

LANGUAGE APPROPRIATION PRACTICES OF GAY MEN AFTER THE LEGALIZATION OF SAME-SEX MARRIAGE

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EXPLORATORY QUALITATIVE STUDY: THE ROLE OF MARRIAGE EQUALITY IN LANGUAGE APPROPRIATION WITHIN A SAMPLE OF GAY MEN

- Purpose
- Foundational research & significance
- Research questions
- Theoretical framework
- Participants & methodology
- Analysis & results
- Implications & limitations
- Future research

PURPOSE

- Build upon and expand the limited body of knowledge regarding how marriage equality influences the language appropriation practices of self-identified gay men in public and private spheres

FOUNDATIONAL RESEARCH & SIGNIFICANCE

- Discourses surrounding marriage equality fluctuate within LGBTQ+ communities
- Addressing the issue of accessibility of language, as interpreted by members of various groups, in a new era of legal access to the institution of marriage
- Builds upon previous research by examining relationships and experiences with language within specific contexts

(Daniels, 2015; Goldberg, 2010; Suter, Bergen, Daas, & Durham, 2006)

FOUNDATIONAL RESEARCH & SIGNIFICANCE

- Discourses inside/outside LGBTQ+ communities
 - Intra-community debate: Is this an institution worth entering?
- Same-sex couples challenge and reify norms surrounding language
- The issues presented by heteronormative social policy

(Bogensneider, 2014; Brown, 2012; Card, 1996; DiGregorio, 2018; Hopkins, Sorensen, & Taylor, 2013; Lewis & Gossett, 2008; Rich, 1980)

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- 1) How do shifts in marriage law affect the private and public experiences surrounding the language appropriation of self-identified gay men?
- 2) What is the perceived impact of law changes on gay men's articulation of their own relationships?

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS

- **Relational Dialectics Theory:** Focus on meaning-making systems
 - Competing discourses among individuals across spheres and within dyads

(Baxter & Braithwaite, 2008; Suter, 2006)

- **Life Course Theory:** Applicable to individuals and families over time
 - Cohort effect
 - Variations in families/deviations from societal norms

(Elder, 1998; Bernal, 1967; Fay, 1987; Harding, 1991; Hareven, 1987)

PARTICIPANTS

- **N:** 28 self-identified, cisgender gay men, 6 with children from previous relationships with women
- **Residency:** California, Colorado, Georgia, Illinois, Mississippi, New York
- **Ages:** 25-73 years
- **Race and ethnicity:** 8 African-Americans, 20 Caucasians
- **Education level:** 2 high school diplomas, 17 Bachelor's degrees, 4 Master's degrees, 5 held doctorates
- **Socioeconomic status:** self-identified middle to upper-middle class

METHODOLOGY

- Qualitative approach warranted: semi-structured in-depth interviews provided a wealth of knowledge and an exclusive vantage point
- Challenge: Conduct interviews that grant meaningful data while simultaneously ensuring that participants feel comfortable enough to share experiences

(Daly, 2003; Flick, 2008; Jacob & Furgerson, 2012)

DATA COLLECTION & ANALYSIS

- Semi-structured in-depth interviews (15 in homes, 3 in a public venue selected by participant, 4 via Skype, via telephone)
 - General preliminary open-ended questions were developed
 - Interviews were digitally recorded and then subsequently transcribed
- Data were open coded
 - Three reviewers
- Substantive & axial coding

(Glaser & Strauss, 1971; Strauss & Corbin, 1998)

REFLEXIVITY

- Participants and the primary investigator as stakeholders
- Researcher reflexivity refers to self-disclosure of assumptions, beliefs and biases on the part of the investigator
- Use of LGBTQ+ standpoints within qualitative research
- Interplay between in-group and out-group dynamics

(Creswell, 2013; Freeman & Vasconcelos, 2010; Homfray 2008; Nadin & Cassell, 2006; Naples, 2003; Ortlipp, 2008; Shenton, 2004)

RESULTS: EMERGENT THEMES

- Freedom with language
- Context-specific dialect
- Institution of marriage as problematic

FREEDOM WITH LANGUAGE

“It is more difficult to say ‘husband’ in doctor’s office, but I do it anyway and then when they make a face or ask if he’s my son or brother I said, louder, no he’s my husband.”

“My feeling about that if there were someone who wouldn’t want to hire me because I was a married gay man --- well, f**k you!”

“When I mention marriage, I lead with ‘my husband.’ I don’t like to wait. I just give it to them, I say it so quickly, at the grocery store, what are you making for dinner? I’m making x, y, z, for my husband!”

FREEDOM WITH LANGUAGE

“Saying he’s my cousin wasn’t good enough anymore. Suddenly, I could legitimize everything!”

- Unapologetic use of language traditionally associated with marriage (‘husband’ or ‘spouse’) across settings by 19 participants
- Intentionality
- Challenged prejudices without fear of repercussions

CONTEXT-SPECIFIC DIALECT

“When I am buying chicken food at the ranch store I definitely say partner. It’s a ranch store...different part of town.”

“We usually say husband or spouse, but if we are in a strange location we use the term partner.”

“Faculty and administration are not my concern, but I worry about students. If I talk a lot about my family or refer to my sexuality, I don’t want them to think I have an agenda.”

“Gives gay people the freedom to define this.”

CONTEXT-SPECIFIC DIALECT

“There are no question marks for heterosexuals where marriage is concerned.”

“It felt easier to use ‘husband’ before marriage was legalized, because it wasn’t even on my radar. But now that I can, it feels like I’m misappropriating it.”

- Some participants in this group were frustrated with the juggling of terminology
- Some participants viewed this as an opportunity for reframing of language on legal and social levels

INSTITUTION OF MARRIAGE AS PROBLEMATIC

“It’s more about the small details of conversation. It makes people feel marginalized, because we can’t have conversations, we aren’t part of the same society. It feels really inauthentic. It all comes down to that. It’s a little taste of defeat every single time.”

“I don’t speak any differently now than I did twenty years ago...I don’t want to be part of all of that.”

“For the straight couples in our lives, it welcomed us into a weird country club...one we aren’t really sure we want to belong to, but d*mn the amenities are nice!”

- Desire to distance their relationships from the institution of marriage
- Lack of palpable change resulting from marriage equality

IMPLICATIONS

- These findings are in stark contrast to a study exploring language appropriation among a sample of self-identified lesbian women
- Majority of gay men in this sample felt safe enough to challenge systems that resisted change, across arenas
 - Finding persisted across demographics within the sample and did not hinge upon cohort or experiences with various social movements
- Differing approaches to use of legal counsel

(DiGregorio, 2018)

IMPLICATIONS

- The role of privilege
- Pervasiveness of patriarchal structures
 - Salience of gender
 - Social identities and status
 - Entitlement and empowerment
- Marriage equality is not a panacea

LIMITATIONS

- Sample size
- Sample characteristics
- Context
- Geography

FUTURE RESEARCH

- Extend research paradigm to other GSM
- Examine the role(s) the gendering of families plays in language appropriation within GSM dyads
- Explore intersectionality more specifically
- Explore implications on perceived social status and its correlation to language appropriation

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THANK YOU

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