chemistry, and a right-away gut feeling. Kate shared about the sense of stability she felt with her wife: “I felt safe with her and I never really felt like that most of my life.” Lori described the sexual connection that increased the bond: “I think when we found each other, there was definitely like a sexual chemistry to it.” Several interviewees mentioned a gut feeling that told them their partner was *the one*. Chris described it: “It was literally pretty instant connection. I probably knew three weeks into our relationship, which is crazy now that I think about it, that I would marry him.”

No social justice or political motivations or considerations. A few participants shared that they had no social justice or political considerations in their journey to getting married. Others shared that they were not as political as they might have been if not for factors blocking that.

Not concerned with the politics of the marriage equality movement. One participant was clear to say that political or social justice factors really did not play into her desire to get married. Specifically, when discussing the issue of the perception of legitimacy through marriage, Kate stated:

Everybody um, already took it as a legit relationship and they didn't question it. . . . my family, friends...even like people that I met, they're like "oh, yeah, no, we know you're a lesbian, it's cool," like, they just accepted it right away meeting me... so . . . no, that didn't really play a role at all.

Other participants stated that politically related factors were not at all central in their motivation to get married, but played more of a background role.

Outside factors block political and social justice motivations. Some participants shared that they are interested in and care about the politics of the marriage equality movement and social justice for the LGBTQ+ community, but other factors keep this from playing a major role in their lives or their motivations. Chris spoke about the impact of internalized homophobia earlier in life on his current motivations:

I think the interesting thing for me is that I've never personally been extremely personally invested in the fight for equality. Um, I think a lot of that is, comes from the fact that um...feeling a little bit like a hypocrite how I felt when I was younger, and if I'm now pushing for it now, that sort of makes me a little bit of a hypocrite.

Several participants mentioned that they care about marriage equality and other social justice factors, but never became very active in the movement because they felt optimistic that it would succeed and did not feel pressure to act. Jason explained, "I think it's a level of privilege that I kind of always knew that I wanted to get married and I kind of always took it for granted that eventually it was going to be able to happen."

Factors that affect commitment (or motivation to stay married). As distinct from their reasons for *getting* married, participants also shared what affects their ongoing commitment, or their motivation to *stay* married. The factors participants described that impact their commitment comprised two main clusters: personal commitment and constraint factors.

Personal commitment. As described earlier, personal commitment is a *desire* to stay married, rather than feeling obligated or having no other option (Rhoades et al., 2010).

Interviewees described the many reasons they feel personally committed to their spouses, including shared goals, love, support, and positive experiences, and the ways they express their commitment.

Interviewees described the way their commitment and shared goals mutually influence each other. Some participants shared that their commitment is steadfast. Some described commitment as a process of choosing each other over and over rather than a static state; it requires constant recommitment and reaffirmation of the desire to stay together even during difficult times. Kate stated, “There were times where I was like, ‘I don’t know if I can keep doing this.’ But we...I *do* choose it, and I want it for the long haul, so we pushed forward and made it work.” Interviewees described how their shared goals for the future, making plans, and intertwining various aspects of their lives reinforces their commitment. Jason described the way joining finances was related to ongoing commitment in his relationship after he and his husband were married:

[W]e’ve dealt with . . . joining bank accounts and people in our lives who were like wait you’re gonna completely consolidate your finances together? And we’re like yeah if we’re gonna be together I mean there’s no point in us having sixteen separate accounts. And there’s a lot of people out there in our lives who were like, well you should keep something to protect yourself, and it’s like, okay well our intention is to stay together and our goal is to stay together, and by having separate accounts to me, and I think [my husband] would agree, it felt like, okay this is a contingency plan.

For Jason and his husband, consolidating their finances was not only practical, but a reflection and reinforcement of their desire to stay married.

Interviewees' commitment was also evident in the ways they think about dedication to their spouses. Lori described how monogamy at various levels is an important part of the commitment in her marriage:

[S]exually we're monogamous. Like, I take that part of it very seriously, just not cheating and being, you know, respecting her wishes and her respecting mine. So I see that as a big part of our commitment. Um, and then also like this idea of cheating on someone emotionally, like um, I think also comes to mind. I don't know, like before we got married, it wasn't uncommon for me to like...go spend the night at a friend's house that, you know...so even respecting what that could look like to my wife. Or like, sharing really intimate details about, I don't know, stuff that maybe she wouldn't want me to say, stuff like that. So like reserving part of myself for her, specifically.

For one participant, commitment to his spouse was evident within the context of their polyamorous relationship. Eddie explained:

We've uh. . . welcomed a third member into the relationship, so it's a polyamorous relationship. And, it...whenever my husband and I talk about it, we acknowledge how committed we are to each other, still. . . . They're very careful to not triangulate, which may also reflect on the commitment between my husband and I.

Constraint. Participants also described factors that impact commitment by providing constraint. Given that these participants were all happily married, these factors were described as perceived constraint—conditions outside their personal commitment that reinforce their dedication to the marriage. These constraint factors took both politically-related and nonpolitical forms.

Political constraint. Interviewees generally reported that the idea of breaking up was not on their minds, and to imagine the factors impacting their commitment and avoidance of divorce

was difficult to do. However, a few participants did agree that above and beyond the pain and turmoil of divorce itself, there might be additional discomfort associated with the *stigma* of divorce. This was true of the general stigma of divorce and specifically the stigma of divorce for a same-sex couple. Lori noted:

I've actually heard this from like members of the LGBT community that it doesn't matter if, um if you're married or you're not or whatever, it doesn't matter how serious the relationship is, like you're still gonna cheat on each other and end up broken up at some point. . . . And...I, I don't know . . . is that really different from anyone else? . . . But I think that there is that stigma out there.

Chris shared a similar view: "I guess the stigma of divorce would be uh, something that I would never want to have, or something, and so that sort of impacts my level of commitment, I don't know." I inquired, "When you think of that—the stigma of divorce just in general or specifically for same-sex couples?" He elaborated:

When I said that I was thinking in general, but I do think there is...some added pressure, um, that, to sort of support what marriage equality is fighting for, that when, that same-sex marriages, um, don't all end in divorce type thing, that the marriages do work out. . . . I think there is some...pressure there, that you know . . . if everything ended in divorce, then why are we fighting for the right to marry?

Chris also added, "I do think that there is, whether real or perceived added pressure to . . . prove that your relationship is legitimate and . . . successful and healthy as a straight couple . . . would be." This pressure could impact the way he and others feel committed to their marriages.

Nonpolitical constraint. Interviewees also reported a multitude of other perceived constraint factors including the conjoint aspects of their lives (i.e., children, finances, social circle), pressure from family and friends, and a personal or moral/religious opposition to divorce.

These are factors, outside of personal desire to stay married, that increase commitment. Walter explained:

Um, there's financial commitment . . . I hate to . . . there's that practical sense of—you're in a good place financially. You know, we own a house together, we've done a remodel together, we've you know seen ourselves through those type of things.

When asked about factors affecting commitment, Amy mentioned the impact of having children on the commitment to maintaining a healthy marriage:

Our kids. [laughs] You know, that's the biggest one. You know you just want to do right by them and raise them in a loving, supportive household. So, it's uh . . . yeah I guess for their benefit to have both parents in the house, but in a loving way, you know.

Chris described the impact of the expectations of others: "I think being the first, one of the first of my friend group to get married, there's a, a bit of . . . not a spotlight but . . . yeah, like expectation there that we have to live up to, I don't know." Lori spoke about the pressure from family:

We both grew up Catholic and um, I think with that background, both of our families are pretty against divorce. And even though they don't necessarily want us to be in a same-sex relationship, now that we are and it's like serious, they kind of hold us to it. . . . 'Cause there's like this acceptance, but then also this pressure.

Some participants talked about their moral or religious opposition to divorce and the way that impacts their commitment. Chris shared, "I see marriage as a lifetime commitment and divorce is not an option. Things could go south or become difficult, but nothing would ever sway me from that." I asked, "What goes into that for you . . . the steadfastness of that?" He elaborated:

I think the way I was raised . . . while I don't necessarily adopt the same religious views, I def . . . a lot of the traditions and mindsets are based in that. So I think my view of marriage is very much a product of my religious upbringing.

Several participants mentioned that the act of marriage or creating that official entity of a marriage, while born of personal commitment, actually also created a sense of relationship constraint in the marriage. Walter described it: “With that paper, there comes a little bit of that sense of commitment. Whereas before I had that piece of paper, it was more of a...you could leave, you could at any time.”

Willingness to utilize couple therapy. Seven of the eight interviewees stated they would be willing to use couple therapy if they came to a rough patch in their marriage. Whether willing or unwilling, there were a number of factors participants mentioned that impact their thoughts about couple therapy. These include a combination of previous experiences with therapy and expectations about therapy or therapists.

Prior experiences with therapy. Participants described both positive and negative prior experiences with individual and couple therapy that impact their thoughts about using couple therapy in the future. Eddie stated, “I have had individual therapy, and...um...I’d say that . . . those experiences would have a positive effect in terms of easing the way to couple’s therapy.” On the other hand, Amy described reasons for choosing not to consider couple therapy in times of relationship distress:

We’ve had some pretty rough spots in the past, too, and, and...um, sort of got forced into a very quick mini like therapy session at one point, and just it felt, well, not good to either of us and we’re like okay that just affirmed what we already thought, like this is not, would not be helpful or productive for us.

Expectations about therapy and the therapist. Interviewees’ willingness to use couple therapy was also impacted by their expectations about therapy in terms of what it can help with, what will be difficult or unwanted about therapy, and the perceived importance of working with

a gay or gay-friendly therapist. Several participants discussed the potential helpfulness of couple therapy for facilitating more effective communication. Lori shared:

I think it would be especially helpful on the areas where we just like talk past each other. In a lot of ways, we are on the same page, and . . . even if we have to fight through it a bit, or, I don't know, even when we go through our rough patches, we can usually talk it out ourselves, but there are a couple hot topics that like we just don't quite have the skill to navigate yet in our relationship. And maybe not even "yet," but I guess we deal with our own personal stuff as well. So I could see that couple's therapy could help. . . .um, I don't know create some form of open communication for that.

Some participants expressed hesitation about sharing personal issues with a stranger. Amy knew that might be a problem for her wife, in particular:

I think she just doesn't understand or doesn't feel there's any benefit to sharing personal information with somebody she doesn't know very well. And having the conversation with her, well you have to sort of find somebody you form a relationship with and then it's not a stranger, and . . . she just won't go there, so we didn't go there.

Several interviewees voiced the expectation that it would be more helpful and more comfortable to have a couple therapist who is knowledgeable about and accepting of same-sex relationships.

Walter explained:

I've had spots where I've gone to a counselor, just me, but I always want to make sure they're, they're gay. Or they're, at the very least I guess gay-friendly. . . . I just want to be able to discuss things freely and have them understand. . . . I just want someone who can relate to the same things I've gone through.

How are interviewees impacted by the marriage equality movement? Interviewees shared additional information about how they have been impacted by the marriage equality

movement. These experiences generally pertained to the general sense of movement and change associated with the movement or the increased salience of differences and challenges they face.

Sense of movement and change. One of the impacts of the marriage equality movement on interview participants is the overarching sense that this is a period of ongoing movement and change. In some respects, this is a positive and healthy feeling for interviewees. On the other hand, though this change is all for the good, there can be some discomfort or wariness associated with that at times.

Positive impact of changes. Interviewees described the positive changes in their lives that accompanied the marriage equality movement. For some participants, marriage equality provided a sense of affirmation and empowerment. Chris shared:

I remember the day that . . . the Supreme Court ruling basically legalized gay marriage, and I just remember feeling very, extremely . . . validated; I felt more comfortable in . . . our marriage. . . . I felt legitimized. . . . I felt like I had . . . a bullet-proof vest on. That like I could hold my husband's hand at a restaurant and I had the federal government backing me.

One participant shared an increased appreciation of his relationship that has come with the empowerment and positive feelings of marriage equality. Marriage equality also brought, for several participants, a simplification of their lives. Greg shared:

I also have found my marriage is a very easy way to continue the process of coming out. Because, you're never really out, because every time you meet somebody, you're already straight, so . . . it's a very convenient way to come out to people, in that you just mention your husband, just casually, it's like no big deal, "my husband," and then they're like "oh" and so you don't have to say it anymore. . . . I do get asked, because of my wedding ring . . . I have had [people] ask me about my wife before, because they saw the ring, and

um, actually it was sort of a funny exchange, they asked me about my wife and I said, “I don’t have a wife” and they’re like “but you’re wearing a ring.” And I’m like, “yeah, I’m married.” . . . There’s a certain source of humor in it at times, but really it surrounds the coming out aspect of things, of revealing about yourself, in a more light-hearted way that maybe wasn’t available before.

Discomfort, wariness, and the ongoing fight. Alongside the positive changes brought by the marriage equality movement, there is the discomfort and unsureness of change, as well as the recognition that there is more to do. Several interviewees indicated through their words or tone of voice that there are some feelings of resentment or friction that are stirred up around conflict regarding same-sex marriage. For example, Walter shared, “[B]eing seen as equals to my straight friends—I think that played into it. So that they could see, that yes you were a committed relationship. I would think that they would see that after 22 years anyway...” I inquired, “Did you feel like you weren’t getting that from them?” He explained, “I think I felt like we weren’t getting that. I think amongst our gay friends, it was a no-brainer, but with our straight friends, there are certain stereotypes they play into.”

At the same time, several participants expressed surprise at the timing or circumstances under which marriage equality developed. Greg described his surprise at the political circumstances when marriage equality was passed in his state:

Right around the time we got married was when the Republican legislature took over in [our state] and we just decided, “well there’s no way Republicans are going to legalize this, so we’re not gonna wait; we’re just gonna go to [a state performing same-sex marriage], and it’ll be honored in [our state] without waiting for Republicans,” and then, it turned out, ya know sure enough the republicans did it.

Eddie described surprise at the timing of federal marriage equality: “We’ve been surprised that it came so rapidly in the end, when it seemed to be moving rather slowly for decades.” This study was conducted just after marriage equality was legalized at the federal level. All participants had married before it was legal everywhere. Participants described a sense of fragility of new rights and unsureness about how things might unfold moving forward. Amy described the fear around parenting rights even after same-sex marriage became legal:

[B]oth of our children, even though when they were born, they were born by us and both of us were immediately put on the birth certificate, we still have spent the financial resources to sit down with a lawyer and have them legally adopted by both us of. Totally redundant and ridiculous, but we don’t want there to be any question . . . that we are equal parents for these two children.

A few participants also mentioned their need and intention to continue fighting for LGBTQ+ equality everywhere. Eddie stated:

In terms of just, still fighting fights, um, we still do that. We still have Uganda and uh, middle east, Isis, we still have places in the world where there is grave injustice for sexual minorities, and having established marriage equality here does not mean that we can sit back.

Increased salience of differences and challenges. The marriage equality movement and surrounding conflict and controversy has raised the salience of some of the differences same-sex couples may have from different-sex couples as well as some of the particular challenges they face.

Salience of differences. The marriage equality movement put a spotlight on some of the differences same-sex couples may have from different-sex couples such as nontraditional proposals and weddings, different power/gender dynamics, and different issues in couple therapy

(although interviewees also believe same-sex and different-sex relationships share much in common and are not all that different). Greg described the way he and his husband changed up the tradition of engagement rings: “So we decided to get married, and we exchanged . . . we didn’t get engagement rings, so we exchanged prewedding . . . items.” Eddie shared his thoughts on the power dynamics in a same-sex relationship:

Two men or two women attending therapy, uh, necessarily works within that layered system differently than . . . a man and a woman. I don’t think that that means that the therapy itself is inevitably different, because I think most likely the problems that couples bring to therapy are going to be fairly similar, but the very fact that two men or two women are um bound up in very different power relations than a man and a woman means that the therapist should be sensitive to how, how this impacts the relationship. . . . When we think of domestic violence in same-sex relationships, uh, how, how are we to talk about power relations and gender in that situation? Um, domestic violence being a very extreme example, right? Maybe it’s something far more banal, uh, something like whose responsibility is it to keep the checkbook balance, or who does the grocery shopping, or who decides who has a greater say in where vacations are taken?

Salience of challenges. The marriage equality movement and surrounding conflict and controversy have also raised particular awareness of some of the special challenges same-sex couples face including discrimination, internalized homophobia, changing and emerging marriage and divorce laws, evolving relationships between religion and same-sex relationships, and complications to major life decisions and events. One interviewee, Lori, mentioned the difficulty she faced related to her marriage while serving in the military:

When I was in the military, it impacted us just ‘cause I couldn’t bring her to events and we . . . I don’t know . . . we were never like super secret about our relationship but . . . if people

asked, they would always ask “what does your husband do” and I wouldn’t correct them. Things like that. The majority of the time Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell was in place and it was just at the end . . . that Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell was repealed. . . It probably would have negatively influenced me if I had wanted it to be like a career thing, though, because so many of the upper ranks in the military, they, I mean, they still have conflict about whether women should be in the military, much less gay women.

Jason talked about the impact of internalized homophobia and how it can impact a marriage:

There are unique struggles in the LGBTQ+ community, and um really learning how to deal with, I’m sure, internalized homophobia and how that impacts a relationship and kind of dealing with your own sexuality, even though you might be out and in a marriage or in a couple, like that stuff still comes up.

Amy highlighted the changing and confusing state of marriage and divorce laws for same-sex couples that existed for a time: “When I got married, there was no . . . process for divorce for same-sex couples. And so I got married with the expectation that divorce was never gonna be an option for me. [Laughs.]” She also spoke about the ongoing friction between religion and same-sex relationships and marriages:

I really think there’s two different definitions of marriage, and there’s the one that’s defined by our federal government, and then there’s one that’s defined by the church. And you know I was raised in a Catholic church, so, it’s, you know I’ve had to, in my mind, separate those two definitions. You know we did not get married by a priest in a Catholic church . . . I fully recognize that the church is a human institution and it’s flawed [laughs] but that doesn’t diminish or take away from my spirituality or my beliefs. . . . And it’s just sad to me that I don’t have recognition from the human part, the human institution part of my faith.

Another participant, Chris, has chosen to move away from organized religion: “We weren’t married in a church; we were married . . . in a nonreligious ceremony that did not mention God and that was . . . an important thing for me.” Several participants additionally described the complications they faced while same-sex marriage was still not legal in every state, such as choosing not to move to a desirable state because their marriage would not be recognized or going through additional barriers in the process of starting a family. Greg described the complications he and his husband dealt with at tax time due to the recognition of same-sex marriage in some states but not in other states or at the federal level, at the time:

My husband frequently will travel to other states, and so if he works in a state enough, he has to file taxes there. . . . So here’s what we had to do. . . . We created a fake federal return, which we weren’t legally allowed to file, which pretended we were married. This gave us all the information that we needed to put on our tax returns for states that allowed us to be married, because you know some of the tax information is transferred from your federal taxes to your state taxes, so there are certain lines that you fill in. So we had like a dummy tax return for federal that was never filed, but we used those numbers on states, . . . and then we of course had the individual ones, which we were legally allowed to file [in states not recognizing same-sex marriage], . . . but when we were doing our . . . taxes [in states recognizing same-sex marriage], we would use the fake one that we never filed. . . . It was a real obnoxiousness and it cost us legit money out of our pocket ‘cause our tax guy charged more money to do these tax returns, uh, because they were more work to do.

Post-Interview Questionnaire

Six of the eight interviewees returned the post-interview follow-up questionnaire. As expected, the primary motivation to get married and stay married for these interviewees was their love for their spouses. Raising children together was also marked as a very important reason to

marry by two interviewees and a very important factor in staying married by one interviewee. There were various other nonpolitical factors endorsed. Additionally, five interviewees noted that wanting to feel that their relationship was legitimized by society was among their motivations to get married; for some this was a minor concern, but one interviewee marked this as very important and one marked this as the most important reason to get married. Only two of the six interviewees who returned the form specifically indicated their motivations to marry included supporting the marriage equality movement. Four indicated one motivation to marry was a desire to contribute to a positive image of same-sex couples in society. Concerns regarding what family, friends, and the community would think and a desire to not contribute to a negative image of same-sex couples in society also factored into commitment for a few interviewees. See Table 1 for further detail on these data.

Table 1. *Data from Follow-up Questionnaire: Motivation to Get Married and Stay Married*

| Motivation to Get Married | | |
|--|--|---|
| <u>Factor</u> | <u>Number Endorsing the Factor</u> | <u>Range of Importance for Endorsed Items</u> |
| Love and commitment | 6 | 3-4 |
| To feel the relationship was legitimized by society | 5 | 1-4 |
| To contribute to positive image of same-sex couples | 4 | 1 |
| To raise children | 3 | 1-3 |
| Financial reasons | 3 | 1-2 |
| Next logical step in the relationship | 2 | 2 |
| To support the marriage equality movement | 2 | 1-3 |
| Pressure from family or friends | 1 | 1 |
| Religious reasons | 1 | 1 |
| Motivation to Stay Married | | |
| <u>Factor</u> | <u>Number Endorsing the Factor</u> | <u>Range of Importance for Endorsed Items</u> |
| Love and commitment | 6 | 4 |
| Time already invested | 2 | 1-2 |
| Concerned what family and friends would think | 2 | 1 |
| To not contribute to negative perceptions of same-sex couples in society | 2 | 1 |
| Raising children together | 1 | 3 |
| Financial reasons | 1 | 2 |
| Concerned what community would think | 1 | 1 |
| Easier than breaking up | 0 | -- |
| Religious reasons | 0 | -- |

Note. The questionnaire listed levels of importance as 1 = It was (is) on my mind, but was (is) only a minor factor, 2 = It was (is) somewhat important, but not major, 3 = It was (is) a very important factor, and 4 = This was (is) the most important factor in my decision to marry (staying married).

Discussion

Overall Findings

Each participant in this study had a unique perspective, but seven of the eight participants endorsed some degree of connection to political or social justice themes in their thoughts about their marriage. These themes manifested among their reasons for getting married, as additional meaning added to the relationship by participating in the movement and making a political statement, or in the sense of belongingness and legitimacy afforded by legal marriage.

When thinking about the possible impact of political and social justice concerns in the event of relationship distress, fewer participants believed there would be any impact on them. All interviewees were happily married and the possibility of divorce was not something that was on their minds at all. Most believed that in the event of such significant relationship distress that they had to consider divorce, the pain and turmoil would far outweigh any possible impact of political and social justice concerns. However, a minority of the interviewees believed that the stigma of divorce in such a situation, or not wanting to contribute to negative images of same-sex couples in society, would be an added factor making divorce less desirable, which could possibly impact their commitment. Again, it is noted that only two of the eight participants endorsed these factors. Participants did not see their willingness to use couple therapy as impacted by the marriage equality movement or by political and social justice concerns in any way. However, several participants did state it would be important to them to seek a therapist who was either gay or gay friendly. Interviewees perceived that a therapist without knowledge and understanding of same-sex relationships and respect for same-sex couples would not be able to do as effective of a job and therapy would be less comfortable with such a therapist. Berke et al. (2016) also found that their participants valued therapists who demonstrate or explicitly state a commitment to LGBTQ+ patients or who share some aspect of identity with the client such as sexual orientation,

life experiences like adopting children, or ideologies; these similarities allowed them to feel more comfortable and accepted. During the present study, participants also described some issues that might come up in couple therapy that would be particular to same-sex couples, such as a different set of gender and power dynamics, to which a therapist should also be sensitive.

Even identifying and working with gay-friendly providers is not simple and problem-free. Rostosky and Riggle (2015) describe some barriers:

[A]t some point in their relationship, most same-sex couples need the services of legal, financial, or other professionals. Accessing these services requires disclosing their same-sex relationship, which may be a barrier for couples who fear that they will be treated poorly by these professionals. Couples hesitate to get the help that they need when they are not sure how they will be treated. (p. 277)

It is not always obvious or easy to tell what professionals are LGBTQ+ inclusive or accepting. Accessing services can also “out” a couple in an unwanted way.

Participants also described the impact of the marriage equality movement and the associated sociocultural/political turmoil on their lives. Overall, there was a sense of positive movement forward and feeling empowered and legitimized. However, it also came with increased salience of differences and challenges still faced by same-sex couples and the greater LGBTQ+ community. Though many couples and individuals may be satisfied and feel the fight is over now that marriage equality is in place, others are concerned about the ongoing fight for equality in the United States that goes beyond just the letter of the law, as well as inequality and atrocities being committed around the world involving members of the LGBTQ+ community.

Rostosky and Riggle (2015) write:

Access to civil marriage is socially and legally important for same-sex couples. However, marriage equality can raise a different set of issues related to stigma and discrimination.

Some of these issues may seem counterintuitive at first glance. After all, sometimes we buy into the good-time feeling that marriage equality will eliminate all stigma and discrimination. (p. 265)

For example, getting married makes a relationship a matter of public record, which can trigger discrimination from people who may not have known about the relationship before, like employers. For individuals living in less accepting communities or areas of the world, the existence of legalized same-sex marriage does not solve all the problems faced by the community. For many individuals and couples in the United States, despite the affirmation of legal marriage, there is still the prejudice and discrimination they must face in the community and among their own families. Couples whose families are more conservative and hold antigay attitudes may state their prejudice outright or commit microaggressions suggesting that the marriage of the same-sex couple is less important or not the same as the marriages of different-sex couples in the family. Couples may face these same attitudes within their religious communities and from family and friends with more conservative religious views, as well (Rostosky & Riggle, 2015). Additionally, some people feel that the marriage equality movement has further alienated members of the LGBTQ+ community who do not identify as gay or lesbian, as well as transgender and gender nonconforming people and individuals in consensually nonmonogamous relationships. This argument states that placing so much importance on the institution of marriage is implicitly submitting to the heteronormative view of what normal means (Bernstein & Burke, 2013; Olsen, 2013). There is still more work to do in achieving full equality.

Implications for Therapists

This study has implications for therapists working with same-sex couples. As with any therapeutic relationship, it is important for these therapists to listen and understand their clients.

This includes considering the impact of stigma and minority stress on the couple as well as their thoughts and feelings about their marriage and commitment. Amidst all of the many painful factors swirling around a person's mind during a period of relationship distress, the potential stigma of divorce and thoughts of contributing to a negative image of same-sex couples in society may be at play for some individuals.

In this study with a relatively homogenous sample, this factor—that is, the impact of minority stress and the stigma of divorce on marital commitment—was not a strong theme. The results showed that political factors can be present among the motivations of a couple to get married, and it is possible that these factors remain after marriage as well. One individual stated that the stigma of divorce might make divorce less desirable, and two participants endorsed “I don't want to contribute to negative perceptions of same-sex marriage that still exist in society” as a factor in their commitment. This was marked as a minor factor for the two people that endorsed it.

The reason for these findings is not clear. It may be that political/social justice/stigma factors in a relationship are simply not as strong once a couple is already married. It may also be that this particular sample is not as susceptible to the impact of these factors on their commitment as other sectors of the population may be. The sample of participants was primarily happily married, middle class or higher, Caucasian, well-educated, and high-functioning. It is possible that in a sample with greater racial and socioeconomic diversity or with higher levels of marital distress, results might have been different. With relatively less privilege, a more diverse sample may have been even more in tune with minority stress. This could result in a greater impact of political and social justice concerns on marital commitment and thoughts about divorce; alternatively, a sample with less privilege may have more of the practical concerns to worry about that would outweigh political/social justice factors. In a sample with higher levels of

marital distress, thoughts about divorce would have been more immediately, which could activate concerns about the stigma of divorce on the LGBTQ+ community, if such concerns do in fact play a role in such decisions for some people.

Despite the fact that few participants in this study seemed to think the stigma of divorce for same-sex couples would impact their commitment in times of relationship distress, it is a hypothesis to keep in mind that might impact some individual. If a therapist is aware of the possible influence of political concerns and social justice concerns as well as stigma and minority stress in terms of thoughts about a relationship and commitment, the therapist will be better prepared to help the client work through these issues.

Limitations and Future Research

One limitation of this study, as described above, is the fact that the individuals who took part all expressed that they were committed to their spouses and had no reason to consider divorce; several participants were enthusiastic in describing how happy they were with their relationships. Therefore, all of the factors that play into the commitment of these individuals to their spouses and marriages are likely perceived constraints rather than felt constraints. It seems likely that as a couple develops more relationship distress, more felt constraint factors become salient. Because this was a happily married sample who was asked to think about their reasons to stay married and not break up, their responses represent predictions, to some extent, about their own thoughts and feelings in a situation they had not experienced. A few participants mentioned this very fact. It is possible that a sample with more relationship distress, perhaps made up of individuals considering divorce, would have produced rather different data.

Additionally, this study concerns only participants who are legally married to a same-sex spouse. It is likely that the views of individuals who have never been married might be different. Therefore, the impact of the marriage equality movement on LGBTQ+ individuals who are

single, dating, in new relationships, or in longer term relationships but not legally married (including civil unions, domestic partnerships, and cohabitation) is not addressed here. These factors must be taken into consideration by the reader when interpreting the results and attempting to apply the findings to their own lives, clients, or research.

Furthermore, it is possible that the perspectives of those individuals who chose to take part in a study of this nature are different from those who choose not to take part. Individuals who elected to participate likely had some level of interest in the topic. This was also a highly educated group of people, several of whom work in or are studying in a mental health field, and primarily Caucasian and middle class or higher. Their opinions and experiences may not accurately represent those of the whole population of married same-sex couples.

Future research on this topic can make additional contributions by studying attitudes about the impact of the marriage equality movement and minority stress on commitment and related variables with quantitative research methods using larger samples in order to compare findings among different groups such as younger and older participants, happily married and distressed couples, different racial groups, and different socioeconomic groups.

Final Thoughts

Overall, this research was intended to shed light on the political stress experienced by same-sex-attracted individuals and same-sex couples while the marriage equality movement was at a peak. As described above, this movement provided a platform not just for advocates and allies, but also for those espousing discrimination and hatred. The interviewees who took part in this study described many aspects of minority stress and how it impacted their marriages and themselves as individuals. It will be important for researchers, clinicians, and society as a whole to continue considering and working with minority stress issues until the day in the future, should such a day ever come, when full equality is achieved.

References

- Amato, P. R., & Booth, A. (1997). *A generation at risk: Growing up in an era of family upheaval*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Amy, J. (2016, April 1). Judge blocks Mississippi ban on adoption by same-sex couples. Retrieved July 9, 2017, from <https://www.bostonglobe.com/news/nation/2016/04/01/judge-blocks-mississippi-ban-adoption-same-sex-couples/6YbvgYNChRE5v1Bi1aE86N/story.html>
- Babcock, J. C., Gottman, J. M., Ryan, K. D., & Gottman, J. S. (2013). A component analysis of a brief psycho-educational couples' workshop: One-year follow-up results. *Journal of Family Therapy*, 35, 252-280.
- Badgett, M.V. L., & Herman, J. L. (2011, November). *Patterns of relationship recognition by same-sex couples in the United States* [PDF]. Retrieved from <http://williamsinstitute.law.ucla.edu/wp-content/uploads/Marriage-Dissolution-FINAL.pdf>
- Badgett, M. V. L., & Mallory, C. (2014, December). *Patterns of relationship recognition for same-sex couples: Divorces and terminations* [PDF]. Retrieved from <http://williamsinstitute.law.ucla.edu/wp-content/uploads/Badgett-Mallory-Divorce-Terminations-Dec-2014.pdf>
- Barth, J., & Huffmon, S. H. (2015). Sentiment toward same-sex divorce. In M.K. Miller, J. A. Blumenthal, & J. Chamberlain (Eds.), *Handbook of community sentiment* (pp. 129-141). New York, NY: Springer Science.
- Berke, D. S., Maples-Keller, J. L., & Richards, P. (2016). LGBTQ+ perceptions of psychotherapy: A consensual qualitative analysis. *Professional Psychology: Research and Practice*, 47, 373-382.
- Bernstein, M., & Burke, M. C. (2013). Normalization, queer discourse, and the marriage-equality movement in Vermont. In M. Bernstein & V. Taylor (Eds.), *The marrying kind? Debating same-sex marriage within the lesbian and gay movement* (pp. 319-344). Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press.
- Biggerstaff, D., & Thompson, A. R. (2008). Interpretive phenomenological analysis (IPA): A qualitative methodology of choice in healthcare research. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 5, 214-224.
- Bloomberg, L. D., & Volpe, M. (2012). *Completing your qualitative dissertation: A road map from beginning to end*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Buffie, W. C. (2011). Public health implications of same-sex marriage. *American Journal of Public Health*, 101, 986-990.

- Chauncey, G. (2013, June 26). The long road to marriage equality. *The New York Times*. Retrieved from http://www.nytimes.com/2013/06/27/opinion/the-long-road-to-marriage-equality.html?_r=0
- Chappell, B. (2015, June 26). Supreme Court declares same-sex marriage legal in all 50 states. Retrieved December 17, 2016, from <http://www.npr.org/sections/thetwo-way/2015/06/26/417717613/supreme-court-rules-all-states-must-allow-same-sex-marriages>
- Cohen, J. (2013, March 18). Gay marriage support hits new high in Post-ABC News poll. *The Washington Post*. Retrieved from <http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/the-fix/wp/2013/03/18/gay-marriage-support-hits-new-high-in-post-abc-poll/>
- Dixon, L. J., Gordon, K. C., Frousakis, N. N., & Schumm, J. A. (2012). A study of expectations and the marital quality of participants of a marital enrichment seminar. *Family Relations*, 61, 75-89.
- Doss, B. D., Mitchell, A., Georgia, E. J., Biesen, J. N., & Rowe, L. S. (2014). Improvements in closeness, communication, and psychological distress mediate effects of couple therapy for veterans. *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology*. Advance online publication. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/a0038541>
- Driver, J., Tabares, A., Shapiro, A. F., & Gottman, J. M. (2012). Couple interaction in happy and unhappy marriages: Gottman laboratory studies. In F. Walsh (Ed.), *Normal family processes: Growing diversity and complexity* (4th ed., pp. 57-77). New York, NY: Guilford Press.
- Gelman, A. (2014, December 14). Same-sex divorce rate not as low as it seemed [Blog post]. Retrieved from: <http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/monkey-cage/wp/2014/12/15/same-sex-divorce-rate-not-as-low-as-it-seemed/>
- Gottman, J. M., Coan, J., Carrere, S., & Swanson, C. (1998). Predicting marital happiness and stability from newlywed interactions. *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, 60, 5-22.
- Gottman, J. M., Levenson, R. W., Gross, J., Frederickson, B. L., McCoy, K., Rosenthal, L., . . . Yoshimoto, D. (2003). Correlates of gay and lesbian couples' relationship satisfaction and relationship dissolution. *Journal of Homosexuality*, 45, 23-43.
- Green, A. A. (2013). Debating same-sex marriage: Lesbian and gay spouses speak to the literature. In M. Bernstein & V. Taylor (Eds.), *The marrying kind? Debating same-sex marriage within the lesbian and gay movement* (pp. 375-405). Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press.
- Green, R. (2012). Gay and lesbian family life: Risk, resilience, and rising expectations. In F. Walsh (Ed.), *Normal family processes: Growing diversity and complexity* (4th ed., pp. 172-195). New York, NY: Guilford Press.

- Greene, D. C., & Britton, P. J. (2013). Predicting relationship commitment in gay men: Contributions of vicarious shame and internalized homophobia to the investment model. *Psychology of Men & Masculinity*. Advance online publication. doi 10.1037/a0034988
- Hernandez, G. (2013, June 12). Sara Gilbert says gay celebrities can feel extra pressure to stay together because of marriage equality fight. Retrieved November 18, 2013, from <http://www.gaystarnews.com/article/sara-gilbert-says-gay-celebrities-can-feel-extra-pressure-stay-together-because-marriage-eq>
- History and timeline of the freedom to marry in the United States. (2014, March 7). Retrieved May 8, 2014, from <http://www.freedomtomarry.org/pages/history-and-timeline-of-marriage>
- Humble, A. M. (2013). Moving from ambivalence to certainty: Older same-sex couples marry in Canada. *Canadian Journal on Aging*, 32, 131-144.
- Jacobson, N. S., & Addis, M. E. (1993). Research on couples and couple therapy: What do we know? Where are we going? *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology*, 61, 85-93.
- Kail, B. L., Acosta, K. L., & Wright, E. R. (2015). State-level marriage equality and the health of same-sex couples. *American Journal of Public Health*, 105, 1101-1105.
- Kealy-Bateman, W., & Pryor, L. (2015). Marriage equality is a mental health issue. *Australasian Psychiatry*, 23, 540-543.
- King, M., & Barlett, A. (2006). What same-sex civil partnerships may mean for health. *Journal of Epidemiological Community Health*, 60, 188-191.
- Knochel, K. (2010). Marriage, civil unions, or reciprocal beneficiary agreements: What best protects older LGBT people? *Journal of Gay & Lesbian Social Services*, 22, 22-39.
- Long, L. L., & Young, M. E. (2007). Same-sex couples. In L. L. Long & M. E. Young (Eds.), *Counseling and therapy for couples* (pp. 317-332). Belmont, CA: Thomson Brooks/Cole.
- Mertens, D. M. (2010). *Research and evaluation in education and psychology: Integrating diversity with quantitative, qualitative, and mixed methods*. Los Angeles, CA: Sage.
- Olsen, K. A. (2013). What happens when you get what you want? The relationship between organizational identity and goals in the movement for same-sex marriage. In M. Bernstein & V. Taylor (Eds.), *The marrying kind? Debating same-sex marriage within the lesbian and gay movement* (pp. 345-374). Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press.
- Owen, J., Keller, B., Shuck, B., Luebcke, B., Knopp, K., & Rhoades, G. K. (2014). An initial examination of commitment uncertainty in couple therapy. *Couple and Family Psychology: Research and Practice*, 3, 232-238.

- Piper, D. (2016). The impact of marriage equality on sexual identity development in young men with same-sex sexual orientation. *Dissertation Abstracts International: Section B: The Sciences and Engineering*, 77(1-B)(E).
- Rhoades, G. K., Stanley, S. M., & Markman, H. J. (2010). Should I stay or should I go? Predicting relationship stability from four aspects of commitment. *Journal of Family Psychology*, 24, 543-550.
- Richardson, H. B. (2014). The perceived impact of marriage equality: Experiences of married and unmarried same-sex couples living in Massachusetts. *Dissertation Abstracts International: Section B: The Sciences and Engineering*, 75(1-B)(E).
- Rostosky, S. S., & Riggle, E. B. (2015). *Happy together: Thriving as a same-sex couple in your family, workplace, and community*. Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.
- Ritter, K. (n.d.). Therapeutic issues for same-sex couples. Retrieved from http://www.aamft.org/imis15/Content/Consumer_Updates/Therapeutic_Issues_for_Same-sex_Couples.aspx
- Schechter, E., Tracy, A. J., Page, K. V., & Luong, G. (2008). Shall we marry? Legal marriage as a commitment event in same-sex relationships. *Journal of Homosexuality*, 54, 400-422.
- Snyder, D. K., & Halford, W. K. (2012). Evidence-based couple therapy: Current status and future directions. *Journal of Family Therapy*, 34, 229-249.
- Snyder, D. K., Mangrum, L. F., & Wills, R. M. (1993). Predicting couples' response to marital therapy. *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology*, 61, 61-69.
- Tambling, R. B. (2012). A literature review of therapeutic expectancy effects. *Contemporary Family Therapy*, 34, 402-415.
- Tambling, R. B., & Johnson, L. N. (2010). Client expectations about couple therapy. *The American Journal of Family Therapy*, 38, 322-333.
- Thomas, M. (2014). Atrocity stories and triumph stories: Using couple narratives to evaluate same-sex marriage and civil partnerships. *Narrative Inquiry*, 24, 200-217.
- Winning the freedom to marry nationwide: The inside story of a transformative campaign. (n.d.). Retrieved from <http://www.freedomtomarry.org/pages/how-it-happened>

Appendix A

Demographic Questionnaire

1. What was your age on your last birthday? _____ years
2. What is your biological or assigned sex? _____
3. With which gender(s) do you identify? _____
4. Please describe your sexual orientation. _____
5. What is your current marital status? Please check all that apply.
 - ☐ Married to a same-sex spouse
Length of relationship: _____
Date of marriage: _____
 - ☐ Separated from a same-sex spouse
Length of relationship: _____
Date of separation: _____
 - ☐ Divorced from a same-sex spouse
Length of relationship: _____
Date of divorce: _____
 - ☐ Divorced from a different-sex spouse
Length of relationship: _____
Date of divorce: _____
 - ☐ Cohabiting with a same-sex partner to whom I am not married
Length of relationship: _____
 - ☐ Cohabiting with a different-sex partner to whom I am not married
Length of relationship: _____
 - ☐ Dating a same-sex partner or partners
 - ☐ Dating a different-sex partner or partners
 - ☐ Other: _____ (Please specify.)

6. Please check your highest level of education:

- ☐ Less than high school diploma or GED
- ☐ High school diploma or GED
- ☐ Associates degree
- ☐ Bachelors degree
- ☐ Masters degree
- ☐ Doctoral degree
- ☐ Other: _____ (Please specify.)

7. Please describe your current occupation: _____

8. Please give choose the category that best represents your current annual pre-tax household income (combined income of you and your spouse or partner, if applicable). If unsure, please estimate:

- ☐ Less than \$10,000
- ☐ \$10,000 - \$14,999
- ☐ \$15,000 - \$24,999
- ☐ \$25,000 - \$49,999
- ☐ \$50,000 - \$99,999
- ☐ \$100,000 - \$149,999
- ☐ \$150,000 - \$199,999
- ☐ \$200,000 or more

9. For each child living in your household, either full time or part time (including those over 18 years of age for whom you are responsible), if any, please list the child's age and check the box(es) that best describe how the child came to be part of your household/family. If you have more than five children in your household, please use the space below to describe the circumstances of additional children. If your situation is not accurately represented by the options listed, or if you would like to comment or elaborate, please do so below. Thank you!

| | Child 1 | Child 2 | Child 3 | Child 4 | Child 5 |
|--------------------------------|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|
| Child's age: | Age ____ | Age ____ | Age ____ | Age ____ | Age ____ |
| My biological child | | | | | |
| My partner's biological child | | | | | |
| My adopted child | | | | | |
| My partner's adopted child | | | | | |
| My step child | | | | | |
| My partner's step child | | | | | |
| Other (please elaborate below) | | | | | |

Please use this space to describe additional children and/or comment/elaborate.

Appendix B

*Interview Protocol*Motivation to Get Married

1) ***Please tell me about the history of your relationship with your spouse and how you decided to get married.***

Possible follow ups:

- Were there any factors other than your love and commitment to your partner that impacted your decision to get married?
- There are many reasons people choose to get married. For some same-sex couples, some of their many reasons may include a desire to feel that their relationship is legitimized by society, taking advantage of a right that has long been fought for, fear that the right will be taken away, supporting the marriage equality movement, or proving to others that nothing terrible happens to other people as a result of same-sex marriage. Was this a factor in your decision to marry? If so: Please tell me about that.

Factors Affecting Commitment

2) Commitment is a desire or intention to remain in a marriage and make it work. People have different levels of commitment to their spouses and different reasons for feeling committed, or not, to their spouses. ***Please tell me about your level of commitment to your spouse and your marriage, including the factors that affect this commitment.***

Possible follow ups:

- If interviewee is stuck or needs examples of what I am asking: Some of these reasons can include mutual love and respect; religious beliefs; shared visions for the future; and pragmatic issues like shared finances, social circles, children, or property.
- Do you feel any pressure from forces external to your marriage to maintain a healthy relationship or stay married? (Prompts—Family, friends, society?)

3) For many years now, same-sex marriage has been a hotly contested issue, and the fight for marriage equality is ongoing. ***What has been the impact of this on your marriage and commitment?***

Willingness to Utilize Couple Therapy

4) ***Have you ever used couple therapy with your spouse (either prior to or after marriage)?***

If yes, 4a) ***What factors influenced your decision to seek therapy?***

Possible follow ups:

- ***What were your expectations about how helpful therapy would be?***
- ***How did previous experiences with therapy (individual, couple, family) affect your decision?***
- ***How did the marriage equality movement or your thoughts and feelings about same-sex marriage impact your decision to use therapy, if at all?***
(Prompts—Desire to support the marriage equality movement? Stigma surrounding couple therapy?)
- ***What are the pros and cons of couple therapy for a same-sex couple?***

If no, 4b) *Would you consider couple therapy if you and your spouse came to a rough patch in your marriage? And, why or why not?*

Possible follow ups:

- *How helpful do you expect therapy might be?*
- *How do previous experiences with therapy (individual, couple, family) affect your decision?*
- *How does the marriage equality movement or your thoughts and feelings about same-sex marriage impact your decision, if at all, about whether or not to use therapy?* (Prompts—Desire to support the marriage equality movement? Stigma surrounding couple therapy?)
- *What are the pros and cons of couple therapy for a same-sex couple?*

View on Same-Sex Divorce

5) For some people, the fight for marriage equality has influenced their decisions about marriage and divorce. This might include a desire to not contribute to stigma surrounding same-sex relationships and marriages. *Please describe the impact of the marriage equality movement or your own thoughts, feelings, or personal experiences with prejudice on your willingness to consider divorce in the event of great difficulty in your marriage, past or present.*

Is there anything else you would like to tell me about your marriage, your commitment, or the impact of marriage equality on your marriage or your life in general?

Appendix C

*Follow-up Questionnaire*Reasons for Getting Married

Please indicate which of the following reasons were factors in your motivation to get married (check all that apply):

If this was a factor for you at all, how important was it to your decision to get married? (Please circle one.)

| | |
|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> My love and commitment to my partner. | <input type="checkbox"/> It was on my mind, but was only a minor factor. <input type="checkbox"/> It was somewhat important, but not major. <input type="checkbox"/> It was a very important factor. <input type="checkbox"/> This was the most important factor in my decision to marry. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Religious reasons (please explain). | <input type="checkbox"/> It was on my mind, but was only a minor factor. <input type="checkbox"/> It was somewhat important, but not major. <input type="checkbox"/> It was a very important factor. <input type="checkbox"/> This was the most important factor in my decision to marry. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> I had been with my partner for so long that it seemed like the next logical step. | <input type="checkbox"/> It was on my mind, but was only a minor factor. <input type="checkbox"/> It was somewhat important, but not major. <input type="checkbox"/> It was a very important factor. <input type="checkbox"/> This was the most important factor in my decision to marry. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> To raise children together. | <input type="checkbox"/> It was on my mind, but was only a minor factor. <input type="checkbox"/> It was somewhat important, but not major. <input type="checkbox"/> It was a very important factor. <input type="checkbox"/> This was the most important factor in my decision to marry. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Financial reasons (taxes, buying a house, etc.). | <input type="checkbox"/> It was on my mind but was only a minor factor. <input type="checkbox"/> It was somewhat important, but not major. <input type="checkbox"/> It was a very important factor. <input type="checkbox"/> This was the most important factor in my decision to marry. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> To feel that our relationship was legitimized by society. | <input type="checkbox"/> It was on my mind, but was only a minor factor. <input type="checkbox"/> It was somewhat important, but not major. <input type="checkbox"/> It was a very important factor. <input type="checkbox"/> This was the most important factor in my decision to marry. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Pressure from family or friends. | <input type="checkbox"/> It was on my mind, but was only a minor factor. <input type="checkbox"/> It was somewhat important, but not major. <input type="checkbox"/> It was a very important factor. <input type="checkbox"/> This was the most important in my decision to marry. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> To support the marriage equality movement. | <input type="checkbox"/> It was on my mind, but was only a minor factor. <input type="checkbox"/> It was somewhat important, but not major. <input type="checkbox"/> It was a very important factor. <input type="checkbox"/> This was the most important |
| <input type="checkbox"/> To contribute to a positive image of same-sex couples in society. | <input type="checkbox"/> It was on my mind, but was only a minor factor. <input type="checkbox"/> It was somewhat important, but not major. |

| | |
|---|--|
| | <input type="checkbox"/> It was a very important factor. <input type="checkbox"/> This was the most important factor in my decision to marry. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Other political or social justice motivation (please explain). | <input type="checkbox"/> It was on my mind, but was only minor factor. <input type="checkbox"/> It was somewhat important, but not major. <input type="checkbox"/> It was a very important factor. <input type="checkbox"/> This was the most important my decision to marry. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Other reason (please explain). | <input type="checkbox"/> It was on my mind, but was only a minor factor. <input type="checkbox"/> It was somewhat important, but not major. <input type="checkbox"/> It was a very important factor. <input type="checkbox"/> This was the most important factor in my decision to marry. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Other reason (please explain). | <input type="checkbox"/> It was on my mind, but was only a minor factor. <input type="checkbox"/> It was important, but not major. <input type="checkbox"/> It was a very important factor. <input type="checkbox"/> This was the most important factor in my decision to marry. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Other reason (please explain). | <input type="checkbox"/> It was on my mind, but was only a minor factor. <input type="checkbox"/> It was important, but not major. <input type="checkbox"/> It was a very important factor. <input type="checkbox"/> This was the most important factor in my decision to marry. |

Please indicate which of the following motivate you to *stay* married (check all that apply):

If this is a factor for you at all, how important is it to your motivation to stay married? (Please circle one.)

| | |
|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> My love and commitment to my partner. | <input type="checkbox"/> This is on my mind, but is only a minor factor. <input type="checkbox"/> It is somewhat important, but not major. <input type="checkbox"/> It is a very important factor. <input type="checkbox"/> This is the most important factor in my staying married. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Religious reasons. | <input type="checkbox"/> This is on my mind, but is only a minor factor. <input type="checkbox"/> It is somewhat important, but not major. <input type="checkbox"/> It is a very important factor. <input type="checkbox"/> This is the most important factor in my staying married. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> We have invested so much time into the relationship, it does not make sense to end it now. | <input type="checkbox"/> This is on my mind, but is only a minor factor. <input type="checkbox"/> It is somewhat important, but not major. <input type="checkbox"/> It is a very important factor. <input type="checkbox"/> This is the most important factor in my staying married. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Because we are raising children together. | <input type="checkbox"/> This is on my mind, but is only a minor factor. <input type="checkbox"/> It is somewhat important, but not major. <input type="checkbox"/> It is a very important factor. <input type="checkbox"/> This is the most important factor in my staying married. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Financial reasons (e.g. shared investments or bills, or we could not both afford to live separately). | <input type="checkbox"/> This is on my mind, but is only a minor factor. <input type="checkbox"/> It is somewhat important, but not major. <input type="checkbox"/> It is a very important factor. |

| | |
|--|---|
| | <input type="checkbox"/> This is the most important factor in my staying married. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> It is easier to just stay together than it is to separate and get a divorce (either because of the emotional pain or the practical considerations like having to move, divide possessions, pay a lawyer, etc.). | <input type="checkbox"/> This is on my mind, but is only a minor factor. <input type="checkbox"/> It is somewhat important, but not major. <input type="checkbox"/> It is a very important factor. <input type="checkbox"/> This is the most important factor in my staying married. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> I am concerned about what family and/or friends would think if we got divorced. | <input type="checkbox"/> This is on my mind, but is only a minor factor. <input type="checkbox"/> It is somewhat important, but not major. <input type="checkbox"/> It is a very important factor. <input type="checkbox"/> This is the most important factor in my staying married. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> I am concerned about what the community would think if we got divorced. | <input type="checkbox"/> This is on my mind, but is only a minor factor. <input type="checkbox"/> It is somewhat important, but not major. <input type="checkbox"/> It is a very important factor. <input type="checkbox"/> This is the most important factor in my staying married. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> I don't want to contribute to negative perceptions of same-sex marriage that still exist in society. | <input type="checkbox"/> This is on my mind, but is only a minor factor. <input type="checkbox"/> It is somewhat important, but not major. <input type="checkbox"/> It is a very important factor. <input type="checkbox"/> This is the most important factor in my staying married. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Other political or social justice motivation (please explain) | <input type="checkbox"/> This is on my mind, but is only a minor factor. <input type="checkbox"/> It is somewhat important, but not major. <input type="checkbox"/> It is a very important factor. <input type="checkbox"/> This is the most important factor in my staying married. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Other reason (please explain) | <input type="checkbox"/> This is on my mind, but is only a minor factor. <input type="checkbox"/> It is somewhat important, but not major. <input type="checkbox"/> It is a very important factor. <input type="checkbox"/> This is the most important factor in my staying married. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Other reason (please explain) | <input type="checkbox"/> This is on my mind, but is only a minor factor. <input type="checkbox"/> It is somewhat important, but not major. <input type="checkbox"/> It is a very important factor. <input type="checkbox"/> This is the most important factor in my staying married. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Other reason (please explain) | <input type="checkbox"/> This is on my mind, but is only a minor factor. <input type="checkbox"/> It is somewhat important, but not major. <input type="checkbox"/> It is a very important factor. <input type="checkbox"/> This is the most important factor in my staying married. |