THE IMPACT OF MARRIAGE EQUALITY ON SEXUAL IDENTITY

DEVELOPMENT IN YOUNG MEN WITH SAME-SEX SEXUAL

ORIENTATION

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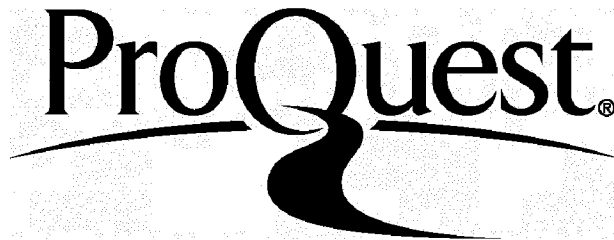
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Abstract

This study sought to examine the ways in which sexual identity development may

be changing for young gay men as they grow to adulthood with the expectation

that they will have the ability to choose marriage for themselves in their lifetime.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with six self-identified gay men

between the ages of 20 and 24 living in a large metropolitan area.

This study aimed to explore several questions. In general, how does the

possibility that one may be able to marry impact an individual's imagined future

and life story? How do these men envision their future relationships, and if they

hope to marry, what do they imagine their marriage might be like? How do

increasing legal recognition and equality impact one's self-view and the comfort

with which one learns to accept and disclose one's sexual orientation? How do

men with same-sex attraction who experienced adolescence while marriage

equality was becoming legal throughout the United States define their sexual

orientation?

The interviews revealed several themes, including others' reactions to the

sexual identity of the individual, attitudes and beliefs about the "gay community",

attitudes and beliefs about the role sexual identity plays in one's overall identity,

attitudes and beliefs about relationship goals, awareness during

childhood/adolescence about the advancement of marriage equality, attitudes

about the current push toward gaining marriage equality, the anticipated impact of

marriage equality on relationships, and attitudes and beliefs about the impact of marriage equality on gay culture.

Participants' relationship ideals were largely shaped by the values and attitudes of the culture in which they were raised. Their awareness that marriage equality was being fought for allowed them to believe that heteronormative relationship ideals regarding long-term, monogamous relationships for the purpose of childrearing were (or should be) available to them in a same-sex relationship. While participants were aware that non-monogamy in relationships was an available option, most participants rejected non-monogamy in favor of seeking long-term monogamous relationships with the possibility of raising children. Participants were aware of, and often internalized, stereotypes and negative judgments about gay men that are still prevalent in society, and most participants believed stereotypical characteristics or judgments were somewhat accurate depictions of the "gay community." Perhaps it was for this reason that the gay men interviewed for this study often distanced themselves from identifying with the "gay community." This suggested they felt that characteristics inherent to gay identity were not descriptive of themselves as individual people. In spite of the fact that participants did not feel they had much in common with the greater "gay community," they nonetheless adopted "gay" as the identity label that best described their sexual orientation.

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committee; specifically Dr. Alvarez, whose encouragement and advice was

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writing process. I would also like to express my gratitude to my partner, Vince,

who has been with me since I began graduate school, and has provided

understanding and emotional support through it all.

This dissertation is dedicated to:

My Parents,

Dennis L. and Vicki D. Piper

Curriculum Vitae

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<u>Education</u>

Adler University, Chicago, IL
Doctorate of Clinical Psychology, APA Accredited Program
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New York Institute of Technology, Old Westbury, NY
Bachelor of Science in Behavioral Science/Psychology, 2010

<u>SUPERVISED TRAINING EXPERIENCE</u>

Northern Illinois University Counseling and Student Development Center, DeKalb, IL
APA Accredited Doctoral Internship
August 2014 – July 2015

Provided time-limited and long-term individual therapy and after-hours emergency services to a diverse undergraduate and graduate student population of approximately 21,000 students. Conducted intake and risk assessments to determine appropriate level of care and appropriateness for the counseling center's short-term therapy model. Co-facilitated interpersonal process therapy group and mindfulness meditation group with senior staff members. Conducted thorough eating disorder assessments and substance use assessments and consulted with multidisciplinary treatment team to determine appropriate level of care. Specialized in LGBTQ issues with a focus on resilience and positive identity development. Served as liaison to the Presidential Commission on Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity (PCSOGI).

University of Chicago, Student Counseling Service, Chicago, IL
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September 2013 – June 2014

Provided individual and group therapy intervention services for diverse population of undergraduate and graduate university students in a college counseling center setting. Provided individual academic skills coaching to assist students with time management, reading effectiveness, test taking, and memory and concentration through the Student Counseling Services' Academic Study Skills Assessment Program (ASAP). Conducted intakes for students seeking services through the Student Counseling Service to determine appropriate

services. Co-facilitated the Coming Out Support Group for LGBTQA for students from various cultural and religious backgrounds who were coming to terms with their sexual orientation and identity.

Psychological Consultations, Chicago, IL
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July 2011 – June 2013

Conducted psychological assessment, diagnostic, and treatment planning services for clients in a private practice setting, including clients referred through Chicago House, the Federal Aviation Administration, and the Department of Human Services/Division of Rehabilitation Services. Administered cognitive/intellectual, neuropsychological, and personality tests (objective and projective). Scored, interpreted, and integrated testing data and wrote psychological evaluations that included treatment recommendations. Provided individual therapy for clients in a private practice setting, including clients referred to the practice through the Department of Human Services/Division of Rehabilitation Services and Chicago House. Co-led ongoing process group therapy for residents of Chicago House. Group members were living with HIV/AIDS and resided in a Supported Living Program to aid their transition from homelessness. Served diverse client population, including LGBTQ identified individuals, individuals in various recovery programs, and individuals from various racial ethnic, and socioeconomic backgrounds.

RESEARCH EXPERIENCE
Adler School of Professional Psychology, Chicago, IL
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Conducted focus groups to examine attitudes toward responsible gaming, problem gambling, and player education regarding problem gambling services and providers. Assisted in analysis of qualitative categories and themes to be used in final report.

PROFESSIONAL PRESENTATIONS
Piper, D. (2015, May). *Encouraging a Positive View of LGBTQ: Current Cultural Influences on Sexual Identity Development.* Presented at Northern Illinois University Student Affairs & Enrollment Management Conference, DeKalb, IL.
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Chapter I: Introduction

Social policy regarding the lesbian, gay, and bisexual (LGB) community is rapidly changing (Human Rights Campaign (HRC), 2011; 2013), and is likely to change the way in which LGB individuals develop their sexual identities (Green, 2006).

While nearly all children in our heteronormative society (i.e. a society in which heterosexual values, beliefs, and assumptions are considered to be norms that guide human action (Jackson, 2005)) are socialized to consider the ideal of marriage and family as a marker of adulthood, gay and lesbian individuals have, until recently, had to "give up" those ideals as part of the process of developing their gay and lesbian identities (Herdt & Boxer, 1992). In 2004, Massachusetts became the first state in the country to allow civil marriage between same-sex partners (*Goodridge v. Department of Public Health,* 2003). Nearly eleven years later, on June 26, 2015, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled in *Obergefell v. Hodges* (2015) that denying marriage licenses to same-sex couples violated the Equal Protection Clause of the Fourteenth Amendment of the U.S. Constitution, thus opening civil marriage to same-sex couples nationwide. This decision made the United States the twentieth nation in the world to allow nationwide marriage equality for same-sex couples (Freedom to Marry, n.d.).

Societal attitudes toward marriage for same-sex couples have also changed drastically over recent decades. In 1988, opposition to marriage between same-sex

partners was nearly universal throughout the United States, except among well-educated, urban individuals with very liberal or no religious affiliation (Baunach, 2012). However, by 2010, marriage equality had received broad support throughout the nation, while opposition to marriage between same-sex partners was limited to primarily older Americans, African Americans, Republicans, evangelical Protestants, and southerners (Baunach, 2012).

Young gay and lesbian individuals who were in their adolescence or younger since the time of the Massachusetts decision have, for the first time in United States history, grown to adulthood with the awareness that marriage to a same-sex spouse was supported by a large segment of their society. Additionally, they grew up with the realistic knowledge that marriage to a same-sex spouse might very well be possible for them in their lifetimes.

Statement of the Problem

Previous cohorts of gay men often reached a point in their identity development when they believed it necessary to "give up" the ideal of having a marriage and family (Herdt & Boxer, 1992). However, it remains to be seen if this has changed for younger cohorts who were developing their identity as marriage equality advanced in the United States. For those gay men today who are considering marriage in their futures, how do they envision marriage for themselves?

Previous research has explored the impact of denial of civil marriage on sexual identity development (Herdt & Boxer, 1992) and the romantic and sexual relationships between gay men regarding expectations about monogamy (Green, 2006). Green (2010) has explored the ways in which gaining access to marriage has affected the relationships of gay men and lesbians who have chosen to marry, in addition to the ways in which same-sex couples have adopted some traditional marriage norms while simultaneously rejecting others. However, the impact of marriage equality on the sexual identity development and relationship trajectories of gay and lesbian individuals who are growing up with the option of getting married in the future remains unclear (Green, 2006; 2010).

Statement of Purpose

This study seeks to examine the ways in which sexual identity development may be changing for young gay men as they grow to adulthood with the expectation that they will have the ability to choose marriage for themselves in their lifetime. Participants in this study were emerging adults, and as such, were at a period in their lives when their developmental tasks included navigating the balance between developing greater independence and autonomy with intimacy and commitment (Santrock, 2009). Attitudes about marriage and raising children has traditionally informed heterosexual emerging adults' approach to balancing independence and intimacy (Santrock, 2009; Willoughby & Hall, 2015). However, Herdt and Boxer (1992) suggest that previous generations of gay men

were required to "unlearn" heteronormative ideals regarding marriage and children in the process of their sexual identity development. Bech (1997) suggested that the absence of marriage caused gay men and lesbians to build nonconformist, liberated sexual lives. It stands to reason that if the absence of marriage has been regarded a significant factor in the development of sexual identity, then sexual identity development would be expected to look different as marriage equality becomes the structural backdrop against which a new generation of gay men grow to adulthood. Green's (2010) work described the ways in which an earlier cohort of gay men who were able to marry in Canada following legalization of marriage for same-sex couples both adopted some traditional values surrounding marriage while rejecting universal norms surrounding marital monogamy and division of labor. This study strives to describe how a younger cohort of gay men – including some who have grown to expect having access to the same rites of passage as their heterosexual peers (Westrate & McLean, 2010) – envision themselves approaching romantic and sexual relationships in the future. Additionally, this study seeks to explore whether access to marriage is in fact eroding the significance of a "queer identity" as has been suggested (Green, 2010; Savin-Williams, 2005; Westrate & McLean, 2010).

The men interviewed for this study belong to the first cohort of gay men to experience adolescence and early adulthood with the awareness that marriage to a

spouse of the same sex could be possible in their lifetimes. As such, qualitative

research methods were used to "enter the world of participants, to see the world

from their perspective" (Corbin & Strauss, 2008, p. 16). This study utilized

qualitative research methods to learn about these same-sex attracted men's

attitudes and beliefs about sexual identity, relationship ideals and goals, and their

views about how gaining marriage equality might influence what it means to be

gay in today's society.

Rather than testing an existing theory or theoretical content, the focus of

grounded theory is to construct a "theory out of the lived experiences of

participants" (Fassinger, 2005, p. 165). This methodology was used to develop a

theory to better understand how societal factors, including awareness of the

growing likelihood of marriage equality, may influence sexual identity

development and relationship ideals for this cohort of gay men. The purpose of

this theory is to contribute to the development of future empirical knowledge

(Corbin & Strauss, 2008).

Assumptions and Limitations

Rather than assuming a stage model of sexual identity development, in

which identity involves a linear progression of stages marked by increasing self-

awareness and self-acceptance of the individual's same-sex attraction and

integration into the LGB community (Cass, 1979; Troiden, 1989), this study

assumed a narrative and life course approach to sexual identity development. Life

course theory recognizes that individual lives are shaped by the historical, social, and cultural contexts in which development takes place (Elder, 1998). This recognition is particularly important regarding sexual identity development, considering the significant changes in social policy and public perception of LGB individuals throughout the last century and into the current century (Hammack & Cohler, 2009). Narrative approaches acknowledge that personal identity is constructed and maintained through the creation and sharing of the life story (McAdams, 1997). Cohler and Hammack (2006) argue that historical, social, and cultural contexts are fundamental to the manner in which gay men construct their life stories. This study assumed gaining access to marriage represents a historical change in the social and cultural context in which gay men construct their life stories, and, therefore, their identity. The study's goal was to examine the impact of this change on gay men's view of themselves and their relationship goals in the future.

The "fluid, evolving, and dynamic nature" (Corbin & Strauss, 2008, p. 13) of qualitative methods are well suited to studying the experiences of individuals within their ever-changing sociohistorical contexts (Patton, 2002). Additionally, qualitative research is specifically useful in describing the meaning people make out of those experiences (Patton, 2002). This study used qualitative methods to explore young, urban/suburban, gay men's narratives about identity and relationships that developed as they experienced adolescence and young

adulthood during a specific time in United States history. Therefore, the results of this study are not necessarily generalizable to gay men throughout the country, especially to those gay men who live in more politically conservative states where the expectation of marriage equality may have been significantly lower during their identity development than in more politically liberal states where marriage for same-sex couples was already legal. Further, the results of this study are not necessarily generalizable to past or future cohorts of same-sex attracted men forming their narratives at different times. It should be noted that all interviews occurred prior to the Supreme Court's decision on June 26, 2015, that ensured marriage equality for same-sex couples nationwide.

While the researcher made every effort to obtain a diverse sample of same-sex oriented young men, recruiting was necessarily limited to men who were willing to disclose their same-sex attraction. Therefore, another limitation was that the study did not include same-sex attracted men who either do not identify as such or who may still be questioning their sexuality.

In qualitative research, the researcher is the primary instrument used to collect data, and as such, it is necessary for the researcher to disclose any personal or professional information that others may want to consider when evaluating the results or conclusions of the study (Patton, 2002). During my psychology doctoral program, I have had clinical training in private practice and college counseling settings that has allowed me to work with a variety of individuals (both

heterosexual and those who identify as LGBTQ) in their late teens and early

twenties. I am a self-identified gay man in my 40s, who grew up in the United

States at a time when very few individuals supported marriage between same-sex

partners or believed it was a realistic option. In light of the successful passage of

marriage equality laws over the past decade, I have a keen interest in learning

more about how a younger cohort of same-sex attracted men developed their

narratives about their identities and their relations as marriage equality advanced

across the nation. Further, I assumed that awareness of the option to marry would

have some influence on this cohort's narratives. I used self-analysis and self-

reflection (Patton, 2002) during the collection and analysis of data, and my

dissertation chair acted as a second coder during data analysis to ensure accuracy

and minimize the possibility of misinterpreting data.

Action Questions

This study aimed to explore several questions. In general, how does the

possibility that one may be able to marry impact an individual's imagined future

as that individual constructs one's life story? How do these men envision their

future relationships, and if they hope to marry, what do they imagine their

marriage might be like? How do increasing legal recognition and equality impact

one's self-view and the comfort with which one learns to accept and disclose

one's sexual orientation? How do men with same-sex attraction who experienced

adolescence while marriage equality was becoming legal throughout the United

States define their sexual orientation?

Chapter II: Review of the Literature

Life Course and Narrative Approaches to Sexual Identity Development

In terms of human development, life course theory builds upon Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological perspective, which views development as dependent on various levels of contextual systems within which the developing individual is raised. Life course theory emphasizes the importance of the historical context within which the individual is raised as well (Elder, 1998). Life course theory posits that an individual's life course is influenced by the historical time and place in which they develop throughout their lives. However, the theory also acknowledges human agency as a process by which individuals take action and make choices to construct their life course within the options and limits of the historical period and its associated social circumstances (Elder, 1998). In taking both the individual and social context into account, life course theory acknowledges the interplay between an individual's culture and biology (Hammack, 2005).

Previous research about sexual identity development [e.g. Cass, 1979; Troiden, 1989] acknowledged, but did not emphasize, the influence of sociohistorical context on sexual identity development. However, Boxer and Cohler (1989) and Herdt and Boxer (1992) highlighted the changes in developmental trajectories of lesbian and gay youth resulting from the historical

context specific to the cohort they were studying (i.e. experiencing adolescence and young adulthood in the era of AIDS).

According to Hammack (2005), sexual identity development occurs as a result of this interplay between biology and culture. His model holds that sexual desire has an underlying biological foundation and that inherent differences between individuals create different subjective sexualities; however, sexual identity is a culturally constructed system allowing individuals to "make sense of desire" (p. 270). Thus, the life course approach to sexual identity development accommodates both essentialist and constructionist views. Life course theory acknowledges that some individuals may have biological factors that contribute to same-sex desire. However, individuals with same-sex desire living in the sociohistorical context of the 1950s and 1960s would likely construct their identities differently than individuals in the 1970s during the post-Stonewall gay rights movement, or those in the 1980s during the AIDS crisis, or during the current century with the push toward greater legal rights and access to marriage equality (Hammack, 2005).

The narrative identity development model posits that personal identity is developed and sustained through telling and management of stories about the self to selectively create an autobiography that provides purpose and unity in one's overarching life story (McLean, Pasupathi, & Pals, 2007). Hammack (2005) posits that individual sexual identity development occurs through a process of

narrative engagement, during which the individual engages with the sexual

"scripts" available within his sociohistorical context to create one's life story. As

the individual engages with the stories in one's social ecology, the individual is

motivated to engage in social practice (i.e. interacting with other gay youth or

coming out to heterosexual friends) that "exposes the individual to the identity

possibilities of a culture" (Hammack, 2005, p. 281). The individual's inner

subjective sexual desires interact with the identity options and their associated

narratives available in the culture (Hammack, 2005). Previous research [e.g.,

Harrison, 1995; Pleck, 1981] suggested that for males, same-sex desire conflicts

with American ideals about gender roles. However, as time marches on, and

elements of the sociohistorical context change, so do American ideals about

masculinity (Anderson, 2009; McCormack, 2012) and the narratives that are

available to individuals as they create their own personal unifying autobiography

(Hammack, 2005).

Dual Narratives of Sexual Identity Development

Cohler and Hammack (2007) describe the changing narratives regarding

sexual identity development in order to demonstrate that the creation of personal

narratives is a distinctive part of human development that provides meaning to the

ways in which humans understand their own development, and that this feature is

particularly salient in adolescence. While some descriptions of sexual identity

development depict same-sex attracted teens as suffering from adjustment

challenges and increased risk (D'Augelli, 2002), others depict these teens as

perfectly "normal", at ease with their sexual desires, and not needing to adopt a

sexual identity label in order to integrate their desires (Savin-Williams, 2005).

Cohler and Hammack (2007) posit that a life course and narrative approach,

which takes into account social and historical contexts, can help explain these

discrepancies between descriptions of sexual identity development.

By considering context, which incorporates cohort, socio-historical context, and

even geographic location, life course and narrative approaches to sexual identity

development show how social change affects the manner in which sexual

minority youth understand and give meaning to their lives (Cohler & Hammack,

2007). Cohler and Hammack (2007) compare the narrative they term the *narrative*

of struggle and success, such as was described by Herdt and Boxer (1996), with

the newer *narrative of emancipation,* typified by Savin-Williams' (2005)

description of "normal" development among sexual minority youth.

The narrative of struggle and success. The *narrative of struggle and*

success depicts gay youth as suffering from internalized homophobia (i.e.

internalization of negative societal attitudes, beliefs, and assumptions about same-

sex sexual orientation (Sophie, 1987)) and victimized by harassment, which leads

to increased risks, including anxiety, depression, increased drug use, suicide, and

unsafe sexual behavior (Cohler & Hammack, 2007). However, through

developing a gay identity, which includes self-acceptance and integration with the

larger gay and lesbian culture, the individual is able to overcome adversity while living in a heterosexist world (Herdt & Boxer, 1996). Cohler and Hammack (2007) suggest this narrative came into being in the 1980s, before the era of the internet, at a time when youth outside large urban centers had little access to any gay narratives beyond that of sexually promiscuous individuals who would likely develop AIDS.

As the gay rights movement gained traction in the 80s and 90s, gay youth who identified with the movement became socially visible as they "came out", and in so doing, were exposed to stigma, victimization and anti-gay violence (Cohler & Hammack, 2007). However, as Herdt and Boxer (1996) described, adopting a gay identity and connecting with a larger gay community and culture enabled these youths to manage the effects of minority stress and overcome stigma.

The narrative of struggle and success is also consistent with many of the well-known stage models of sexual identity development, in which accepting oneself as gay, disclosing that identity to others, and becoming integrated with a larger homosexual community are seen as markers of healthy sexual identity development (Cass, 1979; Troiden, 1989). While this narrative is ultimately empowering, its focus remains on the adversity experienced by gay youth due to being seen as a minority within the dominant heterosexist culture (Cohler and Hammack, 2007). Further, this narrative is dependent upon a historical context in

which gay life is stigmatized, and may not be as relevant as the social context

changes to one where gay life is more readily accepted as a legitimate social

identity, even as the dominant culture continues to be heterosexist (Cohler and

Hammack, 2007). Larger cultural narratives about sexual identity are shifting, as

exemplified by the decriminalization of homosexual behavior (*Lawrence v. Texas*,

2003) and the lengthy process of legalizing marriage equality on a state-by-state

basis (HRC, 2015). Additionally, the Supreme Court Decision overturned key

sections of the Defense of Marriage Act (DOMA) (*United States v. Windsor*,

2013), and more recently provided full nationwide access to marriage equality for

same-sex couples (*Obergefell v. Hodges*, 2015). Due to these cultural shifts,

sexual minority youth are creating their present life narrative to be consistent with

their lived experience of growing up in a society that is much more accepting of

their sexual desires (Cohler and Hammack, 2007).

The narrative of emancipation. The *narrative of emancipation* describes

the manner in which sexual minority youth experience their lives when conflict

about their sexual identity is minimal or absent, and these youths are not subjected

to high levels of anti-gay prejudice (Cohler & Hammack, 2007). For youth

coming of age in more affluent urban communities with access to positive gay

narratives via the internet and major media, the *narrative of emancipation*

diverges from the *narrative of struggle and success* in that it no longer encourages

those with same-sex desire to view themselves as distinct from the larger culture

and does not require the adoption of a particular "gay identity" (Savin-Williams, 2005). Thus, emancipation refers to the desire of some of today's same-sex attracted youth to develop a narrative that transcends the boundaries of a specific gay or bisexual identity (Cohler & Hammack, 2007). This narrative is characterized by increasingly fluid self-labeling (e.g. queer, omnisexual, bi-dyke, etc.) rather than adopting a "gay identity", which many youths today see as belonging to a previous generation of predominantly white, gay men (Savin-Williams, 2005).

Russell, Clarke, and Clary (2009) have offered some criticism about the notion that today's teens are growing up in a "post-gay" world in which same-sex attracted teens feel less inclined to adopt a gay identity or that they may favor alternative self-labels. In their anonymous Preventing School Harassment (PSH) survey of 2,560 California high school students from 2003-2005, students were asked to indicate their sexual orientation. Students had the option of either checking a box with pre-determined sexual identity labels; including heterosexual (straight), gay, lesbian, bisexual, queer, or questioning; or could write in their own sexual identity label. Of the 858 students who indicated they were non-heterosexual, only 69 individuals (9% of non-heterosexual students) chose to write in their own label. Additionally, the researchers noted there was no significant racial or ethnic difference between those choosing a write-in label over a predetermined identity label option. The researchers concluded that since the

overwhelming majority of non-heterosexual students selected gay/lesbian (34%), bisexual (37%), queer (2%), or questioning (13%), this was evidence that traditional sexual identity labels were still very relevant to teens and there was little evidence supporting the narrative of emancipation which states today's youth are resisting such labels (Russell, Clarke, & Clary, 2009).

However, acknowledging sexual minority youth readily select labels such as "gay" or "lesbian" on a survey may be missing the bigger picture described by the narrative of emancipation. For example, Hammack, Thompson, and Pilecki (2009) describe the case of an 18-year-old Latino male college student named Hector. Hector is described as having integrated his sexual identity into his overall identity, in that he was open and comfortable with his sexuality, was "out" to his friends and family, who were all very supportive, and had a boyfriend with whom he had been involved since high school. In spite of his comfort with his same-sex orientation, Hector is uncomfortable with the term "gay", saying that the term is associated with too many stereotypes and a community with which he does not identify (Hammack, Thompson, & Pilecki, 2009). Hector prefers to spend time with mostly straight friends and to think of himself as "a regular guy who just happens to like guys" (Hammack et al., 2009, p. 871). He does not view his personal narrative as being aligned with the master narrative of what it means to be "gay". However, he also acknowledges using the label "gay" out of necessity to easily and effectively communicate his orientation to others

(Hammack et al., 2009) In other words, when he wishes to let others know he is attracted to men, it is easier to say, "I'm gay" than to engage in an explanation of his discomfort with the "gay" label. This example calls into question whether youth might feel it is easier to quickly convey their orientation on a survey by checking the box indicating they are "gay" rather than using their survey answer to struggle with and express their dissatisfaction with the current language of sexual identity.

The narrative of emancipation also encompasses more than a simple reluctance to adopt accepted labels as part of a gay identity. Westrate and McLean (2010) point out that part of the significance of the narrative of emancipation is that young people with same-sex desire are less inclined to view their personal narrative of sexual identity as being heavily influenced by cultural factors (e.g. Stonewall, AIDS, etc.). Instead, they are more likely to point toward personal memories that help them define themselves as a gay or lesbian individual. They asked 251 individuals between 18-74 years old to complete online surveys providing a description of a historical or cultural period or event that was significant in influencing their gay or lesbian identity, as well as a vivid and emotional self-defining memory about their sexuality that helped them understand their gay or lesbian identity (Westrate & McLean, 2010). Examples of cultural events included media (e.g. seeing TV shows like *The L-Word* or *Will and Grace*); education or learning experiences (e.g. reading about same-sex sexuality

in a college course); gay activism (e.g. Queer Nation, ACT UP, etc.); sexual

liberation/revolution (i.e. pre-AIDS); HIV/AIDS (e.g. "learning about a

contagious Gay Cancer") and other culturally relevant memories. Examples of

self-defining events included realizing one was different, coming out to oneself or

others as gay, having romantic experiences or fantasies, experiencing

marginalization or discrimination, etc. (Westrate & McLean, 2010).

Participants were divided into historical cohorts: millennials (born after

1983), the 90s cohort (born between 1972 and 1982), the 80s cohort (born

between 1962 and 1972), the 70s cohort (born between 1952 and 1962), and the

60s cohort (born between 1942 and 1952). The researchers found a significant

difference in the types of events described by the differing cohorts, with older

cohorts being more likely to report actual cultural events (e.g. the sexual

revolution, HIV/AIDS), while younger cohorts described experiences in high

school, experiences with hate crimes, or marginalization (Westrate & McLean,

2010). The only actual cultural event described by any of the younger cohorts

involved narratives surrounding the advancement of gay marriage legislation

(Westrate & McLean, 2010). In general, stories described by younger cohorts

indicated less cultural focus associated with their identities, with some individuals

describing completely personal events with no cultural focus. Westrate and

McLean (2010) found differences between cohorts in descriptions of self-defining

memories as well. While *realization of difference* and *coming out to oneself* were

important themes for all the cohorts, the 80s cohort provided significantly more stories regarding *discrimination and marginalization* than any other cohort. Interestingly, while millennials also described stories of *discrimination and marginalization*, the discrimination described in the 80s was systemic, cultural, and political with a focus on government discrimination. However, millennials' discrimination was described as being almost entirely personal emphasizing individual experiences of discrimination, such as being unable to bring a same-sex partner to prom (Westrate & McLean, 2010). Westrate and McLean (2010) see this expectation to participate in heteronormative rites of passage, as well as the reduced emphasis on cultural events pertaining to individual identity, as evidence that today's same-sex youth are integrating into the dominant narrative rather than accepting identity categorizations that marginalize them. They concluded this is evidence of Cohler and Hammack's (2007) narrative of emancipation in which their identity is more individualized. This narrative may conform to a broad master narrative that includes their same-aged peers regardless of sexual identity (Westrate & McLean, 2010).

Cohler and Hammack (2007) point out that both the *narrative of struggle and success* and the *narrative of emancipation* currently co-exist as "master narratives" available to gay youth in the process of creating their individual narratives based on their specific social and geographical contexts. While some youth with same-sex desire are fortunate to live in more accepting environments

and communities, many others continue to experience stigma and rejection that contributes to challenges to mental health and adjustment. The *narrative of emancipation* may reject the common struggles of gay and lesbian youth that lead to a rather homogenous narrative described by the *narrative of struggle and success*. However, Cohler and Hammack (2007) argue that the *narrative of emancipation* can seem somewhat assimilationist and does not account for sexual minority youth who may desire connection with an LGBTQ community who have shared their unique experiences.

The point is not for these two narratives to compete to more accurately describe sexual identity development. Rather, contrasting the narratives helps illustrate that current understanding of concepts such as "coming out" and "gay" or "lesbian" identity that were taken for granted in some of the earlier stage models of sexual identity development (e.g. Cass, 1979; Troiden, 1989), may be artifacts of the socio-historical context in which they evolved (Boxer & Cohler, 1989). Although stage models present defining individual events (e.g. first same-sex experience, coming out, integration into the LGBT community, etc.) as marking the development of sexual identity through phases, time and place may be the most useful features for understanding sexual identity development (Cohler & Hammack, 2007). Historical events, such as the Stonewall riots, AIDS, the expansion of the internet, presence of sexual minorities in the media, and the advancement of marriage for same-sex couples have overwhelmingly altered the

life course of those with same-sex desires, and are crucial for understanding

sexual identity development (Cohler & Hammack, 2006).

Changing Norms Regarding Same-Sex Attraction

Although LGBT adolescents still experience difficulties related to sexual

orientation-based discrimination (Almeida, Johnson, Corliss, Molnar & Azrael,

2009), adolescent views about homosexuality appear to be changing, as are the

views of the greater society (Anderson, 2009; McCormack, 2012; Savin-

Williams, 2005). In a series of ethnographic studies among mostly white,

university sports teams and fraternities in the United States and Great Britain,

groups traditionally thought to be high in homophobia, Anderson (2009) found

these groups are rapidly redefining masculinity to include more accepting

attitudes toward same-sex orientation and behavior while decreasing the

acceptability of homophobic behavior.

In his ethnography of three British high schools, McCormack (2012) spent

three to six months in each of three schools conducting fieldwork that included

participant observation and informal interviews of students at these schools. The

three schools were selected to provide a variety of environments in order to

ensure his findings were not specific to a single school environment. The first

school, which he called "Religious High" due to its affiliation with a Christian

denomination, was the largest, with approximately 1,000 students of various class

and racial groups from a large geographic area including the town where it was

located, the nearby major city, and surrounding rural areas. The student body of

"Standard High" included approximately 200 students who came from the

working- to upper-class neighborhoods surrounding the school, with a racial mix

similar to that of the United Kingdom (90% white and 10% other racial and ethnic

groups). Lastly, "Fallback High", with a student body of only 18 male students,

provided "educational opportunities to troubled students who have previously

struggled academically and/or behaviorally" (McCormack, 2012, p. 12) in order

to prepare them with basic, entry-level workplace skills.

McCormack (2012) found students with same-sex orientation were no

longer being stigmatized because of their orientation, and that those expressing

homophobia were stigmatized in a manner similar to the stigmatization of those

expressing racism. At all three schools, heterosexual boys in McCormack's

(2012) study consistently attempted to project and display their heterosexuality;

however, they did not attempt to accomplish this through making homophobic

remarks or by disparaging homosexuality. In fact, the heterosexual boys in these

schools often openly expressed affection for each other through physical touch,

and were very accepting of their gay classmates (one of whom was elected

student body president of Standard High.) McCormack (2012) cited several

factors that contributed to the decrease in homophobia, including the success of

the gay rights movement in making gay identity more visible and increased

representation of openly identified gay and lesbian identified individuals on

television, in professional sports, and in virtually every other area of public life.

Although McCormack (2012) cites a conversation he had with masculinities

scholar Eric Anderson, in which Anderson stated he estimates that North

American and Australian cultures seem to be approximately ten years behind the

United Kingdom regarding issues of gender and sexuality, McCormack (2012)

noted that progress in the U.S. and Australia should be acknowledged as signs

that attitudes are rapidly changing.

Keleher and Smith (2012) used data collected between 1991 and 2010

using the National Opinion Research Center (NORC) General Social Survey

(GSS) and the American National Election Survey (ANES) to examine changes in

public opinion about acceptance of lesbians and gays in the United States.

Keleher and Smith found acceptance of those with same-sex attraction varied

greatly based on a number of demographic variables, and that acceptance changed

at different rates for individuals belonging to these demographic groups. For

example, while both Blacks' and Whites' acceptance of same-sex relations

increased over time, the increase in acceptance by Whites was much greater over

time than the increase in acceptance by Blacks (Keleher & Smith, 2012). The

researchers found large differences in acceptance of same-sex relations between

ideological and religious groups as well, with Christian conservatives showing

much less acceptance than those from other religions and ideologies (Keleher &

Smith, 2012). Keleher and Smith found differences in acceptance of same-sex

relations between various geographic regions of the county, between males and females, between older and younger individuals, and between married and unmarried individuals as well. However, when looked at over time, acceptance of same-sex relations increased across *all* demographic groups and geographic regions (Keleher & Smith, 2012). Keleher and Smith concluded, "We are witnessing a sweeping change in attitudes toward lesbians and gay men. (p. 1324)".

Savin-Williams (2005) and McCormack (2012) argued that an increased representation of LGBT individuals in the media have allowed elements of gay culture to be increasingly adopted by the dominant culture. For example, McCormack (2012) notes the American television show *Queer Eye for the Straight Guy* has capitalized on the notion that heterosexual men can become more attractive to women by taking fashion, grooming, design, and culture tips from gay men. As it becomes increasingly acceptable, or even expected, that heterosexual men pay attention to fashion, skin care, "manscaping", and other aspects of personal appearance that previous generations associated with a lack of masculinity, the line between straight and gay cultures has blurred (McCormack, 2012). As a result, gay youth may view themselves as being more similar than different from their straight peers and having same-sex attraction is no longer a particularly noteworthy characteristic on which to build their identity (Savin-Williams, 2005). Savin-Williams (2005) observed that fewer adolescents, in their

search for an answer to the question, "Who am I?" feel it necessary to commit to a "gay identity" with its associated political and social implications. This is not to say that young individuals with same-sex attraction attempt to "pass" as straight, but many have begun to question why their sexual desires should be their defining characteristic when heterosexuals' sexual identity remains, for the most part, unstated (Savin-Williams, 2005). In other words, many of these youth feel their same-sex attractions are normal and are more interested in school activities and getting into college than adopting an identity that is associated with being part of a marginalized minority (Savin-Williams, 2005). As rights for sexual minorities continue to advance, it is possible that this view, which takes for granted that sexuality is one facet of a person's identity rather than their defining characteristic, will become more widespread. How adolescents' views about their sexual identity will continue to evolve remains to be seen.

The Impact of Marriage between Same-Sex Partners in the Life Course of Gay Males

Until Massachusetts became the first state in the country to allow marriage between same-sex couples, research conducted regarding same-sex sexual identity development assumed the absence of marriage to be the structural context in which gay men created the narrative of their lives (Green, 2006). Willoughby and Hall (2015) found that by the time heterosexual men reach emerging adulthood, they fell into three categories regarding their approach to the idea of marriage.

These categories included *enthusiasts*, who were engaged in the process of getting

married; *delayers*, who planned to avoid marriage or postpone it for as long as

possible; and those described as *hesitant*, who valued the idea of getting married

in the future but prioritized school or career before marriage (Willoughby & Hall,

2015). However, for men with same-sex attraction, Herdt and Boxer (1992)

suggest that part of sexual identity development consists of "unlearning" ideals

and goals taken for granted in the heteronormative culture, such as getting

married and having children. Without the ability to adopt traditional "master

scripts" regarding marriage as the ideal dyadic relationship, gay men have

developed and acquired alternative scripts regarding sexual decision-making and

relationship formation throughout their life courses (Fowlkes, 1994).

Green (2006) conducted a qualitative study comparing the life histories of

heterosexual and gay men regarding the ways in which the ability (or inability) to

enter into marriage shaped the way these men approached dyadic sexual and

romantic relationships. For the study, Green (2006) interviewed 60 gay men and

50 straight men between the ages of 21 and 52 residing in New York City's West

Village and Chelsea neighborhoods between 2000 and 2003 – prior to the

Massachusetts decision to allow marriage of same-sex partners. Based on these

interviews, he concluded that all boys, regardless of orientation, go through

similar socialization experiences in childhood in that they "inherit" the

heteronormative expectation of getting married and having a family (Green,

2006). For straight men, whether or not they wanted or intended to marry, marriage and family served as a "master template" around which they negotiated their sexual development (Green, 2006). Although many of the straight men interviewed described looking forward to marriage even as they were dating, others described resisting marriage in favor of sexual exploration. However, even the resistant men described embracing (albeit, for some, reluctantly) norms of monogamy and marriage as an eventual "endpoint" that made bachelorhood seem less desirable as they got older (Green, 2006). Green (2006) concluded that social conditions pull heterosexual men toward a future that includes marriage and family. These results are consistent with more recent findings by Willoughby and Hall (2015), showing that heterosexual men in emerging adulthood may either be enthusiastic about the prospect of marriage, or will wish to postpone marriage until later.

For gay men, who were excluded from marriage in all 50 states at the time of the study, the effect of this exclusion was just as significant in shaping the experience of their sexuality as the expectation of marriage was for the heterosexual men (Green, 2006). For the gay men in the study, their sexuality was initially seen as problematic since it went against the grain of cultural assumptions regarding heterosexual marriage with which they had been raised (Green, 2006). In line with Herdt and Boxer (1992), these men were required to dismantle those assumptions and move toward adulthood without a clear sense of where their lives

might lead (Green, 2006). As the study was conducted in Manhattan, many of the men had moved to the city in order to build a life with other gay men, and subsequently found themselves being socialized by the gay culture present there at that time. Green (2006) suggested this subculture's emphasis on dyadic innovation and sexual exploration was intensified over time by previous generations of gay men with no access to marriage that migrated to the city. Green (2006) concluded that being excluded from (and unconstrained by) heteronormative institutions such as marriage is the reason the urban gay subculture had such a profound impact on the re-socialization of the men in his study. Just as marriage did not predetermine heterosexual men's sexual careers, the lack of marriage did not predetermine the sexual careers of the gay men in the study; however, the lack of marriage did define the structural bundle of constraints and possibilities available during the process of re-socialization that took place in urban gay life (Green, 2006). Green (2006) pointed out that both straight and gay urban men in the study described enjoying a period of sexual freedom that was encouraged by the bar and nightclub scene. However, while straight men described feeling a growing pull toward kinship institutions over time that was absent for the gay men interviewed, many gay men described feeling pushed toward acceptance of non-monogamy as a relationship norm. What is not clear is how urban gay men today, who have grown up with the possibility of marriage in their future, might now navigate this dual socialization that

incorporates the heteronormative ideals with which they were raised and the gay urban culture that evolved in previous generations of gay men. Will young gay men continue to form the innovative dyadic relationships Green (2006) describes, or will the increasingly commonplace occurrence of marriage between same-sex partners create the same pull toward marriage and family their heterosexual counterparts feel as they move through early adulthood?

We do not yet know how marriage equality will influence sexual identity development of adolescents with same-sex desire. However, Green (2010) explored innovations in marriage traditions that developed among same-sex married couples as a result of the dual socialization between the dominant heteronormative culture and the "queer" traditions of sexual freedom and unconventional gender relations in which North American LGBs are raised. In a qualitative study, Green (2010) compared the ways in which same-sex couples have embraced marriage with the predictions made by both supporters and critics of same sex marriage regarding the impact marriage equality would have on the traditions of marriage and on queer culture. For the study, Green (2010) interviewed 30 legally married gay and lesbian spouses from two urban areas in Ontario, Canada between 2005 and 2007. The spouses had been married for at least one year to their same-sex partner, and were between 26 to 61 years of age (Green, 2010). All but two spouses were white. Ontario legalized marriage between same-sex partners in 2003, and as such, most respondents had been

married approximately two years; however, the length of time they were a couple ranged from 4-40 years, with female spouses averaging 10 years together and male spouses averaging 13 years together at the time of the interviews (Green, 2010).

Green (2010) found that marriage equality supporters and critics were simultaneously correct and incorrect in their predictions about marriage equality. For example, the spouses in Green's (2010) study reported reproducing many aspects of the idealized marital norms with which they had been raised. Ideals regarding lifetime partnership and, in some cases, the formation of nuclear families had helped strengthen their dyadic bond through greater stability and commitment. Additionally, the spouses noted experiencing greater social recognition and support of their relationship from friends, families, and co-workers (Green, 2010). This was congruent with predictions made by the "gay and lesbian assimilationist" proponents of marriage equality (Green, 2010). It was also congruent with the fears of feminist/queer activists who worry marriage equality will bring about the demise of a distinctive queer culture that serves as a counterbalance to repressive and outdated heterosexual norms. However, the spouses in this study did not fall, lock step, into marital norms traditionally idealized by the dominant culture. For example, almost all of the couples rejected the norm of universal fidelity in marital relationships (Green, 2010). Close to half of male spouses (and one female spouse) interviewed had intentionally formed

open marriages to allow for sex outside the marriage. And almost half of the couples in open marriages allowed their relationships to become nonmonogamous *after* becoming married, stating that the structural permanence offered by civil marriage provided the security they needed to feel comfortable exploring sexual activities outside the dyad without fear of weakening the relationship (Green, 2010). Of the majority of interviewees, both male and female, who did choose monogamy, the decision to be monogamous was based on personal desires and needs rather than taken for granted as part of marriage tradition (Green, 2010). In fact, many interviewees who were currently in monogamous relationships stated they would be open to the possibility of exploring an open relationship in the future (Green, 2010). This approach to monogamy erodes the feminist/queer criticisms that marriage equality will create an environment where those with same-sex desires will uniformly adopt relationship and sexual norms of the heteronormative dominant culture. However, Green (2010) also notes that these marriage innovations may be a cohort-specific phenomenon created by a generation of gay men socialized into a gay culture before marriage equality existed. It is possible that future generations, who are raised in a culture where marriage between same-sex partners is prevalent and the distinction between "gay" and "straight" culture diminish, will be more inclined to adopt the form of idealized, monogamous marriage that they were raised with by their majority heterosexual parents. Taking a long view, feminist/queer theorists may be correct

in their assumption that having equal access to marriage may eat away at

contemporary meanings of being gay and married (Green, 2010).

Chapter III: Methodology

Sample

Qualitative inquiry focuses on a small, purposeful sample of individuals,

and data collection ceases when categories become saturated (Charmaz, 2006).

This study involved semi-structured, in-depth individual interviews of urban self-

identified, same-sex oriented men, ages 18 – 24. This group was chosen in an

effort to explore the perspectives of individuals who would have been

approximately 8 – 14 years old at the time of the 2004 Massachusetts legalization

of marriage equality in that state (*Goodridge v. Department of Public Health*,

2003). This group of men would have experienced much or all of their adolescent

years at a time when efforts toward marriage equality was gaining ground in

several areas of the United States (HRC, 2013). As adolescence represents an

important time in sexual identity development (Cohler & Hammack, 2006), it was

hoped that interviews with this population would provide insight into how

changes in this aspect of social policy may have played a role in their

development.

Six men who self-identified as having same-sex sexual orientation

volunteered for this study and this number was sufficient to saturate the

categories. Demographic information was collected for all participants.

Participants ranged in age from 20-24 with a mean age of 21.83. When asked to

identify their sexual orientation, all participants responded that they identified as

"gay." Four of the participants identified as White, one identified as Hispanic/Latino, and one identified as Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander. Every participant reported having at least a high school diploma or G.E.D., with four participants having had "some college" experience, and one participant having earned a Bachelor's degree. Four participants lived in the city, and two lived in the suburbs. Five participants grew up in a suburban environment, while one reported growing up in the city where the study was conducted. In terms of occupation, one participant was a full-time graduate student, two reported working in sales, and three reported working in the service industry.

Other participant information was collected during the interview process. All participants acknowledged being aware of their same-sex attraction before they entered high school, with responses ranging from 5th to 8th grade. While half of participants described their awareness as being directly related to feelings of attraction for men, the other half described their awareness beginning when they were faced with other people's (i.e. adults, classmates, etc.) expectation that they be attracted to girls and simultaneously realizing that they were not. All but one participant began to internally self-identify as gay (i.e. come out to themselves as gay without telling anyone else) between the ages of 12 and 14. These same 5 participants all came out to their families between the ages of 15 and 18. The remaining participant self-identified as gay at age 19; however, this participant acknowledged willfully attempting to deny his sexual orientation throughout high

school. This participant explained that he attended a private, Christian-affiliated high school where identifying as gay was grounds for expulsion. This participant came out to his parents at age 22 (two years prior to his interview for this study).

Instruments

The instruments developed for this study included brief demographic questionnaire (Appendix A) and a semi-structured interview guide (see Appendix B). The demographic questionnaire asked participants to state their age, level of education, race, current occupation, childhood caregiver's occupation(s), the type of area where they grew up (e.g. urban, suburban, small town, or rural), the type of area where they currently live, and how they heard about the study.

The semi-structured interview guide consisted of open-ended questions designed to elicit information about the individual's sexual identity development narrative. Questions addressed when and how the participants developed their understanding of their sexual identity, their perception of stigma or acceptance from others regarding their orientation, their relationship history, and how they feel their sexual identity relates to other aspects of their identity both during adolescence and at the time of the interview.

Interview questions also asked the individual to describe their attitudes toward marriage for same-sex couples, marriage in general, and about expectations for future relationships including whether they imagine themselves getting married and what form they imagine those marriages may take. Specific

questions were asked to gauge memories of interviewees' awareness of the marriage equality debate during adolescence, and how that may have impacted imagined relationship expectations, both during adolescence and at the time of the interview.

Procedure

Upon approval from the Adler School of Professional Psychology Institutional Review Board (Appendix C), recruitment occurred through social media (e.g. Facebook and Twitter) (Appendix D), and flyers were provided to area PFLAG chapters and posted on Adler University bulletin boards (Appendix E). Snowball recruitment techniques were also employed by providing participants with an information flyer they could give to friends or acquaintances who might have been interested in participating.

Interested participants contacted the researcher via email or Facebook Messenger and were then contacted by telephone by the researcher in order to verify inclusion criteria to accept participants into the study. All interested individuals who contacted the researcher met the inclusion criteria. After verifying that potential participants met inclusion criteria, the researcher explained that if they agreed to participate in the study, they would be required to participate in a face-to-face interview with the researcher lasting between 45-90 minutes. The researcher further explained that this interview would include questions about their experiences growing up with same-sex attraction as well as

their views on relationships, sexual identity, and their hopes and goals for the future. The researcher also explained that interviews would be audio recorded and transcribed, that identifying information would be removed from the transcription, and that the recordings would be deleted after they were transcribed. Finally, participants were told they would be given a $10 gift card from their choice of either Amazon.com, Starbucks, or iTunes in appreciation of their time and participation.

Individuals who agreed to participate were scheduled for an interview. Individuals were allowed to choose whether they wanted their interview conducted in a private room at Adler University or at a location that was more suitable to them. Of the seven potential participants who agreed to be interviewed for the study, six completed the interview and one failed to keep his appointment and did not return calls to be rescheduled. Three individuals chose to be interviewed at Adler University and three chose to be interviewed in their homes.

At the time of the interview, the researcher presented and explained the informed consent form (See Appendix F), which included information regarding the purpose of the study, the potential benefits and risks involved, and the steps that would be taken to keep information confidential. The informed consent form included a separate section for participants to give consent for their interview to be audio recorded. Participants were invited to ask questions prior to completing the demographic information or beginning the interview, and signed the informed

consent and consent to record to designate their agreement to participate in the study.

Participants were then given the demographic questionnaire prior to being interviewed. Interviews lasted between 25 and 45 minutes. All interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim by the researcher. To protect participants' confidentiality, a study ID number was assigned to each participant and digital audio recordings were not paired with participant names. After the interview, participants were allowed to choose a $10 gift card and were given a list of LGBTQ community resources, as well as being given a flyer about the study in order to refer other potential participants.

Interviews were conducted on weekday evenings from June 2014 to March 2015. Informed consent forms and demographic information hard copies were kept in a locked file cabinet in the home office of the researcher. Digital recordings were recorded onto a password-protected recording device and transferred to a password-protected computer as soon as possible after the interview. Recordings were transcribed and audio recordings were erased/deleted after transcription. Transcriptions were kept in electronic format in password-protected files in a password-protected computer during coding. Upon completion of the study, electronic copies of the transcriptions were transferred to DVD for storage and hard copies of the transcripts were printed and stored in a locked filing cabinet in the researcher's home office, where they will be kept for 7 years.

Electronic files on the computer were deleted after being printed and transferred

to the DVD for storage.

Chapter IV: Results

Data Analysis

Transcriptions were analyzed using the coding procedures of grounded

theory (Charmaz, 2006; Corbin & Strauss, 2008). Analyzing the transcripts began

with line-by-line analysis to identify concepts, and these concepts were compared

across all interviews to find similarities between participants' responses. The

coding schema began with open codes to establish general categories and then

axial coding was used to establish varying dimensions among open codes.

Analytic memos were created to establish patterns across the open and axial

codes. Selective coding was used during the final stage of analysis in order to

create a substantive theory. Relational connections and conclusions used to

develop a theory were completed by organizing categories and defining

relationships between these categories. The dissertation chair supervised the

researcher in the coding and analysis of the data. The researcher's coding,

categories, and quotes were reviewed by the dissertation chair and disagreements

were discussed until the researcher and chair reached consensus.

Categories emerging from this study included (a) reactions received from

others regarding the participant's sexual identity, (b) attitudes and beliefs about

the "gay community", (c) attitudes and beliefs about the role sexual identity plays

in one's overall identity, (d) attitudes and beliefs about relationship goals, (e)

awareness during childhood and/or adolescence about the advancement of

marriage equality, (f) attitudes and beliefs about the current push toward gaining

nationwide marriage equality, and (g) attitudes and beliefs about the anticipated

impact of marriage equality. Any proper names used in the following quotes have

been changed to protect confidentiality.

Reactions Received from Others Regarding the Participant's Sexual Identity

   Reactions from friends. In discussing participants' coming out stories,

most participants described a general lack of negative reactions from friends and

family members. All but one participant came out to some or all of their friends

while in middle school or high school, and of those five people, four described

receiving little or no negative reactions from others. One participant attributed the

positive reaction to his disclosure to his own comfort and confidence in his

identity, while two mentioned believing that they received positive responses

from others because others did not view them *only* in terms of their sexual

identity. The fourth participant attributed the acceptance he received as indicative

of his ability to select good friends. The following quotes illustrate participants'

perceptions of their friends' reactions:

   Participant 1: *...for me it was just another attribute of who I was. I had*

   green hair, I played soccer, I was gay... none of those things really defined

   me and so I don't think anybody ever thought of me as "a gay kid."

   Participant 2: *[Regarding whether he remembers ever receiving any*

   negative reactions from people to his sexual identity] You know, honestly,

not really. I don't honestly remember ever having that problem. I think I

just made some good life choices with my friends.

Bullying. Two participants described negative reactions to their actual or

perceived sexual orientation in grade school and middle school. These negative

reactions included losing friends or being bullied. When asked to describe the

bullying, both participants recalled being called "faggot" and both mentioned

their belief that the at least some of the bullying they received was related to the

religious beliefs of the person or people bullying them. One of these participants

was open about his sexual orientation in middle school and lost friends at that

time, but was able to make new, older friends upon entering high school. The

other of these participants attended a private school affiliated with a Christian

denomination, and was not open about his orientation due to his legitimate fear of

expulsion. This participant chose to date a girl throughout middle school and high

school to protect himself from suspicion and was the only participant in this study

to wait until after high school to admit to himself and others that he was gay.

Participant 1: ... *as a young kid I can remember getting made fun of...*

being called faggot and gay, and that was really negative to me. So I just

tried to push that off and I remember in grade school being like bullied

and taunted. And then middle school, it got better. And from then, I just

like, tried to get a girlfriend so that way I wouldn't get bullied at that

point.

Participant 2: *People used to walk around with little accents with their fingers, and call me faggot or, um, call me, like, Satanic for some reason.*

Reactions from caregivers. Four of the six participants reported that one or both of their parents had guessed they were gay prior to them coming out to their families. One of these participants – the participant who attended the private Christian school – reported being confronted by his parents when he was approximately 12 years old; however, he denied that he was gay because he feared the consequences of coming out. When he chose to come out to his parents at age 22, his father was accepting; however, his mother, who acknowledged she had known for at least 10 years, continued to be unaccepting until at least the time of his interview for this study two years later. Two participants reported that after coming out to their mothers, the mothers told the participants they had previously guessed the participant was gay. Both of these mothers were accepting of their son's orientation, as illustrated by the following quote:

> *I sat my mother down and told her about the gentleman I had been spending a lot of time with... that I was dating him and that I wanted her to know that I was only interested in men and not women. And her first response was very caring. She goes, "We'll accept you no matter what. And we're happy you feel comfortable enough to tell us." And her second response was, "And I just won a bet with your aunt, so thank you very much. I get 15 bucks now."*

In fact, one participant whose mother guessed his orientation before he came out stated coming out to his mother was unnecessary because she acknowledged her acceptance by introducing him to another gay-identified boy at his school:

Kind of a funny story. My mom worked at the school at the time, and one

of her students had a crush on me or something. And she knew I was gay,

but I didn't come out to her or anything. And she introduced us, and then

she kind of asked me, "So how are you and Colby?" And that's how it's

been ever since.

Although the other two participants did not report that their parents knew their orientation prior to coming out, both of these participants stated their parents reacted positively when the participants told them:

My mom, in particular, she's very accepting, and... right off the bat. [...]

we had a really long talk and discussion,[...] 'cause she also wanted some

education on that stuff, too. Where it's like, "Tell me more. How are you

feeling?" Not like, "Oh, it's a choice." Or like, "You'll be fine," or

whatever. But she just wanted to learn more about that so she was very

open to it.

Attitudes and Beliefs About the "Gay Community"

Negative judgments and stereotypes about the gay community.

Throughout many of the interviews, participants discussed negative judgments

about what it means to be gay. This included both judgments they believe the heterosexual majority hold about gay men, but also involved their own judgments or assumptions about "the gay community." While the comments about stereotypes and judgments were expressed differently by each of the participants, it was noteworthy that all but one participant made some comment regarding a generalization about gay men or the gay community. These comments, in part, spoke to concerns about society's views about gay men. But more importantly, it was clear by participants' comments that they had internalized these messages and incorporated them into their own views of gay men. The following quotes illustrate that while some participants suggested gaining exposure to other gay men helped dismantle some of these stereotypes, others appeared to feel that their experiences with other gay men confirmed their belief that the stereotypes were at least partially accurate.

> **Participant 1:** [Explaining that he did not originally think he was gay
> because he was not attracted to "effeminate" men] *"Growing up I had
> only encountered the very stereotypical gay male that society sees* [...]
> *very flamboyant, very effeminate. And then in sixth grade I... internet... the
> internet helps a lot... started realizing that there were* [sic] *a broad
> spectrum from very effeminate to very masculine and everything in
> between, and there was no defining factor about who I could date.*

Participant 2: *"I identify as gay, but I don't... I guess I'm not the*

stereotypical gay, I guess you would say. I don't go to clubs or any of that

stuff. I'm very, just, "do my own thing." I don't identify with the gay

crowd that goes out all the time and does all that stuff. Just not me."

Participant 3: *I mean, if you go and you look, and you actually look at*

like what the gay lifestyle is itemized to be, it's kind of terrifying as to what

a lot of the... basically, the stereotype is terrifying. And the sad part is that

a lot of people do fall into the stereotype. Because the stereotype of the

gay lifestyle is parties, drugs and sex. That's what is known to be the gay

lifestyle.

Concerns about perceptions of gay men as "sexualized." Two members

specifically discussed their concerns about gay men being reduced to "sexualized"

beings. One expressed concern that the heterosexual majority equates gay identity

with sexuality, thereby reducing gay men to sexual beings while ignoring other

aspects of their personalities or character:

> *The people in the straight community, they say like, "Oh that person's*
>
> *gay," they just immediately think of sex. Like, that's it. That's their number*
>
> *one focus, is that, "How? Why? I don't understand. I could never."[...] but*
>
> *that person could be an architect. They could be the smartest person in the*
>
> *world. They could have cured cancer, but all of that stuff would just be*

overlooked because they are gay. And it's like, I almost feel like most

people view it like it outweighs everything.

The other participant expressed frustration at feeling sexualized by other gay men

rather than men wanting to get to know him on a personal level. Again, his

comments demonstrate his perception that gay men he has encountered often

embody the stereotypes attributed to them by society:

> *I think I'm more sexualized. I think people expect certain things from me*
>
> *that I'm sure as hell not going to give them. For some reason, gay people*
>
> *think that every other gay man just wants to fuck and do all these things*
>
> *that... hello! I'm still a human being.*

Attitudes and Beliefs about the Role Sexual Identity Plays in One's Overall Identity

When asked to describe how participants viewed their sexual orientation

in relation to their overall identity, every participant described believing that

being gay is a relatively small facet of their overall identity. In fact, some

participants' statements suggested they were uncomfortable that others might

view their gay identity as their primary identifying characteristic. One participant

stated his belief that his orientation did not impact anything except the sex of his

romantic and sexual partners. Another participant mentioned that prior to coming

out to others as gay, he worried others in his life would believe he was completely

changing who he was as a person.

Participant 1: *As for my sexuality, it has no bearing on how well I do something or how I interact with people. The only thing it affects is who I date. And so, I don't actually let it define me very much. It's just another aspect of who I am.*

Participant 2: *I don't want that to be something that defines me. It's something about me, but I don't want that to define who I am. [...] It's something about me that I don't feel like should be a main thing. You're a person, you're not gay.... a gay person. You're a person.*

Participant 3: *At first, I really wanted my sexual identity to be just [my sexual identity], and kind of not influence my other identities [...] because that's what it was to me at the time. And also because I didn't want to - I perhaps had some hesitance about, um, about people who were learning I was gay thinking that this was a whole change of identity rather than just one facet of my personality.*

Although all participants initially described feeling that gay identity was a small aspect of their overall identity, one of the participants quoted above did acknowledge that his identity as a gay man was beginning to influence other areas of life:

I think over the years, being in the role of an openly-gay man, um, I've maybe reached out in other aspects of myself and my life to... how do I describe it... just be more involved in the gay identity. And be more

involved in community practices - community organizations that are going

on. So I suppose you could say that's another facet of my identity - kind of

like volunteer work and what I'm passionate about and what I'm spending

my time doing... my free time. More recently it's turned toward gay issues

and human rights.

Attitudes and Beliefs about Relationship Goals

Childhood attitudes and beliefs about having a family when they grew up. Of the six men interviewed, two men reported believing as children that they would remain unmarried/unpartnered and childless throughout their lives. The other four participants all described imagining they would have some type of family when they became adults. One reported a clear desire to have children, but stated he imagined he would be a single parent. When asked why he imagined being a single parent, he cited his early confusion about sexual identity as his reason:

I guess because I was confused about myself and my sexuality, I kind of

excluded the partner part of that... in my future. So now that I'm more

secure in my sexuality and know what I want it's allowed me to know

exactly what I want [a partner and children] *in my future.*

The three remaining participants all reported imagining themselves growing up and entering into a marriage with a woman. Two imagined having children, and one imagined having a wife with no children. Of the three participants who

imagined marrying a woman, two of them specifically mentioned their belief that this was a result of expectations placed on them by their culture:

I think for a time I definitely imagined myself with a woman, like, marrying a woman and spending my life with a woman. [...] And I do think that was because it's what I grew up looking at and that's what I was enculturated around, so I thought that's what was expected of me.

Current relationship goals. Although half of the men interviewed imagined as children that they would have a wife when they grew up, as adults, all participants felt that a lifelong relationship with another man was their ideal relationship goal. Four of these men described realizing their desire for a lifelong relationship with a man immediately upon acknowledging to themselves that they were gay and did not want a relationship with a woman; however, the other two described coming to this realization more recently due to having positive experiences in their current same-sex relationships.

Participant 1: *Honestly, as soon as I kind of realized I was gay, that's when the change happened. I was just like, whelp, it's not a wife, so I guess I want a husband instead.*

Participant 2: *I guess my experiences in relationships... my ideal relationship would be with someone that I can trust and that I love very much, which right now I have. It's probably better than my ideal relationship that I've ever experienced with a man. [...] I dated pretty*

shitty people. [...] So, because of that, I expect the worst of people. So,

um, the relationship I'm in now is just, like, amazing. Which is different

than what I'm used to, So I'm surprised that I met [my current boyfriend]

and things worked out the way they did.

Relationship role models. When participants were asked about their

relationship role models, the responses were varied with some discussing role

models from their own lives (e.g. parents, siblings and friends) and others

mentioning celebrity couples or couples from works of fiction. Some participants

discussed positive role models with characteristics they hoped to emulate in their

own relationships, while others discussed negative role models with relationship

characteristics they hoped to avoid. However, all participants predominantly

described being influenced by role models who were in heterosexual

relationships. Only one participant included a same-sex couple (i.e. "Ellen

[DeGeneris] and Portia [de Rossi]") in his list of role models, which otherwise

included heterosexual celebrity couples and heterosexual relatives. The following

quotes are representative of participant responses regarding relationship role

models:

> **Participant 1:** *Growing up I didn't have any [relationship role models],*
>
> *and until this question was asked I would probably say I didn't have any.*
>
> *But, I read a lot as a kid, so just seeing the interaction between people in*
>
> *books. [...] Um, my parents divorced when I was 9 so I saw them fighting.*

I saw them being uncivil toward each other. My grandparents grew up in

a time where things were expected and they're not okay anymore. Women

are usually subservient to men. Um, so growing up I never really had any

relationship ideals, but I've kind of created my own.

Participant 2: *I would say my parents [are my role models], because*

they've been married for, shit, like, since they were 19, 20? And they've

been together like 24 years, so that's a really long time that they've been

together, and I would like to be like that. I've... my parents' relationship

has always been like, really close. They've fought... I've seen them fight.

But, they've always been there for each other and they rely on each other.

And I like those qualities that you can have somebody you can rely on no

matter what, and they'll still be there. Which... I see that in their lives. Just

seeing that makes me wanna have that in my life.

Expectations of monogamy. Another strong theme that became apparent

in participants' attitudes and beliefs about relationships involved their

expectations about monogamy. None of the participants assumed monogamy was

a given in long-term, same-sex relationships, and all of them mentioned their

belief that expectations about monogamy should be negotiated between partners

early in the relationship. Further, all participants seemed to initially express little

judgment about people who choose to have non-monogamous relationships. There

was also an awareness among participants that open relationships are considered

more acceptable in the gay community than for they might be in heterosexual relationships:

> *I feel like [monogamy] needs to be talked about. Either early on or before a relationship starts. Some people aren't capable of it, and it's not that they don't want it, or it's not something that they have. It's that, they simply aren't programmed that way. And if it's agreed upon to not be monogamous, then that's really fine, but if that's the agreement then that needs to be held true. I feel like it's a little bit of a case-to-case thing.*

Although all participants initially seemed accepting of those who wish to have non-monogamous relationships, all but one participant stated that they expected monogamy for themselves in their own relationships. Many implied that monogamy was an integral part of what "commitment" means for them, or worried they would experience jealousy if their partners were to engage in sexual activity outside the relationship.

> **Participant 1:** *Open relationships are a lot more popular around the gay community than the straight community, from what I've understood, from what I've experienced – including [in] marriage. And for me, if I were to marry somebody, I'm already - if I'm going to be in a long-term relationship with someone, I want it to be just us.*

> **Participant 2:** *I definitely expect an ideal relationship to be monogamous. Um, I never really thought about any type of polygamous relationship too*

seriously. Um, I always said I would get too jealous. Um, yeah. I think it's,

well... there's people who [non-monogamy] could work for - people it

DOES work for. I don't think it's for me.

As participants continued to discuss their beliefs regarding monogamy, a

few made statements that appeared to indicate a belief that non-monogamy was

morally wrong, and two mentioned being very unhappy when previous partners

had suggested opening their relationships to outside sexual partners.

Participant 1: *I feel like for respect of, like, your own body you need to....*

I feel like [your body] really should be shared with only one person. Or at

least that's the way I view it. I think that's the way it should be. Yeah.

Participant 2: *When I'm with someone I'm committed 100 percent. And if*

that person were to mention bringing another person in or anything like

that, I'm out. Because that is not what I'm here for. I'm not your side

platter - nothing like that. I'm your partner. I'm here for you. Not here for

you and your toys.

Expectations about parenting. As mentioned above, half of the

participants interviewed stated that, as children, they imagined having children

when they grew up. However, at the time of the interviews, every participant said

they were at least considering having children at some point in their lives. Only

one participant mentioned viewing children in relationship to cultural ideals about

family:

When I was young, you know, I always wanted a family of my own. You

know, wife and kids - the whole shebang. You know - nice job, nice house,

and just, you know, have a future like that. And I guess that was my idea of

the American dream and all that.

The remaining participants, particularly participants whose views on

parenting changed since becoming adults, viewed their decisions about

parenthood in terms that reflected an individual choice they would consider about

whether they were personally interested or ready to have children, as illustrated

by the following quote:

I was super dead-set on, like - nope, I don't want kids. They're awful. I

don't' want to have someone to take care of, or somebody to grow up in a

world that's not the best. Um, but it, of course, it all depends on how you

take it and how you raise your child. And then it just kind of hit me one

day, where I was just like, well, if I don't decide to raise another child or

have my own, then who's going to kind of take over my - I don't want to

say legacy - but, just kind of carry on that, like, my family tree? Does it

stop - does it stop here? And I'm like, it shouldn't have to stop there, 'cause

I don't want that.

Given the fact that all participants were at least considering having

children at some point in their lives, it was surprising that only one participant

mentioned consideration of the inherent difficulty two men would likely

experience in deciding to have children. This participant's statements contrasted his expectations about his experience of becoming a parent with his perceptions about the ease with which heterosexual couples can have children:

> *I worry it will be a lot more difficult than it would be with a woman, because I could just have a baby. But now there are so many options, but it's so expensive. I can't just throw out forty thousand dollars 'cause I just have it laying around. I have to save up, have a plan, decide if I want to adopt or have a surrogate, or test tube... however I decide. It's just a lot more difficult.* [...] [For straight couples,] *you raise the baby however you want. But with gay males there's an application process, an interview process. They have to make sure you're financially stable. Everything like that. And then they decide that you can have a baby, and then you can have a baby. So with straight couples, you can be making minimum wage, do whatever you want to do, have the baby and it's yours. It's easy for them. It's not easy for me.*

Awareness about the Advancement of Marriage Equality

When asked about when they first became aware of legal SSM in the United States, half of the participants remembered becoming aware of SSM advancements sometime around 2006 (two years after Massachusetts gained legal SSM) and the other half remembered hearing about it around 2010-2011 (a year or two after Iowa gained legal SSM). The manner in which SSM came into these

participants' awareness varied. For instance, one participant who grew up outside Illinois in a different Midwestern state recalled learning about SSM through hearing other students at school speak in favor of marriage equality. Another participant recalled learning about SSM when students and faculty at his Christian school were "preaching" against it. Two participants mentioned having a parent in the wedding or hotel industry who provided services to same-sex couples getting civil unions in their state of residence. (These instances occurred prior to the passage of the law granting legal marriage between same-sex partners equality in this state).

Surprisingly, half of the participants mentioned they had not realized same-sex couples could not legally marry prior to first hearing about SSM becoming legal.

I wasn't even really aware that [marriage between same-sex partners] *was illegal at the time. Like I thought that – I thought that it was just fine, you know? You just go get married and that was it. Um, I think when I probably* found [out marriage was illegal for same-sex couples] *I was a little irritated. 'Cause it was just like, like I felt like I didn't have my own rights, as like, an American, you know?*

Attitudes and Beliefs about Marriage Equality Advocacy

All interviews were conducted prior to nationwide marriage equality in the United States. None of the participants in this study were actively involved in any

political or volunteer activity associated with attempts to gain marriage equality

for same-sex couples. When asked, all participants stated they were confident

marriage equality would be achieved in their lifetime. Many of these participants

acknowledged concerns about opposition from conservative groups that were

likely to continue even after legal SSM equality is achieved.

> *But even then... [...], even if it's legal. Again, there will still always be a*
>
> *debate. And there will always still be this never-ending push and pull of*
>
> *what's normal and what's not normal during that process.*

Although all participants were in favor of gaining legal SSM equality,

most participants acknowledged a general lack of awareness about the current

progress toward achieving that equality. Participants cited various reasons for this

lack of awareness. A few commented that they were simply not "politically

aware." One participant mentioned that while he was initially excited about the

progress being made toward achieving marriage equality, paying attention to the

progress seemed less important as more and more states achieved legal SSM

rights.

> *I do remember feeling like, "Wow, this is kind of a big historical moment."*
>
> *And um, more particularly, I remember the progression, because almost*
>
> *like a domino effect, more and more states became legalized, and I think*
>
> *that's why* [my awareness of the progress is] *blurred. Because after a*

while, it's not even a big deal anymore because so many states are doing

it.

Anticipated Impact of Marriage Equality on Relationships

When asked how they believed having marriage equality would impact their individual lives and relationships, most participants initially denied that marriage equality would impact their relationships in a meaningful way. Some discussed their belief that marriage is a legal construct separate from the emotional bond they hoped to experience in a life-long relationship. While some acknowledged they would enjoy the legal benefits offered by marriage, they cited love as the primary reason they believed two people would stay together.

Um, honestly, [legal marriage is] *something I'd like. I'd like to have the*

option to get married. But I don't think it's something that's going to

destroy or ruin anything at the end of the day. Because, quite honestly,

marriage is... I mean what is... marriage is a certificate. It's nothing more

than a piece of paper.

Although most participants initially denied marriage equality would impact their current or future relationships, most acknowledged ways – either positively or negatively – that having the option to marry another man may have on their lives. For example, one participant stated he would value his relationship whether or not he was legally married, but found value in the idea of making a public commitment to his partner.

[When asked if not having the option to marry would impact his current or future relationships.] *I don't think so. Like, the state saying I'm not allowed to marry doesn't make it any less of a relationship to me. So I'm not particularly worried about that I guess.* [A few minutes further in the conversation, he explained his reason for wanting to marry his partner.] *A public commitment. That him and I are a union and we're like, I guess, one. So I don't like being identified as him* [sic] *as my 'friend' to my family. That's a big one for me. I want them to see that he's not just a friend. He's more than a friend.* [...] *I want people to realize, like, this isn't just a friend. He's my husband.*

Another participant mentioned his intention to ensure that having the option to marry would not have an impact on his relationships out of a desire to not "put pressure" on current relationships that will not develop into long-term relationships.

[After being asked how having the option to marry might impact his relationships] *I don't think it does. I keep that stance. Because, at least right now, I keep that stance because I don't want it to influence my relationships. I don't want to say that I want to - I need to - get married because I feel that puts a lot of pressure on relationships that I may be forming now. I don't want to think about a relationship I'm forming now as a long-term relationship. Granted, true, maybe that's what I want in the*

end. But I think that puts a lot of constraints and pressure around what it

could be right there, and what it is at that time for the short term. It's just

a tough balance, because in the end, I do want a long term relationship as

well.

None of the participants mentioned specific legal benefits or gaining legal

"next of kin" status as reasons for wanting to be married. Regarding parental

rights, none of the participants felt that marriage was needed in order for them to

have children in the future. Only one participant mentioned the importance of

ensuring that both he and his future spouse would have equal parenting rights;

however, this participant did not associate these rights with legal marriage.

I mean, when it comes to being a parent, marriage I don't necessarily

think is that important. But, as long as I have the ability to say that this is

my child's father... regardless of where the child came from, this is my

child's father. And they have just as much right to them as I do, then I

don't... that's all that I really need out of that. That's really the only thing I

care about. As I said, marriage, in general, is just a piece of paper.

Attitudes and Beliefs about the Impact of Marriage Equality on Gay Culture

and Identity

When participants were asked how they believed marriage equality would

impact gay culture or what it means to be gay, responses were varied. Some

participants made comments regarding their hope that marriage equality would

somehow legitimize gay relationships. In addition to expressing the belief that marriage would help gay relationships gain more respect (presumably from heterosexuals), one member indicated that having equal marriage rights would help gay men be seen as equals by the majority culture.

> [...] *now that we have, like, the right to get married, it does bring more of that awareness that we can be a couple. We can be monogamous. We can be... we can raise a family. We can work the jobs that [heterosexuals] work. We can do it just as good as you can, if not better.*

Although one participant denied believing that marriage equality would change what it means to be gay, he did believe that marriage equality might change what it means to be married.

> *I think maybe being gay changes what marriage could be like... absolutely. I think there's a lot of sexism and gender roles that marriages are pressured to fit into, and having a same- sex marriage completely erases those roles - well, not completely - but challenges those roles. Definitely.*

Two participants made statements suggesting that some in the gay community might choose to get married out of a desire to follow a trend. Both of these participants suggested that those who rush into marriage for this reason would likely either get divorced or realize they were not ready for a commitment and choose to open their marriage in favor of non-monogamy.

I don't want to generalize it, but I do think a lot of people follow things. When they see something happening they do it just because. [...] they see it in a parade or they see it somewhere else - they're like, "Oh, I wanna do that too." So then they go get married and then a year later they're divorced because it didn't work out.

One participant, after describing his concern about negative gay stereotypes, also mentioned his hope that marriage equality might help change perceptions about the gay community.

I don't know if things are gonna change [due to marriage equality]. *I can honestly say I hope things do. I hope the gay community can be viewed in a better light.*

Several participants mentioned positive impacts they believed marriage equality would have on both the LGBT community and on other human rights causes.

Participant 1: *I would probably say it just makes me feel glad, that like, cool, I have that right now. And even for future generations of LGBTs. I feel like they should be comfortable knowing that if you do find that special someone, you can marry them. [...] they should be fully aware that this is perfectly fine to be whoever you are. And you should have that right, and you should be able to be very confident in finding that significant other. And just being... a family. Like, I don't even want to put*

in the word "normal". Like, a family - that's it. Or being a couple, or being

partners. Yeah.

Participant 2: *I'm excited to see [marriage equality] happen nationally.*

I'm really excited that it's happening in my lifetime. And I can't wait to see

where we go past that as well, because I think that's really what's going to

make a lasting change - to see what [marriage equality] launches. [...]I

think it's just an advancement of gay/human-rights... and human rights in

general. And, I'm hoping that human rights campaigns, a lot of times they

can kind of compete against each other, but more often than not - at least

I'm hopeful more often than not - that they kind of launch each other and

flow into one another. And a gain for one is a gain for all.

Summary and Grounded Theory

Results from the interviews indicated that the development of relationship

ideals for these participants was largely shaped by the heteronormative

relationship ideals promoted by the participant's family and culture (see Figure 1).

Participants acknowledged believing at a young age that the "American Dream"

ideal included having a wife and/or children. Half of the participants mentioned

believing at a young age that they would eventually marry a wife and potentially

have children, explaining that this was what seemed "expected." These

participants were either unaware of their sexual identity, or did not see their early

awareness of sexual identity as relevant to the options available to them for future

relationships. The remaining participants imagined that they would grow up without a primary romantic attachment. One participant who imagined remaining single explained he was already beginning to become aware of his same-sex attraction at that time and realized he was not interested in having a wife, but still hoped to have children when he became an adult. None of the participants imagined having a relationship with a man at a young age, or even considered that a relationship with a man might be possible.

As participants moved into middle school and high school, they gained greater clarity about their own sexual identity and began to self-identify as gay, whether or not they were ready to come out as gay to friends or family members. Most participants described generally positive experiences with coming out to friends and family members, recalling few, if any, negative reactions as they disclosed their sexual identity to others. Most participants also described viewing their sexual identity as a relatively small facet of their overall identity that they believed had little influence on other aspects of their identity. Participants viewed themselves as being more similar to their heterosexual peers than different. Although participants generally reported acceptance from peers, bullying by heterosexual peers was not completely absent. Two participants mentioned being bullied by heterosexual peers in grade school or middle school for either disclosing they were gay or because others suspected they might be gay. Other participants who were not bullied recalled being aware that other boys they knew

were bullied for being gay. These participants believed they were better accepted than the boys who were bullied because they did not view their sexual orientation as the defining aspect of their identity.

In terms of their awareness of marriage equality, participants recalled hearing about the advancement of marriage equality for same-sex couples when they were in middle school or high school, which was roughly at the same time or shortly after they began self-identifying as gay. Half of the participants were unaware that marriage was not legal for same-sex couples prior to hearing about the fight for marriage equality. This knowledge that same-sex couples were striving to enter into the familiar institution of "traditional marriage" was congruent with their belief that they, as gay individuals, were more similar to than different from their heterosexual peers. Some participants reported believing marriage equality was important in helping young gay people recognize they could have a family with the person they love. This suggests awareness of the option to marry a same-sex partner may have been instrumental in allowing these participants to envision marriage as an ideal for themselves.

Although, as *individuals*, these participants felt there was little difference between them and their heterosexual peers, participants distanced themselves from perceived stereotypes or characteristics they believed to be associated with the "gay community." Participants mentioned their belief in the prevalence of various characteristics in the "gay community" with which they did not identify.

For example, a participant mentioned his belief when he was younger that all gay men were effeminate, and did not realize he might be gay until he learned that gay men do no *have to be* effeminate. Other participants mentioned stereotypes related to club culture, substance use, and promiscuity. Participants made comments demonstrating a desire to distance themselves from being associated with these characteristics or from being seen as part of the "gay community." As participants grew older and began dating other young men, they encountered those who engaged in "open" (i.e. non-monogamous) or polyamorous relationships. Some participants described personal experiences of feeling upset when previous romantic partners suggested they have an open relationship, while others stated they became aware of these types of relationships through friends or acquaintances who engaged in non-monogamous relationships.

Participants incorporated these various cultural and personal influences into the re-evaluation of their own relationship ideals and goals. On the one hand, participants believed their gay identity was primarily descriptive of their choice of sexual/romantic partners and did not influence much else. As such, these participants felt that the "American Dream" ideal they grew up with could be accomplished in a same-sex, long-term relationship. Having children was considered to be a valid option, and obstacles to having children (e.g., financial or legal issues, the adoption process, surrogacy, etc.) were not generally considered insurmountable. On the other hand, participants encountered other gay men who

engaged in more non-traditional, non-monogamous relationship configurations. Whether or not participants desired monogamy for themselves, they were aware that the decision to be monogamous was one that all couples should explicitly negotiate at the beginning of a relationship.

Participants at the time of their interviews had adopted relationship ideals that were largely unchanged from the heteronormative relationship ideals with which they were raised. These ideals include long-term relationships and/or marriage, and all participants were at least considering having children. All individuals in this study were aware that some gay men chose to have non-monogamous relationships. However, due to their awareness of marriage equality, they also knew that many gay men were striving to have life-long, monogamous relationships. In the end, all but one participant expressed a personal discomfort with non-monogamy for themselves and maintained monogamy as their personal ideal.

Chapter V: Discussion

Discussion of Major Themes

The purpose of this study was to develop a grounded theory examining the ways in which sexual identity development may be changing for young gay men as they grow to adulthood with the expectation that they will be able to choose marriage for themselves in their lifetime. This study sought to explore how a cohort of same-sex attracted men, who experienced adolescence and young adulthood in the United States as the country moved toward greater legitimization of same-sex couples and began to legalize marriage same-sex between same-sex partners, envisioned themselves approaching their future romantic and sexual relationships. Additionally, this study sought to explore whether participants believed access to marriage is eroding the significance of "gay identity." Six participants engaged in semi-structured interviews exploring aspects of their sexual identity development, the development of their expectations about relationships, their thoughts on the push to legalize marriage equality for same-sex couples, and their beliefs about how marriage equality might impact "gay identity."

The interviews revealed several themes, including others' reactions the to the sexual identity of the individual, attitudes and beliefs about the "gay community", attitudes and beliefs about the role sexual identity plays in one's overall identity, attitudes and beliefs about relationship goals, awareness during

childhood/adolescence about the advancement of marriage equality, attitudes about the current push toward gaining marriage equality, the anticipated impact of marriage equality on relationships, and attitudes and beliefs about the impact of marriage equality on gay culture.

All but one of the participants identified themselves as gay and came out to friends and family while in middle school or high school. The remaining participant came out to others upon entering college. Participants described receiving generally positive reactions from others after coming out to friends and family members. Consistent with the *narrative of emancipation* described by Cohler and Hammack (2007), these participants did not feel that their sexual identity was a significant feature on which they needed to build their overall identity. Although some participants specifically mentioned the existence of identity labels other than gay to denote same-sex attraction (e.g. queer), all participants self-identified as "gay." This is consistent with work by Hammack et al. (2009) stating that while today's same-sex attracted youth may not identify with a larger "gay community," they may nonetheless use traditional sexual identity labels to easily communicate their sexual preferences rather than explaining their discomfort with the "gay" label.

However, two participants reported some experiences with bullying related to their sexual identity. The bullying received by these participants was primarily verbal (e.g., being called "faggot"). These experiences of stigma and

minority stress are consistent with the *narrative of struggle and success* described

in Cohler and Hammack (2007). However, these participants did not choose to

overcome adversity by seeking self-acceptance through integration with a larger

gay community, as suggested by Herdt and Boxer (1996). Rather, these

individuals were no different than the individuals who did not experience bullying

in that they also felt their "gay identity" was a relatively small part of their overall

identity. This is consistent with Savin-Williams (2005) and McCormack (2012),

who suggest that greater LGBT representation in the media have made same-sex

attraction more acceptable and allow gay youth to feel more similar than different

to their heterosexual peers.

All but one participant described what they believed to be negative

qualities or stereotypes that are applicable to gay men or what they imagine to be

the "gay community." Participants discussed concerns about gay men being

thought of by the heterosexual majority only in terms of their sexual behavior, but

some also made comments acknowledging that they themselves sometimes

thought of "gay men" as a group in terms of sexual behavior and stereotypes. As

mentioned above, participants made a point of describing their sexual identity as a

relatively small facet of their overall identity, presumably in an attempt to

distance themselves from these stereotypes associated with an identity based

primarily on the basis of one's sexual activity. Participants negative evaluations of

gay individuals or gay culture are consistent with early models of sexual identity

development (Cass, 1979; Troiden, 1989) in which same-sex oriented individuals internalize negative societal attitudes about those with same-sex desire. In these early models, individuals with same-sex desires could overcome those negative internalized attitudes through connecting to and finding acceptance within a larger gay community. However, in the earlier models, finding acceptance within a gay community was necessary because coming out to heterosexual family and friends in that sociohistorical context was usually met with rejection. In contrast, participants in this study generally did not experience such rejection from family and friends, and therefore felt little motivation to connect with a gay community which was still associated with negative attitudes held by many in the heterosexual majority culture. Consistent with Cohler and Hammack (2007), these individuals appeared comfortable with their same-sex desire, considered their sexuality to be "normal," and did not wish to be associated with the gay community which is still seen by some as "abnormal."

These participants, rather than seeking acceptance within a *gay community*, appear to have minimized the overall importance of their sexual identity as being one of many other personal characteristics (e.g. playing soccer or having green hair) that make up their identities as *individuals*. Further, participants suggested that individuals who choose to adopt their gay identity as their primary identity (i.e. display perceived negative characteristics associated with gay identity) are more likely to be victims of bullying. Consistent with

previous literature (Hammack et al., 2009; Cohler & Hammack, 2007; Savin-Williams, 2005) these participants did not wish to identify with a marginalized minority identity characterized by stereotypes they do not feel apply to them. In spite of this, participants in this study continued to use "gay" as their identity label. This continued use of the "gay" identity label is consistent with findings by Hammack et al. (2009). Those findings showed that while youth may not identify with qualities they believe characterize the gay community or gay culture, it is easier to communicate one's preference of romantic and sexual partners using the word "gay" than to explain their reasons for choosing alternative identity labels. As one participant put it, "I like to keep things simple." All participants described their belief that being gay was a relatively small aspect of their overall identity as a person, expressing discomfort with letting their sexual identity define the way others view them.

Herdt and Boxer (1992) suggested that part of gay identity development involved "unlearning" the culturally instilled goals of monogamy and heterosexual marriage for the purpose of having children. The individuals in this study who remembered having some awareness of their same-sex attraction at a young age also described difficulty imagining at a young age that they would ever marry as adults. These individuals, who appear to have had some awareness that their sexual attraction was incompatible with heteronormative ideals of marriage, may be describing this "unlearning." The remaining participants did not question

the heteronormative ideals modeled by their society, and believed they would

eventually marry women. However, all participants in this study eventually

developed their gay identity while retaining many of the heteronormative

relationship values with which they grew up (i.e. monogamy, a desire for life-long

relationships, a desire to form a family including the desire for children), whether

or not they initially experienced their sexual attraction as incompatible with those

ideals. Green (2006) suggested exclusion from the institution of marriage required

gay men to give up cultural expectations related to marriage and family without

having a clear understanding of how their relationships might unfold in the

absence of those cultural expectations. Further, Green (2006) proposed that as

these men moved to urban environments for the purpose of finding a community

of other gay men, they were socialized by a gay culture that promoted sexual

exploration and innovation in dyadic relationships. In his interviews of married,

same-sex couples in Canada where marriage between same-sex couples was legal,

Green (2010) found that all of the couples he interviewed considered monogamy

within the context of their marriage to be a personal choice each couple needed to

make for themselves. Indeed, although a majority of married, gay men in Green's

(2010) study chose to practice monogamy in their marriages, nearly half chose to

allow some extramarital sexual activity. Green (2010) hypothesized that this

acceptance of non-monogamy within marriage might be a cohort-specific

innovation to traditional marriage norms limited to those who developed their gay

identity in a culture where same-sex couples were excluded from legal marriage. His reasoning was that these couples, having been socialized into a gay culture that encouraged sexual freedom prior to gaining marriage equality, carried the value of dyadic innovation with them into their newly legal marriages.

In contrast, participants in this study became aware that marriage equality was being fought for and legalized in other parts of the country (e.g., Massachusetts and Iowa) at roughly the same time or slightly after most of them were coming to terms with their own gay identity. Some participants, upon learning of the fight for marriage equality, were surprised that same-sex couples were not already allowed to marry. Their assumption that same-sex couples were already allowed to marry is one demonstration of their attitudes, which hold that same-sex relationships are very much aligned with the values and norms demonstrated by the idealized heterosexual relationships reflected in their culture. Further, although the participants expressed frustration, anger, and disappointment upon realizing that marriage was not legal for same-sex couples in most of the country, they were aware that same-sex couples were fighting to have their relationships sanctioned through civil marriage. This awareness may have allowed them to develop their gay identity without feeling the requirement to abandon relationship ideals with which they were raised and bolstered their belief that gay individuals desire (and should be allowed to have) long-term, monogamous relationships similar to the heteronormative relationship ideal. This

message - that the gay community valued marriage - was in direct contrast to the message received by earlier cohorts of gay men interviewed in Green's (2006, 2010) studies. Rather, their attitudes about marriage were more aligned with those of heterosexual men in emerging adulthood described in Willoughby and Hall (2015). The men in this study were either enthusiastic about the prospect of getting married or valued the concept of marriage, but wished to postpone marriage until they were somewhat older. Further, in seeing themselves as more similar to than different from their heterosexual peers, they did not feel the same pressure to find acceptance and community within a gay subculture that they perceived to exemplify values that were not aligned with their own.

Participants in this study acknowledged their perception that non-monogamous relationships are more common and acceptable among gay men than among heterosexual relationships. This perception appeared to develop later as they became older and developed more social and romantic relationships with other gay men. In line with Green (2010), none of the participants in this study took monogamy for granted in a long-term relationship, stating their belief that couples must explicitly negotiate their decision about whether or not to be monogamous at the beginning of their relationship. Although many of the participants said non-monogamy was an acceptable choice for *other* people, all but one participant stated they would not be comfortable with non-monogamy in their own romantic relationships. As mentioned above, Green (2006) found that

participants in his study, who were excluded from the option to marry, sought satisfaction in a gay culture that encouraged sexual exploration and freedom. While this emphasis on exploration proved liberating for some gay men, others, who desired more stable, monogamous relationships, were often discouraged by messages they received from other gay men that monogamy was not a realistic option within the gay community. Indeed, some men in Green's (2006) study recalled being told that sexual freedom was one of the few benefits of being gay. Conversely, participants in this study, whose cultural backdrop included a world where gay people were fighting to have their relationships legally validated as equal to heterosexual relationships, may have been discouraged when romantic partners suggested having an open relationship, but they did not resign themselves to believing that non-monogamy was the only realistic option for having a long-term, same-sex relationship.

Participants' responses tended to reflect a belief that legal recognition of marriage between same-sex partners would have little impact on their personal romantic relationships. Participants commented on marriages being the equivalent of a contract, or "just a piece of paper", that had no bearing on their love for their partner. There was little, if any, acknowledgement of the legal ramifications of not being married (e.g., legal recognition as next-of-kin impacting medical decisions, inheritance, child custody, etc.). None of the participants felt marriage was a prerequisite for sharing custody of children they may have in the future.

However, when asked how they believed marriage equality might impact gay culture, participants believed that marriage equality was likely to have what they perceived to be a positive benefit to gay culture and what it means to be gay. Responses about this positive benefit were varied, but included the hope that gay relationships would gain more respect and the hope that marriage equality might improve perceptions of the gay community as a whole among the heterosexual majority. For example, one participant hoped that the heterosexual majority culture would recognize that gay men can have committed, monogamous relationships, raise families, and be seen as "just as good as" heterosexuals. Although participants mainly discussed how they hoped marriage equality might change heterosexuals' opinions of LGBT individuals, a few participants spoke specifically to their belief that marriage equality would ensure that future generations of gay youth would grow up confident in the fact that they could get married and raise families with a same-sex spouse. While not explicitly stated, this desire speaks to the fact that these participants likely experienced doubt at some point in their own identity development about whether they could, as gay men, grow up to have families of their own.

The results of this study provide insights from a first-person point of view highlighting the ways in which the sexual identity and relationship goals of gay men are shaped by factors present within the individual's sociohistorical context. These interviews explored how participants' relationship ideals were largely

shaped by the values and attitudes of the culture in which they were raised. As participants grew from early childhood to adolescence and became increasingly aware of their sexual identity in a culture that was increasingly accepting of individuals with same-sex attraction, they also became aware that same-sex couples were fighting to gain the right to have their relationships legally recognized through civil marriage. Although participants described frustration at finding out same-sex couples were prohibited from marrying, their awareness that marriage equality was being fought for allowed them to believe that relationship ideals regarding long-term, monogamous relationships for the purpose of childrearing were (or should be) available to them in a same-sex relationship. This was inconsistent with previous research showing that development of gay identity involved giving up heteronormative relationship goals including monogamy a marriage for the purpose of childrearing (Herdt & Boxer, 1992).

As they continued to grow to adulthood and were exposed to a larger number of same-sex attracted men in the "gay community", they became increasingly aware of relationship options that included non-monogamous or polyamorous relationships. The literature describes previous generations of gay men who faced rejection from family and friends due to their sexual orientation and were socialized into a gay culture that embraced sexual exploration and dyadic innovation [e.g. Bech, 1997; Fowlkes, 1994; Green, 2006]. However, participants in this study experienced relatively low levels of rejection, and, in

witnessing the fight for marriage equality, were aware that gay couples could have long-term, monogamous relationships that reflected the values with which these participants grew up. While participants were aware that non-monogamy in relationships was an available option, most participants rejected non-monogamy in favor of seeking long-term monogamous relationships with the possibility of raising children.

Due to the relatively recent progress toward marriage equality for same-sex couples, it has not been possible until now to study a group of same-sex attracted men in the United States who experienced adolescence and emerging adulthood with the awareness that same-sex couples might become legally married. This study allowed an exploration of how that awareness helped shape participants' relationship goals, as well as how that awareness shaped their opinions of what it means to be gay. Consistent with previous research, findings indicated that participants were aware of, and often internalized, stereotypes and negative judgments about gay men that are still prevalent in society. Although previous research suggested connecting with a gay community was instrumental in helping individuals overcome societal homophobia and rejection, participants in this study – having experienced greater societal acceptance and believing themselves to have much in common with their heterosexual peers – refused to identify with those stereotypes and negative judgments. Yet most participants believed stereotypical characteristics or judgments were somewhat accurate

depictions of the "gay community." Perhaps it was for this reason that the gay

men interviewed for this study felt that being gay represented a small facet of

their overall identity, since they felt that characteristics inherent to gay identity

were not descriptive of themselves as individual people. In spite of the fact that

participants did not feel they had much in common with the greater "gay

community," they nonetheless adopted "gay" as the identity label that best

described their sexual orientation.

By learning about the attitudes and beliefs of this cohort of same-sex

attracted men, we are able to understand the impact marriage equality for same-

sex couples has on how young gay men learn to view themselves, their

relationships, and their ability to be included in society.

Discussion of the Grounded Theory

Consistent with Herdt and Boxer (1992) and Green (2006), individuals in

this study were surrounded in early childhood by heteronormative relationship

ideals that they believed were, at best, part of the "American Dream," or, at least,

the only available option (see Figure 1). Some participants described believing in

early childhood that they would eventually have a wife and children when they

became adults. These individuals made comments that doing so was "expected"

or was seen as "what people do." Other participants had difficulty imagining

themselves participating in these heteronormative rites of passage, with some

describing early "confusion" about their sexual attraction and others simply

describing a lack of interest in marriage at a young age. The individuals in this group are likely describing the early stages of "unlearning" of culturally instilled ideals surrounding relationships and monogamy that Herdt and Boxer (1992) discuss in their work. Previous stage models of sexual identity development (Cass, 1979; Troiden, 1989) acknowledge that individuals pass through stages of awareness at different ages. Individuals in the group who believed they would eventually get married made comments suggesting they had not yet questioned whether their sexual attraction would be inconsistent with relationship goals including marriage.

However, as both groups gained greater awareness about their sexual identity, their exposure to cultural messages about gay identity also increased. Consistent with previous research (Anderson, 2009; Hammack et al., 2009; McCormack, 2012; Savin-Williams, 2005) individuals in this study came to believe that being gay did not define them as individuals. This view was reinforced by the mostly positive experiences participants described regarding coming out to family and friends. As they moved through adolescence, they were aware that marriage equality advocates were fighting for same-sex couples to win the right to marry. While many of the messages they witnessed about gay identity were viewed as positive, they were also exposed to cultural messages about the gay community which they perceived as negative. In addition to cultural stereotypes about gay men or the gay community, participants described increased

interaction with other gay men. Like gay participants in Green (2006), these participants were also introduced to non-traditional forms of relationships (e.g., non-monogamous or "open" relationships, polyamory, etc.), either by men they were dating or by gay friends who were engaging in these forms of relationships. Participants were able to consider all of these influences as they developed and re-evaluated their own relationship goals. Participants were aware that, on one hand, same-sex couples could have long-term relationships, marriage, and children. On the other hand, they were also aware that some gay men chose non-monogamy and viewed that as a valid option that couples must negotiate at the beginning of their relationship.

When faced with these two possibilities – relationship goals that were similar to the cultural ideals they were raised with or more non-traditional relationship goals – all participants described personal relationship goals that were largely unchanged from the monogamy and marriage/children ideals they became familiar with as children. While participants did not all indicate that marriage was necessary, all hoped to have long-term relationships with a partner, and all were at least considering having children. Green (2010) suggested that the dyadic innovations (i.e. non-monogamy) within married couples of the same-sex might be a cohort specific phenomenon resulting from growing up without access to marriage. Although a majority of couples in Green's (2010) study chose to have monogamous marriages, just under half chose some form of non-monogamy in

their marriages. In contrast, all but one participant in this study was clear that they desired monogamy in their relationship, with the remaining participant stating that he would consider having a non-monogamous partner. Although it remains to be seen how access to marriage will continue to shape gay men's relationship goals, these results suggest that non-monogamy may decline in future cohorts of gay men who are raised in a world where they are not forced to question whether they can partake in their culture's rites of passage concerning marriage and childrearing.

Limitations

This study was limited to a sample that included 20-24 year old gay-identified men living in a large metropolitan area. Further, participants in this study were mostly white, and included only one participant who identified as Latino and one who identified as Pacific Islander. Therefore, the results of this study may not be applicable to gay men living in other parts of the country – particularly those who grew up or choose to live in more areas of the United States – or even to other men with same-sex attraction living in urban centers who may belong to other racial or ethnic groups or communities.

This homogeneity of characteristics among participants in this study limits the findings from being generalized to other groups of same-sex attracted males. However, the categories identified in this study were saturated, indicating agreement among participants about their attitudes and beliefs about gay identity,

relationship ideals including expectations of monogamy, and the manner in which marriage equality impacts what it means to be gay. This study's purpose was not to gain information that would be generalized to same-sex attracted men in general, but to explore the beliefs and attitudes among urban same-sex attracted men. Specifically, the studies sought to explore attitudes of same-sex attracted men who came of age in the United States at a time when marriage equality advocates were fighting for equal access to marriage on a state-by-state basis across the country.

Another limitation of this study was the relatively small sample size. Several factors created difficulties with recruitment. In addition to having difficulty reaching a large audience of men that included the target demographics, the logistics of scheduling and attending the interview required a certain amount of effort and follow-through on the part of participants. The gay men who were interviewed for this study were willing to openly share their experiences, attitudes, and beliefs with a stranger for very little compensation. Their openness to discuss these topics may indicate a bias toward having positive coming out experiences, since it is possible that those with more difficult coming out experiences would likely be less willing to share their stories with a stranger. Additionally, those willing to be interviewed for a study about relationship ideals and marriage equality may be more likely to have positive views of long-term relationships, commitment, monogamy, and ideals about raising a family. Having

a personal investment in the advancement of marriage equality may have been a factor in participants being willing to participate.

Current relationship status was not specifically assessed; however, through the course of the interviews most participants disclosed their relationship status. Further, at the time of their interviews, all but one of the participants disclosed that they were in long-term relationships with men whom they hoped to maintain a relationship with for the rest of their lives. That most of the men in the sample were engaged in what they described as long-term, committed relationships points to another potential bias in the participants' willingness to participate.

As mentioned, this sample was limited to participants under 24 years of age in order to examine the impact of awareness of marriage equality during adolescence on identity development and relationship goals. Accepting older participants would not have served the purpose of the study, since older participants would have already been in their mid- to late-teens when marriage equality first became legal in 2004. However, Green (2006) found that attitudes about marriage and relationship trajectories of both gay and heterosexual men continued to develop throughout individuals' twenties and thirties. Therefore, the information gathered in this study is limited by the relatively young age of the participants whose attitudes about marriage and relationships will likely continue to change and evolve as they grow older and gain greater experience.

This study sought to explore the attitudes and beliefs among 18 to 24 year-old men with same-sex attraction to explore the possible impact of marriage equality on the sexual identity development of same-sex attracted men. This study allowed me to explore participants' attitudes and beliefs about gay identity, the development of their relationship ideals, and their perception of the impact of marriage equality. This exploration allowed me to understand the ways in which awareness of marriage equality influenced participants view of themselves as gay men, as well as how it impacted the development of their relationship ideals and goals.

Implication for Professional Practice

The theory described in this study illustrates the manner in which awareness of marriage equality may play a role in identity development and relationship goals of same-sex attracted youth. Because marriage equality for same-sex couples first became legal in Massachusetts in 2004 (*Goodridge v. Department of Public Health*, 2003), the participants interviewed for this study represent the first cohort of same-sex attracted men to experience most or all of their adolescence and grow to adulthood with the awareness that marrying a person of the same sex could be a possibility within their lifetime.

Most children in our heteronormative society are socialized to consider ideals of marriage as a marker of adulthood; however, previous cohorts of gay and lesbian individuals have been required to unlearn those ideals as they develop gay

and lesbian identities (Herdt & Boxer, 1992). Previous cohorts of gay men, denied

access to marriage and lacking of clear model for their relationships, were often

re-socialized by urban, gay communities to develop models for their relationships

that emphasized sexual exploration and dyadic innovation (Green, 2006). With

marriage equality now legal throughout the entire United States (*Obergefell v.*

Hodges, 2015), today's gay and lesbian youth will no longer be required to give

up relationship ideals related to marriage and family, and there is a need to

understand how access to marriage will impact their identity development.

The results of this study can provide insight to mental health professionals,

policy makers, and organizations working with same-sex attracted men. Previous

research has explored the impact denial of civil marriage rights has on sexual

identity development (Herdt & Boxer, 1992) and on gay men's expectations of

monogamy in romantic and sexual relationships (Green, 2006). Earlier models of

sexual identity development (Cass, 1979; Troiden, 1989) suggested that in order

to develop a healthy gay identity, overcome stigma, and manage minority stress, it

was helpful for individuals to develop connections within a larger gay

community. However, results from this study show that mental health

professionals must not assume that gay men view themselves as a stigmatized

minority and may not feel it necessary or desirable to become integrated within a

gay community with which they feel they have little in common aside from their

same-sex sexual orientation. Results from this study suggest that as societal

acceptance increases and lesbians and gay men gain greater legal rights, gay men are more likely to view their same-sex attraction as a relatively small facet of their overall identity. It remains to be seen how organizations seeking to provide services to gay men will respond as fewer men view their gay identity to be a noteworthy characteristic that sets them apart from "mainstream" society.

Recommendations for Future Research

Based on the results and limitations of this study, as well as the current literature, recommendations for future research are as follow:

1. A continuation of this study with a larger sample of same-sex attracted men including a greater variety of racial and ethnic backgrounds to find if similar results are found. Including exploration of additional variables, such as relationship status and/or relationship history may help researchers learn how these factors may influence relationship ideals and goals for the future.

2. Future studies should be repeated with participants who may live in communities or in geographic areas where greater stigmatization of same-sex attraction continues to exist. This research may help further determine how messages from the larger culture regarding acceptance of LGBTQ people and marriage equality mitigate negative messages within the individual's community during their sexual identity development.

3. An extension of this study designed to follow this cohort of gay men as they mature into their twenties, thirties, and beyond. This would allow greater understanding of how this cohorts' attitudes and beliefs about marriage continue to develop as they grow older, gain greater life experience.

4. Similar studies including a younger cohort of same-sex attracted males. These studies would allow exploration of attitudes of gay men who will be growing up in a society where marriage equality for same-sex couples is already the law throughout the United States. This research would allow exploration of same-sex sexual identity development in the absence of disparity with regards to access to marriage.

5. Further research should include older cohorts of gay men in order to explore how their relationship ideals regarding marriage and monogamy may continue to evolve in light of changing societal attitudes and equal access to marriage.

6. Studies including lesbians and bisexuals should also be conducted to explore the influence of marriage equality on the sexual identity development and relationship trajectories of these populations.

7. Future research should continue to study proposed programs that hope to address mental health disparities among LGBTQ populations in order to

develop appropriate public policies to grant greater legal equality and

reduce ongoing discrimination.

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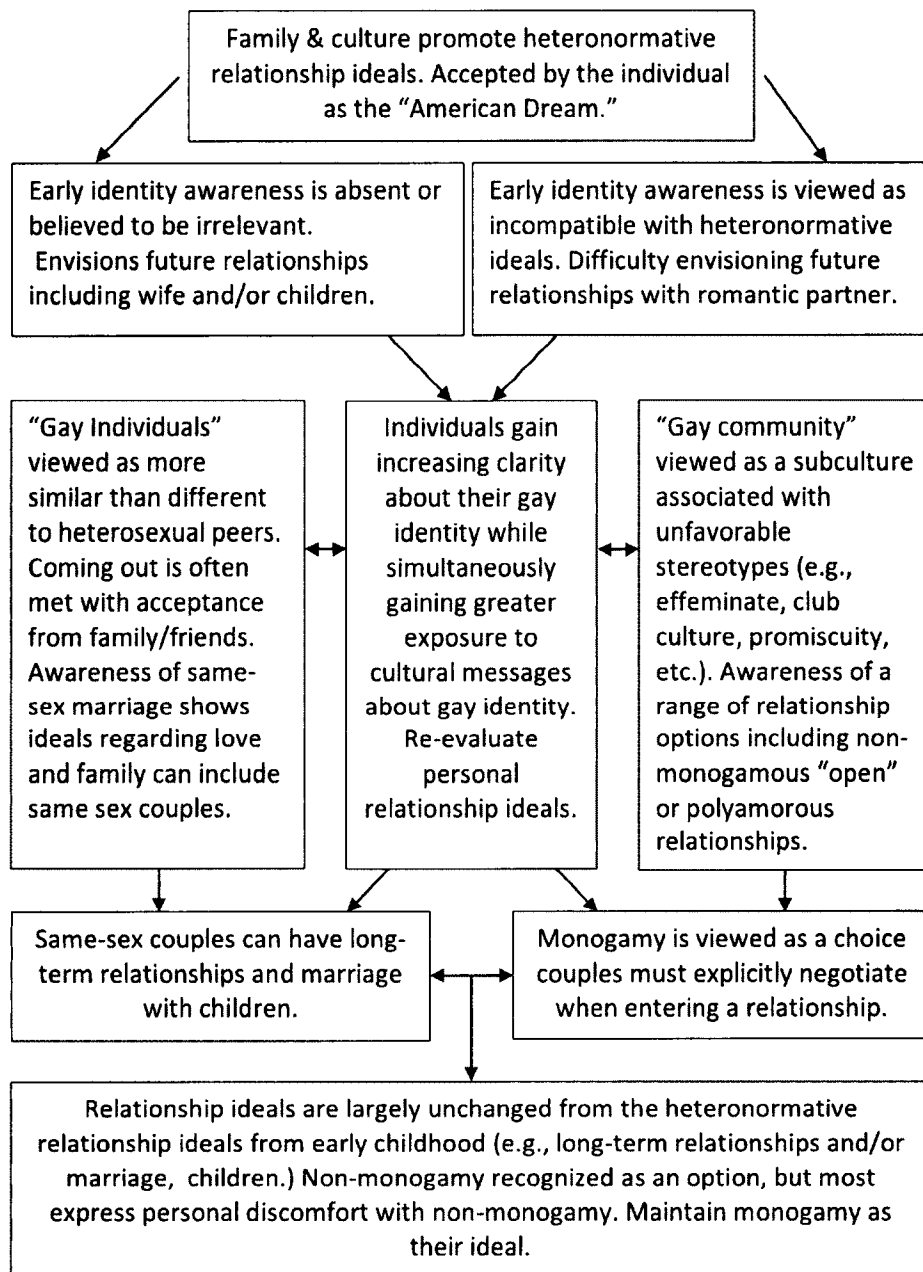*3*(2), 123-135. doi:10.1177/2167696814548478

Figure 1. Development of relationship ideals from early childhood through emerging adulthood.

Appendix A:

Demographic Questionnaire

Age: _____

Level of Education (Circle one):
HS Diploma or GED
Some College/Associates Degree
Bachelor's Degree
Post-graduate student or degree

Race (Circle one):
White
Black/African American
Asian
Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander
Native American/Alaskan Native

Current Occupation:

Full-Time Student
Business/Finance/Sales
Clerical/Administrative
Service Industry (Retail, Restaurant, Hotel)
Arts/Performance/Music
Education/Teaching
Community/Public/Social Service
Other:

Technology/Engineering
Medicine/Health
Government/Public Policy
Law
Research/Academic
Communication/Journalism
Entrepreneur/Self-Employed

Caregiver's occupation during most of your childhood (Circle one for each parent/guardian):

Homemaker/Stay-at-Home Mom/Dad
Business/Finance/Sales
Clerical/Administrative
Service Industry (Retail, Restaurant, Hotel)
Arts/Performance/Music
Education/Teaching
Community/Public/Social Service
Other:

Technology/Engineering
Medicine/Health
Government/Public Policy
Law
Research/Academic
Communication/Journalism
Entrepreneur/Self-Employed

Type of area where you grew up:
___ Urban   ___ Suburban   ___ Small Town   ___ Rural
Type of area where you currently live:
___ Urban   ___ Suburban   ___ Small Town   ___ Rural

How did you hear about this study? _____

Appendix B:

Semi-Structured Interview Questions

1. How do you identify your sexual orientation? (ex. gay, bi, queer, etc.)

2. Tell me about how you first came to understand that you were attracted to other males, and how your understanding of your orientation developed throughout your childhood/adolescence.

    a. (If not addressed:) How old were you when you first identified yourself as (identity label used by interviewee) to yourself? To others?

3. How have people you've encountered responded to your sexuality?

    a. (If not addressed:) Have you encountered any negative reactions from people regarding your sexuality or of being perceived as gay? What happened and what was that like for you? How did you handle it?

4. How does your sexual identity relate to your overall identity as a person?

    a. (Clarify if needed:) How important is your sexual identity as (identity label used by interviewee) compared with other aspects of your identity/personality?

5. When you were very young, what kind of relationship or family did you imagine you would have when you grew up?

    a. (If not specifically addressed, query about imagined details such as marital status, sex of partner/spouse, children, residential setting (e.g. city, suburbs, small town, etc.).)

6. How did your expectations about having a family change as you got older?

    a. (If not specifically addressed:) Did these changes happen over time or was there a sudden realization that prompted the change? About how old were you as your expectations changed?

7. Can you remember about how old you were when you first heard about gay marriage becoming legal anywhere in the U.S. or elsewhere? What were your reactions to that at the time?

8. What do you think about the current push for marriage equality that would allow same-sex couples to become legally married? (Follow up: How confidant are you that same-sex marriage will become fully legal in the U.S. in your lifetime? Or in the state where you live or plan on eventually living?)

9. Describe the "ideal" or "perfect" relationship for you.

    a. Who are your "relationship role models"?

        i. What kind of qualities do those relationships have that you would like to emulate?

    b. (If not specifically addressed:)

        i. How do you believe having the option of getting married impacts how you envision your future relationships, if at all? (What was different before marriage became a "real" option?)

        ii. How do you think having the option to marry changes what it means to be (interviewee's identity label), if at all?

      iii. What are your expectations about monogamy in your ideal relationship?

      iv. What kinds of thoughts do you have about becoming a parent?

10. What else should I know about your view of same-sex marriage – either in general or as it pertains to your life specifically?

Appendix C:
Institutional Review Board Approval

ADLER
SCHOOL of Professional Psychology

March 26, 2014

Dear Daniel Piper,

The Institutional Review Board evaluated the changes to your protocol **#14-054**, *The Impact of Marriage Equality on Sexual Identity Development in Young Men with Same-Sex Sexual Orientation.* Your protocol has now received **Full Approval**. This decision means that you may proceed with your plan of research as it is proposed in your protocol.

Please note that if you wish to make changes to your protocol, you must provide written notification to the IRB in advance of the changes, co-signed by your Dissertation Chair, Dr. Alvarez. **You may not implement those changes until you have received a Full Approval letter from the IRB**. Please feel free to contact myself or other IRB committee members should you have any questions.

Sincerely,

Peter Ji, Ph.D.
Associate Professor
Core Faculty, Psy.D. Program in Clinical Psychology
Co-Chair, Institutional Review Board

ADLER UNIVERSITY

Date: February 11, 2015

Institutional Review Board
Adler School of Professional Psychology

Research Protocol Amendment

Researcher Name: Daniel Piper
Protocol Title: **The Impact of Marriage Equality on Sexual Identity Development in Young Men with Same-Sex Sexual Orientation**
Protocol Number: 14-054
Chair: Dr. Josefina Alvarez

_____x_____ The amendment(s) have been accepted by the IRB as submitted and you have permission to proceed with your research.

    1. Recruitment of Adler students.

_____ Further documentation is needed before the amendment(s) is approved. Please see the information below.

Best Regards,

Peter Ji, Ph.D.
Associate Professor
Core Faculty, Psy.D. Program in Clinical Psychology
Co-Chair, Institutional Review Board

Appendix D:
Social Media Recruitment

Facebook:
Facebook page will include virtually identical text to the text from the flyer (minus the instructions to visit the Facebook page); however, it will include the ability for people to "Like" the page so that the activity appears on their timelines to increase visibility. Visitors to the page will be able to post comments on the page. Comments will be moderated; therefore will not be visible to the public unless approved by the researcher. Appropriate comments that would be allowed would include relevant questions about the study that clarify questions potential participants may have or comments expressing excitement for the research. Questions posed to the moderator/researcher may be answered publicly so that others can see the answer while other responses to inquiries may direct the person to contact the researcher by phone. The Facebook page will include language that notifies visitors that posts will be public and visible to others on Facebook, including to those who share the page with others.

Twitter:
As twitter profiles only allow 160 characters in the bio (not including a separate field to include a web link), the text for the twitter bio will be necessarily brief and direct individuals to the Facebook page for further information.
"Research study seeks 18-24 year-old, same-sex attracted male volunteers from the Chicago Area for doctoral dissertation. See our Facebook for more information."

Tweets may be no more than 140 characters in length. Sample tweet:
"Participants needed for doctoral dissertation research! Must be 18-24 same-sex attracted male living in Chicago area. Please RT." (Shortened link follows.)

Appendix E:
Recruitment Flyer

Appendix F
Informed Consent to Participate in a Qualitative Study of 18-24 Year-Old
Same-Sex Attracted Men

You are being asked to participate in a research study that is being conducted by Daniel Piper, a doctoral student at the Adler School of Professional Psychology. This research is being done in fulfillment of the student's doctoral program at the School. The purpose of this study is to explore identity development and relationship goals of gay men. Areas covered will include demographic background, such as age, race, and income, experiences of discrimination, awareness of changes to same-sex marriage laws during adolescence, relationship history, and relationship goals.

In order to gather this information, you are being asked to complete a demographic questionnaire and to participate in an in-depth interview. On average, it will take between 45-90 minutes to complete both parts. With your consent, the interview portion of the study will be digitally audio-recorded. Your risk and discomfort as a result of participating in this survey are expected to be minimal, and consistent with the level of distress you might experience participating in any other interview about your background. However, because some of the questions are of a personal nature and ask about experiences that may have been upsetting, some respondents may experience emotional discomfort. Should any questions upset you, you may stop at any point. In addition, you may skip questions that you do not want to answer. All participants in the study will be provided with a list of relevant mental health resources at the conclusion of the survey.

In is the hope that the information gathered here will provide important information about the health of same-sex attracted men and their relationships. While there is no direct benefit to you as a result of your participation in the study, others may ultimately benefit from the knowledge gained in this study. You will be given a token gift of a $10 gift card in appreciation of your participation in the study.

All information gathered as a part of this study is strictly confidential. Your name will never be attached to the data and a case number will be used instead of your name. Results of the survey will be reported only in summary form, so that no individual can ever be identified. Those whose interview data are reported on will be assigned a pseudonym. Any information that contains identifiers, including audio recordings, will be kept in a locked cabinet, in a locked office and only accessible to the Principle Investigator.

Further questions about this project can be directed to Daniel Piper (dpiper@my.adler.edu) or Dr. Josefina Alvarez, the Chair of Daniel Piper's dissertation committee (jalvarez@adler.edu). Questions or concerns about your rights as a research participant should be directed to Peter Ji, Ph.D., Chair of the Adler School of Professional Psychology Institutional Review Board at 312-662-4354 or pji@adler.edu. You will receive a copy of the consent form for your records as well.

There is no cost to you for participating in the study. Your participation is completely voluntary and you may choose to withdraw from the study at any point. In addition, even after you have signed the consent form, you may decide to leave the study at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which you may otherwise be entitled.

Signature   Print Name   Date

Witness (Researcher)   Print Name   Date

Consent to Audio Record

I, _____, understand that participation in this research study requires that my interview with Daniel Piper, a doctoral student at the Adler School of Professional Psychology, be audio recorded in order to be transcribed. Transcriptions of recordings will be stored in a password-protected computer and any identifying information mentioned during the interview will be removed from the transcript.

_____   I AGREE to allowing my interview to be recorded for the purposes of the study.

_____   I DO NOT AGREE to allow my interview to be recorded for the purposes of the study.

Signature   Print Name   Date