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"Monogamish" : constructing shared meaning of commitment and marriage in same-sex relationships.

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“MONOGAMISH”: CONSTRUCTING SHARED MEANING OF
COMMITMENT AND MARRIAGE IN SAME-SEX RELATIONSHIPS

By

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A.A., Ozarks Technical Community College, 2014
B.S., Missouri State University, 2017

A Thesis
Submitted to the Faculty of the
College of Arts and Sciences of the University of Louisville
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of

Master of Arts
in Sociology

Department of Sociology
University of Louisville
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A Thesis Approved on

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DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to all who have helped me along the way.

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I want to first start by thanking Dr. Patricia Gagne for her mentorship and guidance throughout this research project. In addition, I want to thank Dr. Karen Christopher and Dr. Hiromi Taniguchi for their mentorship and support along the way. I want to thank my husband, Colton Groh, for his love, support, and understanding through this extremely busy and stressful period of graduate school. To my father, Randy Schmidt, I thank you for your love and support. Last but not least, I want to thank my friends and colleagues. Your support has been a shoulder to lean on in this stressful time of my life.

ABSTRACT

“MONOGAMISH”: CONSTRUCTING SHARED MEANING OF COMMITMENT AND MARRIAGE IN SAME-SEX RELATIONSHIPS

Brandon M. Schmidt

May 11, 2019

In this study I drew from 17 in-depth interviews with nine gay men and eight lesbian women who were in or previously had been in a committed same-sex relationship. My goal was to understand how cisgender women and men in a same-sex relationship define commitment in the era of marriage equality. I approached the research using standard principles of analytic induction. I drew from social construction theory and symbolic interactionism theory to help me make sense of the data. Emergent from the data were the themes for importance of constant open and honest communication within the relationship and negotiation of the relationship. I found that those in same-sex relationships negotiated with their partner(s) the boundaries of fidelity, tolerance of infidelity, commitment, and the meaning of marriage. Furthermore, those who were in an open relationship or those who were more tolerant of an open relationship showed an ability to compartmentalize sexual and emotional feelings involved in extra-dyadic sexual encounters. Despite having been historically excluded from the institution of marriage, it appears that these women and men are in the process of constructing and giving meaning to commitment and marriage in an era of marriage equality and increasing visibility of same-sex relationships.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The United States federal government legalized same-sex marriage in all fifty states after the landmark 2015 United States Supreme Court case, *Obergefell v. Hodges*. Since that time, only about ten percent of gay men and lesbian women have decided to legally marry (Pew Research Center, 2017). With marriage being such an important institutionalized component of commitment, this led me to question why only a small percent of same-sex couples have decided to marry.

Marriage as an institution grants a number of social and economic benefits to couples who choose to marry. Historically the trend has been to exclude same-sex couples from marriage in the United States. If a same-sex couple is unable to marry, they are not able to take advantage of these benefits (Naylor & Haulsee, 2014). Same-sex marriage was legally recognized by the United States federal government in 2013 (*U.S. v. Windsor*), and became legal in all fifty states on June 26, 2015 (*Obergefell v. Hodges*). Little, if any, research has examined what marriage and committed relationships mean to those in same-sex relationships since the *Obergefell* decision. The purpose of this research is to identify the components of commitment and what it means to same-sex couples in the wake of marriage equality.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

While same-sex and different-sex relationships are generally more similar than different and have similar romantic relationship quality (e.g., Bradbury & Karney, 2010; Wade & Donis, 2007), fundamental differences do exist. For example, straight participants tend to view lifelong commitment as more important than gay men and lesbian women. Straight women viewed lifelong commitment more highly than straight men. Gay men viewed lifelong commitment more highly than lesbian women (Meier, Hull, & Ortyl, 2009). Cohabiting same-sex couples and different-sex couples have similar levels of relationships stability; however, the reason to cohabit for same-sex couples prior to national marriage equality was fundamentally different compared to different-sex couples, which was to show a high level of commitment within the relationship (e.g., Manning, Brown, & Stykes, 2016; Haas & Whitton, 2015). Furthermore, research suggests that same-sex relationships have a unique type of stress that exists within the relationship stemming from a heteronormative society that creates sexual minority stress, ultimately negatively impacting the quality of the relationship (Cao, Zhou, Fine, Liang, Li, & Mills-Koonce, 2017; LeBlanc, Frost, & Wight, 2015).

With the knowledge that same-sex and different-sex relationships are often different, it is important to study same-sex relationships qualitatively in a way that does not rely on comparative analysis between same-sex and different-sex relationships, but

rather takes an approach to research same-sex relationships as a distinguished group. Same-sex relationships are the center of focus in this study.

Compartmentalization of sexual and emotional fidelity

Research has shown that all groups (straight women, gay men, and lesbians) except for straight men had greater distress when confronted with emotional infidelity of a partner compared to sexual infidelity. Sheets and Wolfe (2001) presented emotional infidelity as “forming a deep emotional attachment” (p.264) and sexual infidelity as “enjoying passionate sexual intercourse” (p. 264) with another person. Lesbians indicated more distress than gay men did for sexual infidelity, although the differences were minimal. Furthermore, gay men indicated a lower certainty of fidelity for their relationship than lesbians, suggesting that gay men may be more accepting of sexual infidelity (Sheets & Wolfe, 2001).

Research on male same-sex relationships suggests that gay men are able to better compartmentalize their emotions, allowing them to parse out any possible emotional ties to their hook-up during casual sex, in-turn allowing them to maintain emotional monogamy in their primary relationship (Bonello & Cross, 2010). Umberson, Thomeer, and Lodge (2015) similarly found that gay men were more likely than women and straight men to describe emotional intimacy and sexual acts as being separate. Additionally, LaSala’s (2004) research on monogamy suggests that sexual monogamy may not be an essential component of a committed relationship for gay males, whereas emotional monogamy is.

Recent research has shown that women work to minimize relationship boundaries more than men (Umberson, Thomeer, & Lodge, 2015). Lesbian women minimized

relationship boundaries in vastly different means compared to men and straight women. Lesbian women were far more likely than men and straight women to describe a partner's past emotional affair which often included an absence of sexual intimacy or physical attraction (Umberson, Thomeer, & Lodge, 2015).

Sexual Minority Stress

Sexual minority stress (LeBlanc, Frost, & Wright, 2015) is an emerging branch of the minority stress framework (Meyer, 2003). The sexual minority stress framework argues that lesbian, gay, bisexual, and queer individuals have an increased risk of a unique form of stress based on their sexual identity caused by social forces (Stewart, Frost, & LeBlanc, 2019). Sexual minority stress exposes these individuals to additional mental health and overall health wellbeing problems that non-minority individuals are not exposed to (LeBlanc, Frost, & Wright, 2015; Stewart, Frost, & LeBlanc, 2019). Stewart et al (2019) found that same-sex couples have a unique form of sexual minority stress in their relationships, often created by stigma from those around them not validating the same-sex relationship.

Rejection of heteronormative ideals

Relationships and marriage have long been institutionalized to follow heteronormative constructs. Research has shown that progressive LGBTQ-identified individuals tended to actively reject heteronormative practices that have long formed the basis of relationships. In doing so, their relationships were more flexible and avoided gendered practices within the relationship (Lamont, 2017).

CHAPTER III

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Those in same-sex relationships have only recently been able to be publicly open about their relationships and were not able to legally marry nationwide in the United States until 2015. Marriage and committed relationships have historically been institutionalized in our society, meaning they follow established norms that were created by those in the institution. It has been argued that marriage has gone through deinstitutionalization over the last half decade, shifting the focus of the relationship from limited choice to more choice. Furthermore, there has been a shift from a focus on fulfillment of socially valued roles within the relationship to more open and honest communication among partners in a relationship (Cherlin, 2004). Only recently have women and men in same-sex relationships been included in the institution.

According to Berger and Luckmann, the word reality can be defined as “a quality appertaining to phenomena that we recognize as having a being independent of our own volition” (1966, p.1). Simply put, reality cannot be simply wished away. Berger and Luckmann utilized a phenomenological approach, which can be viewed as a way to examine how people interact and create shared meanings that may become institutionalized. Social construction theory can help identify the various ways in which individuals see their committed relationships, and how symbolic meanings attached to

issues such as sexual fidelity, emotional fidelity, relationships boundaries, and legal marriage are related to the way relationships are formed and carried out.

Social change can be explained by drawing from Berger and Luckmann's (1966) theory of social construction. Social change occurs through a number of processes by a marginalized group within an institution. *Habituation* is the process of the creation of a pattern of consistent actions. As patterns are repeated, they become habituated and become a part of an institution. *Typification* is similar to habituation, except it is the process of taking external factors and creating shared meanings from normative assumptions – such as an individual only witnessing different-sex marriages and internalizing that as the only option. Finally, *externalization* is the process of taking what has been internalized and socializing others into the expectations. Through these processes, sedimentation occurs, leading to institutionalization which is followed by social change (Berger & Luckmann, 1966).

The Social Construction of Sexuality

Blumer's (1969) symbolic interactionism theory argues that people assign symbolic meanings to make sense of their social worlds. Plummer (1996) adapted symbolic interactionism to explain homosexuality. The interactionist approach can help to make sense of the symbolism attached to the various aspects of the same-sex relationships I investigated. Queer theory scholars generally accept that sexuality is comprised of symbols from interactions (Plummer, 1996), scripts (Simon & Gagnon, 1986), stories (Plummer, 1995), and discourses (Foucault, 1978). That is, it is socially constructed and imbued with symbolic meaning. All of these individual pieces help to define which relationship practices of a committed relationship are and are not socially

acceptable. It is important to note that the acceptability of various relationship practices vary by the culture and historical time frame that the practices occur in.

While not the first, Foucault's (1978) writing pointed to sexuality being socially constructed, not discovered, as the medical field at the time of Foucault's writing alluded to. Notably, Foucault wanted to examine the role discourses played in the creation and institutionalization of sexuality. Similar to Foucault, Seidman (2015) built upon Berger and Luckmann's (1966) theory of social construction by presenting how sexuality has been socially constructed. Foucault (1978) also argued that power is everywhere. He did not believe in a single oppressor but believed that power is discursive and that where there is power, there is resistance. Everyone has some degree of power and ability to resist the power, which allows social change to occur for gay men and lesbian women, among others.

As lesbian, gay, bisexual, and queer-identified individuals began to publicly come out and proclaim their relationships, public attitudes toward same-sex marriage began to change (D'Emilio, 1983). Lesbian, gay, and queer-identified individuals took advantage of this era of changing attitudes and fought for marriage equality. As public attitudes shifted, the norm of same-sex relationships began to become sedimented. Further sedimentation occurred from the social process of state-by-state recognition of civil unions, state-by-state marriage, and finally federal marriage equality.

Adapting Berger and Luckmann's (1966) social constructionist theory to same-sex marriage can point to social change within the institution of marriage to integrate lesbian, gay, bisexual, and queer-identified individuals. The Supreme Court ruling on marriage equality (*Obergefell v. Hodges*, 2015) has reaffirmed that same-sex couples can

participate in marriage as an institution. Same-sex marriage has become institutionalized under the same assumptions of strict emotional and sexual fidelity for life to one partner that traditional different-sex marriage implies. Since same-sex marriage has become integrated into the existing institution, it is important to examine how same-sex relationships define what commitment means to them, whether that is internal or external to the institution of marriage.

Research Questions

The purpose of this study was to answer four key questions: (1) how do individuals in a same-sex relationship define commitment; (2) how do individuals in a same-sex relationship negotiate what fidelity will look like for their relationships; (3) how do individuals compartmentalize sexual and emotional fidelity, and (4) are there differences for commitment between those who are and who are not married?

CHAPTER IV

METHODS

I completed seventeen in-depth semi-structured interviews with eight women and nine men who identified as *cisgender* (i.e., the individual identifies with the gender they were assigned at birth) and reported being in a same-sex committed relationship at the time of the interview or had been in one in the past. Of the nine men, eight identified as gay and one identified as queer. Of the eight women, seven identified as lesbian and one identified as bisexual. All referred to a committed relationship with a partner of the same sex for purposes of the interview. Individuals were not required to live with or have lived with their partner to be included in the sample. Those who were not in a committed relationship or who had not been in one in the past, however the individual defined it, were excluded. The interviews were approximately forty-five minutes to one-and-a-half hours in length.

Participants

The sample was drawn from two mid-size Midwest metropolitan areas. I had three reasons to draw a sample from two cities: (1) *entr e* already existed in the two cities which allowed me to gain access to an already marginalized group of people who might otherwise be reluctant to participate; (2) the demographics between the two cities are comparable; and (3) further diversity across cities allowed for a more representative sample. Of the seventeen participants, nine were men, who aged from 23 to 31. Of the

men, five identified as white, two as black, one as Hispanic, and one as Asian. All of the men were unmarried and had never been married. Of the men, six had a graduate degree, two had attended some graduate school, and one had attended some college. Seven of the men had been in or were in a monogamous relationship, one was single and had been in a monogamous open relationship, and one was in an open polyamorous relationship. There were eight women, who aged from 23 to 39. All of the women identified as white. Of the women, five were married, two were never married, and one was divorced. Of the women, four had a graduate degree, two had attended some graduate school, and two were college graduates. Seven of the women were in a monogamous relationship and one was in an open relationship. The men and women in my sample were highly educated.

My participants defined polyamory as three or more individuals that agreed to be committed to only each other emotionally and sexually. My participants defined an open relationship as being committed emotionally to their partner(s), but through an agreement they were able to participate in some form of extra-dyadic sex.

Procedures and Data Collection

Participants were recruited using a combination of convenience sampling and snowball sampling. I started the interviews with three colleagues and snowball sampled, reaching four degrees of separation between myself and four participants, three degrees of separation for four participants, and two degrees of separation for six of the seventeen participants (Charmaz, 2006). Each participant was given a recruitment flyer to share with those they knew (see Appendix A). A colleague of a colleague posted the recruitment flyer to a social media website group, from which three participants were recruited.

Following procedures set out by Gillham (2000), I conducted in-depth semi-structured interviews while following the pre-developed interview guide (see Appendix B). In-depth interviews were necessary to reach a deeper, more nuanced understanding of topics that participants would be less likely to divulge through other means of interviewing.

I drew from Patricia Hill Collins' approach to taking a *standpoint perspective* (2000), originally coined by Nancy Hartsock (1983) and further developed by Dorothy Smith (1987). When a researcher takes on a *standpoint perspective*, the researcher strives to understand people from the perspectives of those being studied. Sprague (2016) explains that "the term *standpoint* points to a way of making sense of social processes and structures that can be developed from the resources available to a particular social location." I approached the analysis in a way that personally tells a collective story from my participant's perspective.

To aid in the analysis of the interviews, I collected demographic information at the beginning of the interview (see Appendix C) in order to better understand the participant before beginning the interview process. At the beginning of the interview I explained the purpose of the study and "came out" to my participants that I am a gay man and was engaged to my partner of nearly five years. Collecting the demographic information at the beginning of the interview and "coming out" to my participants aided in establishing rapport with my participants early on in the interview process. I sampled to the point of theoretical saturation, following the procedures outlined by Charmaz (2006).

Analysis

I audio recorded the in-depth interviews. The interviews were transcribed verbatim, during which time I added memos. I used the established methods of principles of analytic induction in analyzing my data (Charmaz, 2006; Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 1995). Using the constant comparative method (Charmaz, 2006), I constantly compared the participants together and compared the participant responses while drawing from the literature and existing theory. My analysis was completed in four stages.

For the first stage I began with line-by-line coding of concrete facts for each individual interview. At this stage, I added additional memos on themes I saw starting to form. In the second stage, I began to code the themes and patterns that emerged in each individual interview. In the third stage, I coded overarching themes and concepts that emerged among the interviews and literature. I then worked to explain how the themes and concepts came together to explain theoretically how individuals in same-sex relationships make sense of their committed relationships and marriage. In the fourth stage, after I analyzed and wrote my findings, I verified that my findings accurately represented the data and made corrections I deemed necessary. My aim is to present the standpoints (Smith, 1987) of those who participated in this study.

CHAPTER V

FINDINGS

A number of key trends emerged from the data, including those related to commitment, negotiation in the relationship, constant open and honest communication, compartmentalization between sexual and emotional fidelity, and marriage. A distinction was also made in which a relationship can be monogamous with two people, but still be sexually open. The overarching patterns revealed similarities and differences between lesbian women and gay men in committed relationships. Overall, all identified a desire for emotional commitment to one's partner, but the importance of sexual fidelity varied among participants.

Commitment

The majority of my participants shared a common view on what commitment meant to them, regardless of marital status. Themes that emerged from my data were the idea of permanence within the relationship, having open and honest communication, sticking through the good and the bad, and viewing the relationship as an investment. Those who valued a sexually monogamous relationship also mentioned the idea of monogamy being involved in their definition of commitment. A married 36-year-old white lesbian in a five-year long cohabiting monogamous relationship framed it this way:

Well my definition is someone that you chose to spend most of your time with, that you're committed to making the relationship healthy and happy, and that you agree on, not everything, but on the core things. If you don't, you're able to discuss them and work that out. ... someone that makes you happy that you want to be with.

An unmarried 28-year-old white gay man in a three-and-a-half-year long non-cohabiting monogamous relationship framed it this way:

... a big part of that is just being faithful to one another ... having that extra mile, so to speak, of having reassurance that neither of you are straying from the relationship and you're committed to this idea of both of you is a very important thing.

It appears that a large part of commitment involves a person accepting their partner for who they are and putting forth equivalent effort towards the relationship, similar to an investment. Many saw the relationship as a type of permanence, meaning it would be there for them to turn to no matter what, a bad argument would not dissolve the commitment. It does not mean there would not be arguments, but those in a committed relationship would choose to overlook or work through disagreements for the sake of the relationship.

While there was only one gay man in a polyamorous relationship, his explanation of commitment was largely similar to the individuals that were in an open relationship. He (an unmarried 28-year-old gay man of color in a two-month long non-cohabiting open polyamorous relationship) explained his idea of commitment like this:

... my idea for commitment in regards to that is having that open communication. If you're going to go play let me know in advance, don't hide it from me. Let's talk about it. If it's someone that I know, and I'm against we have the right to veto that.

For this gay man, communication was the largest part of a committed relationship, and a violation of communication would be a violation against commitment. For those participants that were in a polyamorous or open relationship, this communication was

essential, and a large symbol of trust that was involved in this type of relationship.

Communication was an important component to commitment for each person that I interviewed. As you will see, communication is also important for negotiation within the relationship

Negotiating the Relationship

Not everyone was concerned with following the predetermined societal norms for strict fidelity (i.e., strict emotional and sexual fidelity to one individual). Emergent from my data, fidelity can be broken down into two parts: emotional and sexual. Fourteen out of seventeen relationships followed some form of sexual monogamy, one man and one woman each were in different open relationships, and one man was in an open polyamorous relationship. Two men and one woman were receptive to the idea of opening up their relationship sexually. This meant that 6 out of 17 participants were willing to follow something other than the predetermined societal norms for strict sexual fidelity in their relationship. In addition, two men indicated that they had attempted to have an open relationship at one point, but decided it was not for them. All participants placed an emphasis on the importance of strict emotional fidelity within their relationships. Emergent from the data was the necessity to negotiate shared meanings and understandings of various aspects within the relationship. Through constant open and honest communication, this negotiation allowed the partners to set specific relationship boundaries.

It is important to recognize that people's expectations for their relationships change, whether the change occurs over time within the relationship, or from one relationship to the next. At times negotiation may involve sexually opening up the

relationship. Sometimes relationships succeed in sexually opening up, and other times they do not. This became apparent with those who had tried an open-relationship in the past but for one reason or another decided that it was not for them.

One gay man's partner expressed his desire to be in an open sexual relationship after some time. The gay man was reluctant to open up the relationship but did eventually concede to his partner's wishes out of fear that if he did not, the relationship would end. When I asked the participant (an unmarried 30-year-old gay white man previously in a two-and-a-half-year long cohabiting relationship) whether that relationship matched his definition of what a committed relationship should look like, he replied with:

Not really. I was trying to compromise a handful of times after that relationship went awry with what it would be like to be with people who were in open relationships or not even having any kind of label attached. But I apparently like labels to some extent.

This implies that some relationships will reach a point of negotiation where one partner may concede too much away, consequently leaving the individual unhappy with newly negotiated terms, possibly to the detriment of the relationship.

Others reported they thought they would be able to tolerate an open relationship, or a polyamorous relationship, but through experience determined that this was no longer possible. An unmarried 28-year-old gay white man previously in a five-month long non-cohabiting open relationship explained his experience this way:

I used to think I would be okay with an open relationship. Like I think I'd be open to even sort of polyamorous relationships. Nope. Nope, nope, nope, nope. I realized that I ... I have a giant green monster that lives inside me, and it's not the Hulk. It's envy, and jealousy.

This gay man had difficulty when he tried to adapt to an open relationship. He ultimately determined that he was unable to parse out his jealousy and could not continue with this type of relationship.

An unmarried 28-year-old gay man of color in a two-month long non-cohabiting open polyamorous relationship explained the freedom in his open relationship like this:

In my mind with an open relationship you're committing yourself to someone saying that, "Hey, I love you, but sexually if we don't want to have sex with each other, [go] get gratification with someone else, but still my heart is going to belong to you."

Each person I interviewed responded differently to an open relationship. Some of the men and women valued the freedom involved to gratify themselves sexually, while others could not contain their jealousy that their partner was sexually active with other people.

While there appear to be differences among gay men and lesbians in terms of sexual monogamy, both groups had discussed and negotiated their expectations and boundaries with their partner(s) at some point in their relationship. While I do not have enough data to determine whether there are differences between gay men and lesbians in sexually open and polyamorous relationships, collectively they do appear to follow a similar structure. Gay men appear to be more receptive to the idea of having a sexually open relationship, possibly due to better compartmentalization between sexual and emotional feelings (Bonello & Cross, 2010; Umberson, Thomeer, & Lodge 2015).

Lesbian Sexual Monogamy

A majority of women (six out of eight) followed the more traditional and strict definition of sexual fidelity. Lesbian women overwhelmingly required strict sexual monogamy in their relationships, with only one participant involved in a sexually open relationship, and one more who wanted to have an open relationship, although her partner

did not. When I asked what the line being crossed would be for sexual fidelity, the women told me that kissing would be on the line. They defined infidelity to include, kissing, sexting, oral sex, digital penetration, and use of sex toys with someone else. This is what the definition looked like for an unmarried 26-year-old white lesbian in a seven-year long cohabiting monogamous relationship:

Obviously having sexual intercourse. But I think sexual cheating would be anything in an intimate atmosphere. Like, obviously I would consider it cheating if she went up to somebody and just started making out with them, or like a build up to where they were having intimate moments. Obviously, hugging isn't cheating, or anything like that. But the more intimate things that you would do with someone you were hooking up with, or dating, whatever. So not just sex, just kind of anything that could lead up to that. The kissing, or hand-holding, stuff like that. I would think would be some form of infidelity. Because you don't just go out and hold hands with your best friends for no reason, you know?

While the women had varying degrees of what they considered to be infidelity, the tolerance of infidelity by these women always stopped short of any sexual contact, including holding hands or kissing, for those in a strictly sexually monogamous relationship. This was largely similar to my other lesbian participants, with the added exception piece of negotiated extra-dyadic sex.

Gay Men Sexual Monogamy

Seven out of nine men were in a sexually monogamous relationship. Gay men had varying tolerance for sexual infidelity. Most men drew the line at sexual contact, but that contact did not always include kissing. The majority of gay men viewed sexting as being right on the border for infidelity, but most considered it a form of sexual infidelity. It became apparent that it was less about the act, but what mattered most was secrecy and interpreted intent. This is what sexual infidelity looked like for an unmarried 30-year-old

white gay man who desired strict monogamy, previously in a two-and-a-half-year long partially-cohabiting monogamous relationship:

It would be if someone engaged in sex with another person and either told me about it or didn't tell me about it then that would be infidelity to me. If we'd already committed to being together exclusively. [...] It doesn't have to be purely physical, for me. It can be a certain verbal kind of cheating especially if it's been weeks or months of communications that are of an illicit kind of nature that show intentions to take it further especially.

Through open and honest communication, those within a relationship are better able to navigate the negotiation process to determine what behavior is and is not acceptable for the partner to have with individuals outside of the relationship.

Lesbians Open to Extra-dyadic Sex

A married 36-year-old white lesbian in a five-year long partially-cohabiting relationship was a proponent for having a sexually open relationship, but her partner was not receptive to the idea, although she did state she would reconsider it after they were together for ten years:

But we still discuss it [opening up the relationship], I'd say, fairly often, like three times a year. She understands my point of view, where I'm coming from with it. While that's never been something that she's ever thought of or considered before, she's willing to consider it, but she's not ready for it.

While only one lesbian was in the category of individuals expressing a desire to incorporate extra-dyadic sex into their committed relationship, this quote continues to show the emerging theme of the importance of constant open and honest communication. Through this constant open communication for this couple, they were able to regularly negotiate and set the boundaries that were expected to be followed, while honestly expressing any uncertainty they had with the relationship. Most important from this is

that successful boundary negotiation tended to err on the side of the partner that placed importance on stricter sexual fidelity.

Gay Men Open to Extra-dyadic Sex

Two men out of the seven in sexually monogamous relationships indicated that they were receptive to a sexually open relationship, although they were in a sexually monogamous relationship. Each expressed the need to keep an open line of communication with their partner(s) whether their sexual needs were being met. One unmarried 26-year-old gay man of color previously in a four-year long non-cohabiting monogamous relationship put it this way:

... I feel like if you really want to have sex with some other person outside of our relationships, why not just tell me, you know where we can sit down and talk about that. You know, is this a one-time thing? Is it going to be a recurring thing? You know things like that. So, I think that it's infidelity if it's something that you're sneaking around doing, you're constantly like you hiding it, instead of just being honest about it. At least then we can talk about what you're doing.

The gay men that I interviewed constructed their relationships in a way that worked best for them. Specifically negotiated boundaries were not indicated in my interviews with these two men, as they only suggested their willingness to approach the topic of opening up their relationship in the future with their partner. Similar to past research, this process did not always follow the established norms and institutionalized expectations of monogamy and commitment for relationships (Lamont, 2017; Umberson, Thomeer, & Lodge, 2015). This indicated a need to keep communication open to continue to establish trust within the relationship through expressing needs in the relationship. It also aligns with past research that strict sexual monogamy may not be an essential component of commitment for some same-sex relationships (LaSala, 2004).

Lesbians and Gay Men in an Open Relationship

In addition, there were those who were in a sexually open relationship. Two men and one woman utilized the agreed-upon terms of their open relationship when their sexual needs, or their partner's sexual needs were not being met in the relationship, or they wanted a "thrill." They did not hold a negative view towards their partner(s) for being sexually unavailable; instead, they adapted by getting their needs met elsewhere, following the already agreed-upon rules on how to navigate sex with an outside party. An unmarried 28-year-old gay man of color in a two-month long non-cohabiting open polyamorous relationship explained it this way:

I noticed that in my monogamous relationship the last one I was in when the sex started to dwindle off, he went and found it elsewhere. [...] With these two, however, I feel that physical affection is important, and if one of us is not in the mood we have another individual that we can go to, and if the other one's not in the mood we have that ability to look elsewhere.

This gay man explained that in order to look elsewhere, he and his partners needed to communicate their intent to have a hook-up (i.e., an extra-dyadic sexual encounter without emotional attachments sanctioned by existing agreed-upon terms of the open relationship) and receive consent from all partners. If for some reason one of his partners was unavailable to give their consent, or if they vetoed it, then the hook-up was not to occur. This is a major part of the trust involved in this type of relationship and continues to emphasize the importance of constant open and honest communication, which for this relationship, was the foundation of their commitment to one another. These rules seem to apply to monogamous couples as well, although there was less tolerance for extra-dyadic sexual and emotional relationships.

A few of my participants explained the process involved in deciding to have an open relationship or to open their current relationship. A past experience of cheating in a

relationship might consequently influence an individual's belief that sex would occur outside of the relationship regardless of its openness. Subsequently, individuals talked to their partner(s) about making an open-relationship an option. Other individuals enjoyed the freedom involved in a sexually open relationship. One married 24-year-old white lesbian in a two-and-a-half-year long partially-cohabiting open relationship explained her belief with a metaphor:

I've kind of figured it out as a puppy in a crate during crate training. I like the crate. It's nice, but as soon as you close the door I get angry. I want to be able to leave. But I also think it's kind of nice in here. I don't want to get out. So, that's our kind of thing. Because we both like the idea of not being boxed in by something and the ability to do it.

Those that I interviewed that were in open relationships set up specific rules or guidelines that they were to follow. Both of the gay men and the lesbian woman were to tell their partner(s) before having sex outside of the relationship; however, only the gay male relationship required consent be acquired prior to extra-dyadic sex. All three participants had an "off limits" list in their relationship.

Emotional Fidelity

Interestingly, all participants followed strict emotional fidelity for their relationships, viewing it as an essential part of their relationship. My participants viewed strict emotional fidelity as receiving a majority of their emotional support from their partner(s), and not someone else. Those in open and polyamorous relationships reported they received emotional support strictly from their partner(s) in the approved relationship. Those in a polyamorous relationship or those who wanted to form a polyamorous relationship negotiated with their partner(s) to open the relationship up to another individual. Not following strict emotional boundaries was seen as a form of emotional

infidelity. In defining emotional fidelity, it is important to note that an emotional bond with individuals outside of the relationship was okay, as long as there was not also a potential sexual connection with the person. These individuals were not expected to abandon their friends but put priority in their partner(s) for emotional support. This is how a married 34-year-old white lesbian in a six-year long cohabiting monogamous relationship framed emotional infidelity:

Emotional cheating for me would be connecting with someone that's not your partner. On an emotional level that's beyond what the average friend would. It's harder to define, I think. But I know it when I see it.

If she or her partner received emotional support from an individual outside of the relationship, that would be considered a form of emotional infidelity. An unmarried 26-year-old white lesbian in a seven-year long cohabiting monogamous relationship explained emotional infidelity like this:

Emotional cheating, I think would be turning to somebody else for any form of support instead of your spouse. Like, knowing that you didn't want to go to your spouse about certain things, so you felt more comfortable going to somebody else instead of your spouse [...] because maybe I wasn't getting emotional support from her, so I went to somebody else for emotional support. Kind of like a companion. Like how older people [...] don't really want to get in to another relationship, but they just want a companion. I feel like if you turn to somebody else for that companionship, instead of your spouse, that would be emotional [cheating].

All gay men had a similar definition to the lesbian women for emotional infidelity. An unmarried 31-year-old gay white man previously in a two-and-a-half-year long non-cohabiting monogamous relationship framed it this way:

I think it's easy to cheat emotionally with someone with all of the modern technologies. So, I think that even setting up profiles online just to talk, I think that's almost emotional cheating. [...] I guess the severity of cheating would depend on if it was a kissy face emoji or a full-on paragraph about their feelings, [...] but I would consider that at least emotional cheating

An unmarried 28-year-old gay man of color in a two-month long non-cohabiting open polyamorous relationship explained emotional support and emotional infidelity this way:

Ideally, it [emotional support] should be coming from the three of us, but we do have a lot of friends that provide affection, but it's on a friendly level. We understand that, and we know each other's friends, essentially, because we're from the same community and what-not, so that's one thing. It's when they go to the outsiders that we don't know about, and they start seeking that emotional support, or that emotional affection rather without coming to us for it.

All of these individuals placed an emphasis on the importance of emotional fidelity for their relationships, although their opinions of acceptable behavior differed slightly, showing that each relationship constructs and gives meaning to acceptable behaviors. It is important to note that this emphasis also existed for the polyamorous relationship, which were only men in the relationship, and existed for the sexually open lesbian couple.

A trend also emerged for a belief that if emotional infidelity was occurring within the relationship, it was likely an indication that there were more serious problems involved in the relationship, conceivably pointing to its dissolution. A married 34-year-old white lesbian in a six-year long cohabiting monogamous relationship framed the indication this way:

I think the emotional part would be more harmful, because really at least from what I've experienced and know about lesbians, the emotional part is part of sex. Not for everyone, but it seems like that's the starting point of the infidelity when it comes to sex too, so it's kind of like the red flag of things. And, if I'm not connecting emotionally with my spouse or my partner, that's a huge problem.

An unmarried 28-year-old white gay man currently in a three-and-a-half-year long non-cohabiting monogamous relationship framed it this way:

I've come to see infidelity as, not necessarily a super terrible thing, but really just an indicator that something's wrong, whether with the relationship, or more lightly just one partner's needs aren't being met in some capacity. Now, with that

mindset, when that might happen, kind of using that as a framework or a space to discuss what is going on that's not working, and then trying to problem solve and troubleshoot from there to see if needs can be met or if this is time that we should call it quits.

For these two participants, the lack of emotional bond with one's partner was an indication of brewing problems within the relationship. Overall, this was an emerging trend among the majority of my participants. It appears as though my participants recognize and interpret these indicators within their relationship to aid in directing future adjustment in the relationship. My findings suggest that in monogamous, polyamorous, and open relationships, emotional fidelity as defined by those involved in the relationship, is an essential part of a committed relationship, whereas sexual fidelity could be more easily negotiated. It appears that the emotional aspect of fidelity is far more complex in the foundation of the relationship compared to sexual fidelity.

Compartmentalization of sexual fidelity and emotional fidelity

Consistent with previous research (Bonello & Cross, 2010) there appeared to be a form of compartmentalization between sexual and emotional fidelity among a slight majority of men I interviewed, while compartmentalization only existed for two women in this study. All individuals that were in a sexually open relationship or were receptive to the idea of a sexually open relationship considered themselves to not be in a polyamorous relationship with their extra-dyadic sexual partner. These individuals compartmentalized between sexual and possible emotional bonds by viewing their extra-dyadic sexual relationship as merely a "hook up" as there was not an emotional connection, and caution was taken to avoid creating one. This further suggests that sexual monogamy may not be

an essential component to committed relationships for some gay men and lesbians where emotional monogamy is (LaSala, 2004).

This compartmentalization was only seen among the gay men and lesbians who had an open relationship, and among the gay men and lesbian woman who were more tolerant of a sexually open relationship. My participants pointed out a distinct difference between their partner(s) and their hook-ups: the presence of emotional bond. Any presence of emotional bond between a partner and their hook-up was seen as a threat to the primary relationship. A married 24-year-old white lesbian in a two-and-a-half-year long previously cohabiting open relationship explained her process of compartmentalization this way:

The person that you share all the emotional things with exclusively and open and honest communication. [...] and for us it's if I have a good day and something exciting happens, she's the first person I tell. If I have a bad day and I'm angry, I need someone to vent to, she's the person I call on the phone or for working through stress or something with school. They're the person we talk to and communicate with. So, that's what I would say is committed. Making decisions, somebody I went out and hooked up with I wouldn't call and be like, "Hey I'm thinking about making this purchase. What do you think?"

An unmarried 28-year-old gay man of color in a two-month long non-cohabiting open polyamorous relationship compartmentalization between sexual acts and emotional acts:

For me, sex, I know I talked about physical affection that's what sex is for me. It's less about the idea of being able to achieve the climax, but more of receiving the affection that you get through the act of sex that's romantic to me.

This man viewed physical and emotional affection separately with the emotional affection forming the foundation of his relationship.

In contrast, there were some men and women who could not differentiate between sexual and emotional acts of infidelity. For those men and women, the sexual and emotional acts were very intertwined and impossible to parse out. This is where the

sexual becomes emotional. A divorced 33-year-old white lesbian in a three-and-a-half-year long cohabiting monogamous relationship framed the intertwined belief like this:

Cheating in general to me would just be even talking to someone about sex. So, if I were to have a conversation with someone like I would like to have sex with you, I would consider that cheating. I guess sexual cheating. Even talking about having sex with someone I guess would be sexual cheating.

When I asked her what emotional cheating would be, she replied with: “The same.

Talking, or I guess thinking about it would be tough.” This further shows that some viewed sexual infidelity as containing emotional components. Overall, my participants showed that they were able to shape their relationship boundaries according to their own ability or choice to compartmentalize emotional and sexual fidelity.

Defining Marriage

Eleven participants had never been married, five lesbian women were married at the time of their interview, and one lesbian woman was previously divorced from another woman. No gay men I interviewed were married or had ever been married. One gay man said he did not want to get married. One previously divorced lesbian woman (an unmarried 33-year-old white lesbian currently in a three-and-a-half-year long cohabiting monogamous relationship) had a negative viewpoint on marriage: “I wonder if marriage would screw all of this up. This good thing that we have that's awesome right now. I don't want to screw it up.” The gay man in the polyamorous relationship stated that he would be willing to get married if same-sex polygamy were legal.

Prior to marriage equality, a minority of participants did not believe that they had a place in marriage as an institution. An unmarried 26-year-old gay man of color previously in a four-year long non-cohabiting monogamous relationship explained it like this:

So, growing up as a gay child I never really had an example or a role model for what marriage looked like for a gay couple. I grew up in the 90's so you know only until recently have we started to see more acceptance and more images especially in the media about gay marriage. I never really grew up with an idea of what marriage would look like for me. I know what it looked like for straight couples. You know for a man or a woman, but I never really knew what that was for me. And so, I never really thought marriage was a possibility because how do two men get married. ... my thoughts on marriage growing up was ... I didn't think about it at all. It was something that I didn't see I had a future in or for. Now ... I see it's definitely more possible now ... because ..., times are changing so I'm more open to it now than I used to be when I was growing up.

The majority of those who did not believe they had a place in marriage as an institution had a similar reason, which was that they did not know what same-sex marriage could look like. A married 34-year-old white lesbian in a six-year long cohabiting monogamous relationship explained a similar viewpoint that changed due to her marriage. When I asked how she would define marriage, she answered:

The stereotypical marriage is between a man and a woman. I always think of that and it always kind of bristles, like grit it's a little gritty. Like it doesn't feel very good, but I think of marriage as the traditional form of marriage of man and woman, coming together, but I also, now that I've had this experience and more of expanding of my context, it's two people coming together and walking through life and being supportive of one another. Loving each other despite flaws.

A theme emerged in which the heteronormative construct of marriage formed a conflicting belief on whether or not they could fit into the construct of marriage. Prior to the *Obergefell* decision, my participants did not consider marriage as an institution that would include them. After the decision, these individuals appeared to be more inclined to view the possibility of marriage in a positive light. This further shows that these individuals have to construct and give meaning to marriage, as they have been excluded from the socialization process. This process was stressful and daunting to my participants who navigated it alone and was further stigmatized by a religious background.

My participants had a much more optimistic outlook on marriage once they had marriage equality giving them the opportunity to marry. An unmarried 29-year-old gay man of color in a one-year long non-cohabiting monogamous relationship explained his thoughts on marriage like this:

I think it's beautiful. I always joke around with this Disney princess mentality. I think it's really good. For me, marriage serves, not only it's a legal ... you got a lot of federal benefits that come from marriage, but I think it's also just a really powerful symbol of one's commitment to the other person. So, for me, I think it's beautiful. I think it's one of those things where it's conveying a particular image to other people, but I think it also has an inherent importance in and of itself. Of course, it also just gives a lot of benefits legally.

This explanation summarized the meaning of marriage for the vast majority of my participants, who defined marriage as legal protections (medical rights and tax benefits among others), the final step in a committed relationship, a life marker, a symbol of lifelong commitment, and the person you share everything with.

The five married lesbian women had a very similar viewpoint on marriage as the unmarried gay men and lesbian women I interviewed. They held the same viewpoint on defining marriage as someone that always has their back, the person they shared everything with, and two people coming together to walk through life together while supporting each other.

Two married lesbian women held a somewhat pessimistic viewpoint toward marriage prior to their own marriage. One of those, a married 39-year-old white lesbian in a five-and-a-half-year long cohabiting monogamous relationship explained her conflicting views on marriage like this:

Well, part of it is I never thought I would legally be able to be married, so when that changed, I was like, "Oh my god." I am totally a girly-girl, and as a kid, played the bride, and I wanted the Disney princess fairytale, all of it. And then got pretty jaded with my parents' divorce and my mom split, and just no real good

role models for that, so then I thought that marriage was bullshit for a while, and so I went from total fairytale to it's all a fucking disaster, to somewhere in the middle now. [My wife] makes me feel like marriage is real, and I feel like a fairytale princess, and I do believe that it is forever with her. Even when we first started dating, I was nowhere in that place, but I do believe you fall in love with someone.

Interestingly, this quote presents just how complex this active negotiation process can be for some in same-sex relationships. This woman moved from a heteronormative view of marriage, to rejecting marriage, and now to an integrated view where she can pick and choose certain elements to include in her own definition of marriage. Those that did not hold the most optimistic view on marriage could still choose to give their own meaning to their relationship and overcome the historically limited societal definition of marriage.

When I asked the five married lesbian women the reasons behind becoming married, they had similar responses. All five married women held the belief that marriage was two people coming together to share everything with and support each other through everything. Three of the married lesbians married to form a cohesive family unit to prepare for having children. A married 39-year-old white lesbian in a five-and-a-half-year long cohabiting monogamous relationship explained her decision to get married:

Well, she thought we should probably be married before we have a baby, and I really wanted the big, fluffy dress. That was for sure part of it, but we'd been together a long time, and I knew I wanted to be with her, and she wanted to be with me, and we wanted to say that in front of everybody, and the fact that it could be legal was super cool, and I wanted to take advantage of the legal perks that all of the other straight couples had, and not have to worry about if something happened to me that nobody would let her in the hospital room or any of that kind of crap.

Overall, my participants all pointed to the need to construct and give meaning to their own relationships. All of my participants needed to be able to navigate and give meaning to marriage despite being excluded from the institution of marriage until only

recently. While most of my participants followed a heteronormative approach to defining marriage, they were still able to decide to give marriage meaning in their own way. I discuss this further in the discussion section.

Moreover, my participants identified that their ideas of marriage are malleable and can change over time, be that from life experiences or social change around them that they have encountered. The quote above from the married 39-year-old white lesbian in a five-and-a-half-year long cohabiting monogamous relationship exemplifies that as options become available, such as marriage equality, viewpoints and even tone on issues can drastically shift. Perhaps the effect of marriage equality is lagging behind the social change that has occurred since the June 26, 2015 United States Supreme Court ruling.

CHAPTER VI

DISCUSSION

My participants were aware of the already established norms and institutionalized expectations of committed relationships that different-sex relationships followed. To an extent, my participants adhered to some of the established discourses and resisted others (Foucault, 1978). These men and women chose to define what commitment meant to them in their own unique ways. Where one relationship had an agreement for strict sexual and emotional fidelity, another relationship chose to allow extra-dyadic sex of some form in their relationship. Due to this negotiation, fidelity did not have a universal definition that could be applied to all of the lesbian women and gay men that I interviewed. This definition was negotiated within each relationship and made each one unique. Through this negotiation, gay men and lesbians have been able to construct and give meaning to their committed relationships and marriages in relation to an institution that excluded them from this process until only recently.

All participants expressed their desire for strict emotional fidelity within their relationship; however, they could not concretely define it. Similar to what Plummer (1996) discussed in regard to interpreting homosexual acts, it appears as though emotional fidelity is interpreted based on the time and place of the situation and inferred based on the symbolism involved (Blumer, 1969). My participants stated they would “know it when I see it.” They would interpret an event based on what it meant to them

and their relationship, further showing that fidelity is malleable and that its meaning is symbolic to those involved in the relationship.

While my participants all desired strict emotional fidelity, there were some that were receptive to a negotiated form of redefined sexual fidelity. Some of the gay men that were receptive to the idea of or in an open-relationship discussed that they believed sexual cheating would occur in their relationship, so they chose to open their relationship. This was consistent with Sheets and Wolfe (2001) that gay men appeared to have a lower level of certainty of sexual fidelity.

While both lesbian women and gay men appeared able to compartmentalize emotional and sexual feelings, it seemed as though women were less likely to compartmentalize, consistent with previous research (Bonello & Cross, 2010). All who chose to have an open-relationship compartmentalized emotional and sexual feelings during extra-dyadic sexual encounters, choosing to compartmentalize for the security of their primary relationship. Among these participants, sexual monogamy was not always an essential component to a relationship for gay men and lesbian women, perhaps adding to LaSala's (2004) findings that both gay men and lesbian women can compartmentalize, not just gay men. Contrary to prior research (Meier, Hull, & Ortyl, 2009), my findings did not show that gay men value lifelong commitment more highly than lesbian women, but my sample did not include any married gay men.

Even though women and men in same-sex relationships were excluded from the legal definition of marriage, it appears that same-sex couples were heavily influenced by the prominent heteronormative constructs of marriage. Heteronormative constructs of marriage facilitated an internalized conflict among my participants. Many of my

participants brought up a “Disney” view on marriage and the idea that marriage involves a form of permanence, both of which source from a heteronormative approach to marriage. These views were often shadowed by an already existing internalized restriction from childhood that told my participants that marriage is only between a man and a woman, exacerbating sexual minority stress in their relationship (Stewart, Frost, & LeBlanc, 2019). From this, my participants had difficulty defining marriage that included them. Furthermore, my data suggests that due to additional stressors stemming from sexual minority stress, gay men and lesbian women may rely more heavily on their partner(s) to meet their emotional needs.

For my participants there was little urgency involved in the desire to marry. Although same-sex marriages are on the rise, only about one in ten LGBT people in the United States were married as of 2017 (Pew Research Center). This suggests that not all are rushing to the marriage license office, possibly further suggesting some hesitance to enter the institution in the current state.

According to Berger and Luckmann (1966), marginalized groups can go through imperfect socialization within an institution leading these groups to not follow the hegemonic rules of the institution. Social change occurs in an institution as a result of imperfect socialization. Cherlin (2004) might suggest that all Americans have been imperfectly socialized due to the high rates of divorce, cohabitation, and remarriage. Unique to lesbian women and gay men is that only recently have they been able to legally marry. These men and women appear to integrate their own shared meaning of what commitment and marriage mean to them (Plummer, 1996). While Berger and Luckmann (1966) outlined that the process of social change occurs in a chain of events due to

imperfect socialization, my data challenges this. Berger and Luckmann (1966) believed that social change would occur for the institution in a way that everyday acts would become habituated, and later would become typified, reified, and sedimented. Instead, the lesbian women and gay men I interviewed actively resisted the social norms of the institution, opting to instead form their relationships in a way that worked best for them despite outside pressure.

Similarly, just as sexual identities are socially constructed (Seidman, 2015; Plummer, 1996), my research suggests that lesbians and gay men have taken the position to socially construct and shape their own relationships. Within these socially constructed relationships, the meanings of sexual and emotional infidelity have symbolic meaning, which is negotiated. Gay men and lesbian women negotiate the shared meaning through both resistance and conformity to hegemonic definitions and discourses of the institution (Plummer, 1996; D'Emilio 1983; Foucault, 1978; Lamont, 2017). For example, the married 34-year-old white lesbian in a six-year long cohabiting monogamous relationship said that she once thought that marriage was only between a man and a woman and had conflicting views on that thought. Through her life experiences, she came to accept marriage as “two people coming together and walking through life and being supportive of one another. Loving each other despite flaws.”

Same-sex marriage has now become institutionalized and been embraced by approximately ten percent of the gay and lesbian community (Pew Research Center, 2017). However, my research suggests that for an unknown number of same-sex couples, negotiation of the relationship and how it should be carried out, whether within or outside of marriage, continues. Same-sex couples were excluded from the institution of marriage

and were free to structure their relationships without much institutional oversight; although religious institutions, family, and the criminal justice system have played important roles in stigmatizing, marginalizing, and criminalizing same-sex relationships (D'Emilio 1983; D'Emilio & Freedman, 1997). Resulting from little oversight over the relationships was the negotiation process that same-sex couples go through, which has become sedimented from the externalization process of this imperfect socialization. Negotiation is a part of same-sex relationships and will continue to be a part of the institution of marriage for same-sex relationships.

Conclusions

The institution of marriage is socially constructed and varies according to culture and historical time period (Seidman, 2015). The process of integrating same-sex marriage within the institution of marriage is no different than previous changes. While there is now marriage equality not all gay men and lesbian women want to conform to the expectations of the institution. Some lesbian women and gay men prefer to exercise a degree of autonomy in negotiating their own relationship and the shape it will take. Through the discursive power that Foucault (1978) discussed, gay men and lesbian women have power to resist the expectations, which allows for social change in the institution of marriage to occur (Berger and Luckmann, 1966).

It remains to be seen whether lesbian women and gay men will continue to exercise a degree of autonomy over their relationships, though theory suggests they will (Foucault, 1978). Theoretically, we might conclude that these men and women will continue to give symbolic meaning to their relationships (Blumer 1969; Plummer, 1996). Just as the institution of marriage has evolved in the past, theory suggests that it will

continue to expand to further embrace diversity (Seidman, 2015). Gay men and lesbian women will continue to structure their relationships to be a fusion between conforming to the expectations of heteronormative marriage and the sedimented practices prior to the inclusion of same-sex relationship in the institution of marriage.

Limitations of the current research

My sample was limited in size, and geographically limited to the Midwestern United States. The overwhelming majority of my sample was white, well-educated, middle class, and relatively young. Despite my continued efforts, I was unable to recruit any married gay men. One should be careful to generalize these findings beyond the United States and also recognize that my research took place only three years post marriage equality.

Future research should focus on a larger and more diverse sample, particularly including regions other than the Midwest. Future research should be careful to include a more diverse sample for race, age, marital status, education, and class, particularly focusing on intersectionality within the same-sex population. Future research should further explore in more depth the negotiation process that these same-sex couples utilize in their relationships.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

You are invited to participate in a research study, if you identify as LGBTQ+ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, queer, etc.), and are currently in a committed same-sex relationship, or have been in one in the past.

Patricia Gagne, a professor at the University of Louisville, and Brandon Schmidt, a graduate student at the University of Louisville, are conducting a study on commitment in same-sex relationships. They will ask about participants' life experiences, current and past relationships, and decision-making within relationships.

Interviews will last around an hour.

Interviews will take place in a public place, like a coffee shop, library, or in an office/conference room at UofL. When results of the study are published, all participants will be given fake names to protect their identities.

If you would like to participate, please call or text Brandon Schmidt at (417) 300-3154, or you may email for more information at:

Brandon.Schmidt@Louisville.edu

For more information on the study, please see Professor Gagne's website:

<http://louisville.edu/sociology/faculty-staff-students/faculty-new/patricia-gagne-ph-d>

Thank you!

APPENDIX B

Interview Guide

This is a reminder that interviews will be audio and/or video recorded.

1. Tell me about your most recent committed relationship.
 - a. When did you meet
 - i. How long has it lasted?
 - ii. (Or) How long did it last?
 - b. Was your significant other male or female?
 - c. How did you meet?
 - d. How did the relationship progress?
 - e. Have you told your family about your relationship?
 - f. Have you told your friends about your relationship?
 - i. How did your family and friends react to the relationship?
 - g. If living together/lived together:
 - i. When did you decide to move in together?
 - ii. Tell me about making that decision.
 - h. Is your partner supportive of your goals and ambitions in life?
 - i. Can you tell me what this support or non-support looks like?
2. Next, I'd like for you to talk about what commitment means to you in a relationship.
 - a. What does being in a committed relationship mean to you? What does it entail?
 - b. What did you think it was going to be like?
 - i. Is commitment what you always imagined it to be?
 - c. Can you tell me about how you deal with money in a committed relationship?
 - d. Can you tell me about what sex means in a committed relationship?
 - e. Can you tell me about how you make decisions, both as a couple, and as an individual in a committed relationship?
 - f. Can you explain to me how you work through problems in a relationship?
 - i. Has that changed over time?
 - g. Can you explain to me how you compromise within a committed relationship and what that compromise might look like?
 - h. How are major decision made, such as a major purchase, where you should live, where you should find a job, what house to buy, etc.?
3. What are your thoughts on infidelity or cheating in a committed relationship?
 - a. What is sexual cheating to you

- b. What is emotional cheating to you?
 - i. Please explain the difference.
 - c. Has this changed for you over time?
 - i. How has it changed?
 - ii. What caused this to change?
 - d. What about social media connections?
 - i. Flirting on social media?
 - ii. Having a dating app?
 - iii. Keeping open a dating profile?
 - e. What if they continue to talk to or have a relationship with an ex?
 - f. What if they look at pornography without you?
4. How do you deal with money?
- a. Is money managed jointly or individually?
 - b. How did you decide to manage money this way?
 - c. Is this how you prefer to manage money?
5. What are your thoughts on marriage?
- a. Not married
 - i. What do you think of marriage?
 - 1. Is it something you would like?
 - 2. What do you think marriage means to those around you?
 - 3. What do you think marriage means to you?
 - ii. When you hear/think about the possibility of marriage, what does that mean to you?
 - iii. What comes to mind when you think of marriage?
 - iv. Do you have any thoughts on getting married?
 - 1. How come?
 - b. Married
 - i. What do you think of marriage?
 - ii. What comes to mind when you think of marriage?
 - iii. Why did you decide to get married?
 - iv. What made you and your partner think that was the next step you wanted to take?
 - v. How did your family and close friends react to the news that you were getting married, or that you married?
 - 1. What did they say?
 - c. What are your thoughts on gay marriage?
 - i. Do you think that society views same-sex marriage and different-sex (heterosexual) marriage equally?
 - ii. How come?
 - d. Do you post your “relationship status” on social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter?
 - i. Tell me about how people have reacted to your relationship.
 - 1. Were there negative reactions? Tell me about those.
 - 2. Were there positive reactions? Tell me about those.

- ii. Were reactions different on social media as compared to in-person?
 - 1. How so?
 - e. Do you view marriage differently since the June 2015 marriage equality ruling?
 - i. Was it an important component to commitment then?
 - 1. What about now?
- 6. I'm wondering if there were any topics or issues that we haven't discussed that you view as important for me to know.
- 7. Thank the participant for their time.
 - a. Ask: If I find that I forgot to ask something, would it be okay if I contacted you? If so, how would you prefer to be contacted (Phone, E-mail, etc.)?

APPENDIX C

Demographics

1. Gender (please circle one)

Female Male Other _____

2. What is your age? _____

3. What is your occupation? _____

4. Which of the following statements best describes your highest educational achievement?

- _____ Some high school
- _____ High school graduate
- _____ Trade school
- _____ Some college
- _____ College graduate
- _____ Some graduate school
- _____ Graduate degree

5. What is your race and/or ethnicity? (please check all that apply)

- Hispanic or Latina/o
- Native American/Alaska Native
- Black or African-American
- Asian or Asian American or Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander
- White
- Other _____

6. What is your current marital status?

- Never Married Married
- Divorced Widowed
- Legally Separated

7. How many children do you have, if any? _____

7.1. How many of your children are under age 18? _____

8. What is your household size (including yourself)? _____

9. Which of the following best describes your annual household income before taxes?
 ___ \$20,000 or less ___ \$20,001-\$50,000
 ___ \$50,001-\$70,000 ___ \$70,001-\$100,000
 ___ \$100,001-\$150,000 ___ \$150,001 or more

10. What is your housing status?
 Rent
 Own
 Live rent free
 Other _____

11. Which of these opinions best represents your political views?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Extremely Liberal	Liberal	Slightly Liberal	Moderate	Slightly Conservative	Conservative	Extremely Conservative

12. Which of the following best characterizes your religious affiliation? (please circle all that apply)

Agnostic
 Atheist
 Buddhist
 Christian
 Hindu
 Jewish
 Muslim
 Pagan
 Other _____

13. How do you identify sexually?

Straight	Gay/Lesbian
Bisexual	Pansexual
Asexual	Other _____

14. Are you currently in what you consider to be a long-term committed relationship?

Yes No

15. Have you ever been in what you consider to be a long-term committed relationship?

Yes No

CURRICULUM VITA

Brandon M. Schmidt

Department of Sociology
Lutz Hall 113
University of Louisville
Louisville, Kentucky 40292
(417) 300-3154
Brandon.Schmidt@Louisville.edu

EDUCATION

Doctor of Philosophy in Applied Sociology	Accepted, to begin August 2019
University of Louisville, Louisville, Kentucky	
Master of Arts in Sociology	May 2019
University of Louisville, Louisville, Kentucky	
Thesis: <i>“Monogamish”</i> : <i>Constructing Shared Meaning of Commitment and Marriage in Same-Sex Relationships</i>	
Bachelor of Science in Psychology	May 2017
Missouri State University, Springfield, Missouri	
Certificate in Forensic Child Psychology	May 2017
Missouri State University, Springfield, Missouri	
Associate of Arts	July 2014
Ozarks Technical Community College, Springfield, Missouri	
Graduated Summa Cum Laude (4.0)	

TEACHING EXPERIENCE

Graduate Teaching Assistant	January 2018 – Present
Department of Sociology, University of Louisville	
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Attended weekly lectures with supervising faculty member• Lead two weekly recitation discussion sessions• Lectured on course material weekly• Made myself available during office hours to students for tutoring and to answer questions• Managed class records, graded coursework, and submitted final grades to the University• Guest lectured for combined large lecture sections	
<i>Supervisor:</i> Dr. Mark Austin	
<i>Class:</i> SOC 201 – Introduction to Sociology	

Graduate Teaching Assistant**August 2018 – Present**

Department of Sociology, University of Louisville

- Managed course on Blackboard including posting assignments, quizzes, and exams.
- Made myself available during office hours to students for tutoring and to answer questions
- Graded coursework and submitted final grades to the University

Supervisor: Dr. Mark Austin*Class:* SOC 201-50 (Online) – Introduction to Sociology**Graduate Teaching Assistant****January 2018 – June 2018**

Department of Sociology, University of Louisville

- Made myself available during office hours to students to answer questions
- Managed class records and assignments

Supervisor: Dr. Mark Austin*Class:* SOC 405/605 – Voluntarism**RESEARCH AND PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE**

Graduate Assistant,**June 2018 – September 2018**

College of Arts & Science Dean's Office, University of Louisville

- Collected and responded to email in a timely manner
- Produced weekly "Monday Memo" email newsletter sent to all Faculty, Staff, and Graduate Students
- Managed social media accounts for the College of Arts & Sciences

Research Assistant**August 2016 – May 2017**

David M. Zimmerman, Ph.D., Missouri State University

- Researched for literature reviews
- Entered, organized, and analyzed data in SPSS; Completed write-up for analysis
- Conducted data collection with participants
- Debriefed participants

Independent Researcher**August 2016- May 2017***The Impacts of Victim Sexual Orientation, Victim Sex, Scenario, and Outside Perceiver's Gender on Judgments of Sexual Encounters*

Research Advisor: David M. Zimmerman, Ph.D., Missouri State University

- In an Independent Research Project, I designed, coordinated, and ran an experimental study with 400 participants examining the effects of gender, sexual orientation, and type of rape as a function of the amount of blame placed on both victim and perpetrator.

CONFERENCE PRESENTATIONS/PAPERS

Schmidt, B. M. (April 2019). Preliminary Findings Examining Negotiation of Fidelity in Same-Sex Relationships. Paper presented at the Anthropologists & Sociologists of Kentucky Spring 2019 Annual Meeting, Campbellsville University, Campbellsville, Kentucky, on April 6, 2019.

Austin, M. D., **Schmidt, B. M.**, & Malone, T. (July 2018). *Motorcycle Training Experiences and Plans: Examination of Survey Data Among a Random Sample of Motorcyclists*. Paper presented at the 8th Annual meeting of the International Journal of Motorcycle Studies Conference, Rancho Cucamonga, California, on July 26-28, 2018.

Schmidt, B. M., Zimmerman, D. M. (June 2017). *The Impacts of Victim Sexual Orientation, Victim Sex, Scenario, and Outside Perceiver's Gender on Judgments of Sexual Encounters*. Poster presented at Missouri Psychological Association Conference, St. Louis, Missouri, on June 2-3, 2017.

Schmidt, B. M., Zimmerman, D. M. (April 2017). *The Impacts of Victim Sexual Orientation, Victim Sex, Scenario, and Outside Perceiver's Gender on Judgments of Sexual Encounters*. Poster presented at College of Health and Human Services Student Research Symposium, Missouri State University, Springfield, Missouri, on April 27, 2017. (Required presentation at Symposium for grant travel money)

MANUSCRIPTS IN PREPARATION

Austin, M. D., **Schmidt, B. M.**, & Malone, T. *Motorcycle Training Experiences and Plans: Examination of Survey Data Among a Random Sample of Motorcyclists*.

Schmidt, B. M. *The Impacts of Victim Sexual Orientation, Victim Sex, Scenario, and Outside Perceiver's Gender on Judgments of Sexual Encounters*.

PROFESSIONAL SKILLS AND WORKING KNOWLEDGE

- **Data management:** data entry, data screening for normality, dummy coding, data management (e.g., creating aggregate variables)
- **Data analysis:** intermediate working knowledge of SPSS using a variety of statistical tests (e.g., *t*-tests, ANOVA, MANOVA, Factor Analysis, Correlation/Regression, graphing)
- **Data analysis:** advanced working knowledge of STATA using a variety of statistical tests (e.g., *t*-tests, ANOVA, MANOVA, Factor Analysis, Correlation/Regression, Confirmatory Analysis, SEM, graphing)
- **Critical writing and editing**
- **Surveys:** using online platform Qualtrics; survey flow, informed consent, randomization of blocks within survey (e.g., between-group testing of independent variable level), and integration into university student research participant website.
- **In depth qualitative interviewing:** Focus Groups, Analytic Inductive Data Analysis, Ethnographic Field Research, Content Analysis, In-Depth Interviews, Ethnographic Field Research in Naturalistic Setting, Structured Interviews

INVITED LECTURES

Schmidt, B. M., (February 2019) *Workshop for Coding Ethnographic Field Notes and Interview Transcripts*. Invited guest lecture for a Graduate Seminar in Qualitative Methods.

Schmidt, B. M., (November 2018) *Prisonization in the United States*. Invited guest lecture for an Undergraduate Introduction to Sociology class.

GRANTS AND SCHOLARSHIPS

Schmidt, B. M., (2018). Rieger Endowment for Graduate Student Funding, Sociology Department, University of Louisville (\$500).

Schmidt, B. M., (2017). Research Conference Grant for MOPA 2017 costs associated, Psychology Department, Missouri State University (\$150).

UNIVERSITY INVOLVEMENT

- Sociology Graduate Student Association – President **August 2019 – Present**
- Sociology Graduate Student Association – Faculty Rep. **August 2019 – Present**
- Sociology Graduate Student Association – Treasurer **August 2017 – July 2019**

SERVICE TO THE COMMUNITY

- Americana Community Center Repainting of World Map **March 2018**

PROFESSIONAL MEMBERSHIPS/AFFILIATIONS

- American Sociological Association **2017 – Present**
- Mid-South Sociological Association **2017 – Present**
- Anthropologists & Sociologists of Kentucky **2019 – Present**
- Missouri Psychological Association **2017-2018**

REFERENCES

Patricia Gagne, Ph.D.
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