Examining the Impact of Age on Social Support Received by Same-Sex Married Individuals

Danielle Zohrob

A Dissertation Submitted to the Faculty of
The Chicago School of Professional Psychology
In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
For the Degree of Doctor of Psychology

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2017

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Abstract

The focus of this study was to examine the impact of age on social support received by gay and lesbian married individuals, particularly support received from friends and family. The purpose of this study was to further the research on the impact of systemic influences on individuals’ experiences of support around their marriage. This mixed methods online study investigated the support received from friends and family in a sample of 65 individuals. The data were collected using an adaptation of Procidano and Heller’s social support scale, adjusted to address support received specifically around marriage. Quantitative results were interpreted using Pearson’s correlations and Univariate Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) tests. Participants were divided into age cohorts based on patterns in responses to qualitative questions. Qualitative data were collected via a qualitative questionnaire and the qualitative analysis included 62 participants. Qualitative data were analyzed through thematic coding and the use of a second coder to cross analyze and verify emerging themes. Results suggest a strong correlation between age and support received from family. Older adults receive less marital support from family than do younger adults. Age did not impact the support received by friends. Thematic analyses shed light on the experience of making the choice to marry one’s partner, the impact this decision had on relationships with one’s social network, and the impact one’s social network had on this decision.
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Chapter 1: Introduction

The definition of marriage has undergone many changes in recent years with a move toward equal rights for same-sex couples across the United States as well as in countries around the world. Since Denmark led the way in 1989 as the first nation in the world to legally recognize same-sex partnerships, a number of countries all over the globe have followed. The Netherlands was the first nation to legalize same-sex marriage in 2003. In the United States the Stonewall riots of 1969, demonstrations against the city-sanctioned police harassment of sexual minorities, are often recognized as the beginning of the equal rights movement for gay and lesbian individuals (Eskridge, 2001). The same-sex marriage movement within the United States has become a large representation of equal rights in the gay community. Legal and social equality for same-sex couples has been attempted through domestic partnerships, civil unions, and, in some states, marriage. Legislation surrounding these legal recognitions of same-sex unions changes daily, and significant shifts have occurred within the last several years. By early 2015, same-sex marriage had been legalized in 36 states and the District of Columbia, with several other states in the process of appeals to overturn state bans on same-sex marriage. In April 2015, the Supreme Court of the United States (SCOTUS) heard cases from Michigan, Ohio, Kentucky, and Tennessee in order to examine individuals’ constitutional right to marry as well as states’ ability not to recognize same-sex marriages performed in other states with legalized same-sex marriage. In June 2015, SCOTUS legalized same-sex marriage on a federal level, revoking states’ rights to deny recognition of same-sex marriages.

The marriage equality movement has worked toward the freedom to marry for same-sex couples over the last few decades, alongside vast changes in public opinion. In 1988, 71% of the United States population opposed gay marriage; this number dropped to 52% in 2006 (Baunach,
A Gallup poll done in May 2014 suggested that 66% of the population believed same-sex relations between consenting adults should be legal, whereas 30% believe it should not be legal (McCarthy, 2014). Furthermore, the study showed that 55% of the population at this time supported legal recognition of gay marriage, with the same rights as opposite-sex marriages (McCarthy, 2014). The same poll found that 42% of the population still opposed the idea of marriage equality for same-sex couples (McCarthy, 2014). ABC News and The Washington Post (2015) conducted a poll suggesting that 61% of Americans believed same-sex marriage should be legal, whereas 35% still oppose same-sex marriage. Pew Research Center has conducted polls around support of same-sex marriage since 2001. Findings suggest that support for same-sex marriage has steadily increased over the last 15 years (Pew Research Center, 2016). Polls done in 2001 found that 35% of Americans favored same-sex marriage while 57% opposed it. In March 2016, the same poll found that 55% of Americans favor same-sex marriage while 37% oppose it (Pew Research Center, 2016).

The changes occurring at state and federal levels as well as the changes in public opinion signify a widespread sociopolitical shift in support for same-sex marriage. Despite such monumental changes in the sociopolitical climate, the impact on those within the gay community is not necessarily exclusively positive. In states with marriage amendments that banned or overturned same-sex marriage, gay and lesbian individuals experienced higher levels of psychological distress (Rostosky, Riggle, Horne, & Miller, 2009). Ongoing efforts to overturn state legislature negatively impact the mental health of individuals in the gay community. Despite federal laws granting same-sex marriage rights across the United States, certain states and counties have been particularly defiant when granting marriage licenses for same-sex couples. Furthermore, the assumption that all same-sex couples desire marriage has been a
misconception brought on by the assertive push toward equal rights. Like many heterosexuals, not all gay and lesbian individuals have the desire to marry. Some argue that the institution of marriage is not only oppressive in nature but forces same-sex couples into defining their relationship based on heterosexual norms (Yep, Lovaas, & Elia, 2003).

The differing perspectives on same-sex marriage within the gay population are one of many factors influencing the decision for same-sex couples to marry. For years, gay and lesbian individuals have created and maintained relationships without the option to marry. Domestic partnerships and civil unions in some states first provided some benefits and steps toward equality for same-sex couples. Couples in civil unions do not differ significantly from couples without civil unions in several aspects of relationship dynamics such as intimacy, familial support, social support, and level of “outness;” however, same-sex couples not in civil unions may be more likely to end their relationship than same-sex civil union couples or heterosexual married couples (Balsam, Beauchaine, Rothblum, & Solomon, 2008). Though the relationship between legalization and relationship length is not necessarily causal, couples in legal unions appear less likely to end their relationships. Thus, there seems to be a positive correlation between legally recognized couples and commitment. MacIntosh, Reissing, and Andruff (2010) studied the impact of legal marriage on the first cohort of same-sex couples to wed in Canada. Couples in this study experienced primarily positive consequences of marriage in terms of relationship satisfaction and attachment security; additionally, social, relational, and political elements played a role in participants’ experience of legalizing their relationship (MacIntosh et al., 2010). Overall, MacIntosh et al. (2010) understood consequences of same-sex marriage in terms of legal and practical benefits, social support, and relationship satisfaction.
Although the decision to marry may be a personal commitment, couples live within and are impacted by a variety of external systems. Bronfenbrenner’s (1979) ecological systems theory refers to these systems as the interpersonal and environmental influences that surround and influence an individual. Same-sex couples develop their relationship within the context of interpersonal relationships with family members and friends, providing a social network as an integral part of their mesosystem (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Same-sex couples are also impacted by larger cultural ideologies and shifts in these ideologies. These macrosystemic factors not only influence the dynamic between individuals within a relationship but also those greater sociocultural opinions that may influence the way in which family members and friends interact with same-sex couples (Bronfenbrenner, 1979).

Although the body of research on gay and lesbian couples continues to grow, it remains limited in comparison to the abundant literature on heterosexual couples. Within the rapidly changing sociopolitical climate in the United States and across the world, same-sex couples of all ages are gaining access to marriage in unprecedented numbers. The present study adds to the growing body of research on the phenomenon of same-sex marriage, during a time when equal rights for same-sex couples continues to change. This study addresses differences among individuals of different ages who have made the choice to legally marry their same-sex partners. The findings of this study contribute valuable information for clinicians working with gay and lesbian individuals as well as same-sex couples of all ages as it sheds light on the impact of sociopolitical climate on relationship dynamics within various systems. Furthermore, this study offers insight into the impact of cultural shifts in attitudes toward same-sex marriage on the gay population.
Research Questions and Hypotheses

The present study sought to answer the following questions using both quantitative and qualitative measures: What is the effect of age on social support received by gay and lesbian individuals in legal same-sex marriages? How have cultural shifts impacted the support that individuals receive? What is the impact of age on the experience of choosing to marry one’s partner?

This study explored various aspects of social support received by gay and lesbian individuals from friends and family, as well as how these relationships with others impact each participant’s marriage. Furthermore, patterns in social support were examined based on age of the participants. It was hypothesized that younger cohorts of gay and lesbian individuals will receive more support from friends and family based on the sociopolitical climate in which they have been raised. Whereas older cohorts may experience more support from friends, this study hypothesized that younger cohorts receive more significant support from family in addition to friends.
Chapter 2: Review of Literature

Ecological Systems Theory

Urie Bronfenbrenner (1979) created a model of human development based on the numerous factors influencing how a child interacts with the environment. Since its original development, Bronfenbrenner’s ecological systems theory has been used in understanding the environmental factors influencing an individual on various levels. In Bronfenbrenner’s theory, the levels of environmental factors influencing an individual are organized into spheres based on proximity to the individual. Ecological systems theory includes the microsystem, the mesosystem, the exosystem, the macrosystem, and the chronosystem, which are used to describe both past and present environmental influences (see Figure 1).

Figure 1. Bronfenbrenner’s Ecological Systems

The microsystem is closest in proximity to an individual, consisting of systems the person directly interacts with (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, 1994). Components of the microsystem include
an individual’s interactions with family, friends, neighborhood, or workplace. These direct social interactions are an integral part of the microsystem, where individuals relate to others and also contribute to the environment where they experience these interactions. The mesosystem involves the interaction of various microsystemic influences in an individual’s life (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, 1994). For example, a person’s relationship with their spouse may be related to or influenced by their relationship with their family of origin. In the context of this study, a person’s marital satisfaction may be influenced by the support he or she receives from family and friends.

The exosystem consists of environmental settings that a person does not directly interact with, and thus indirectly influence an individual’s life (Bronfenbrenner 1979, 1994). For example, whereas an individual’s workplace falls into his or her microsystem, the workplace of his or her spouse would be categorized as an exosystemic factor. If an individual’s spouse loses his or her job, that person is indirectly impacted by his or her spouse’s workplace interactions. Additionally, if an individual’s husband or wife is uncomfortable disclosing his or her marital status in a work-related setting due to fear of discrimination, his or her spouse is also impacted indirectly. In this context, a spouse may not be included in his or her partner’s healthcare benefits.

Bronfenbrenner (1979, 1994) described the macrosystem as the outermost level of this developmental model that is comprised of social culture, values, and laws. Macrosystemic influences such as societal norms and beliefs comprise an environment in which a person creates his or her own beliefs and values about him or herself and the world. The changes in cultural attitudes toward same-sex marriage have a tremendous impact on the gay population, with 66% of the U.S. population supporting the right for same-sex couples to marry (McCarthy, 2014).
Although it is difficult to distinguish whether the shift in societal attitudes was followed by legislative changes, or vice versa, the Supreme Court’s ruling to legalize same-sex marriage on a federal level shows the impact and interplay of culture, values, and laws on gay and lesbian individuals.

Finally, the chronosystem encompasses systemic changes or consistencies over time or across a person’s lifespan (Bronfenbrenner, 1994). These changes over time include characteristics of an individual, such as age, as well as characteristics of a person’s environment, such as sociopolitical climate (Bronfenbrenner, 1994). Cultural changes over time impact the environment that surrounds individuals, and these cultural shifts have the potential to alter self-perceptions and views of the world around them. In the context of this study, older generations of gay and lesbian individuals have lived through significant cultural changes in attitudes toward minority sexual orientations as well as same-sex marriage that may impact them on an individual level.

**The Marriage Equality Movement**

**A Definition of Marriage**

The concept of marriage has constantly changed over the course of history. Monogamy has replaced once common polygamy; once concerned with control of labor and property transmission, marriage now signifies mutual commitment and happiness (Chauncey, 2005). There is no universally accepted definition of marriage due to the evolving nature of the institution and the varying groups and cultures that identify with the tradition (Blankenhorn, 2007). In the United States, four major and fundamental changes in the idea of marriage have occurred since the nineteenth century (Chauncey, 2005). First, the right to choose one’s spouse has come to be seen as a fundamental civil right. Second, the marital roles assigned to husbands
and wives have shifted, becoming less defined by strict gender roles. Third, the construct of marriage has become interconnected with economic benefits and legal protections. Finally, the religious relationship to the concept of marriage has become less significant as the power of any one religion has declined (Chauncey, 2005).

The right to choose one’s partner in marriage, no matter how much that choice distressed the systems one was a part of, came to be seen as a fundamental civil right by the courts and the American public (Chauncey, 2005; Lee, 2010). At various points in history, outside factors played a more significant role in a couple’s choice to marry. Parents often interfered with their children’s decisions and even laws were created to prevent “immoral” or “unnatural” couplings, particularly with relation to interracial marriages (Chauncey, 2005). An unprecedented shift in the definition of marriage occurred in the midst of World War II, when the United Nations adopted the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which declared that the “right to marry” was one of the fundamental rights of humankind (Chauncey, 2005; Glendon, 1989; Lee, 2010). In the years that followed, several state courts determined that laws banning interracial marriage were unconstitutional (Chauncey, 2005). The Supreme Court of the United States finally declared this as the law of the land in 1967, declaring that marriage is one of the “basic civil rights of man, fundamental to our very existence and survival” and proclaiming that a person has the fundamental civil right to choose his or her spouse regardless of skin color (Loving v. Virginia, 1967). Decades later, this very ruling would be a propelling factor in the marriage equality movement for gays and lesbians.

Over the years, marriage has become a more gender-neutral and egalitarian institution (Chauncey, 2005; Neuman, 2013). The differences in marital roles assigned to husbands and wives are no longer as strict and separate. Into the 1800s, marriage was the last time a woman
could consent to a legal agreement on her own (Chauncey, 2005). Once married, a woman’s personal property and earnings became the property of her husband. Monumental changes in the early 1900s, such as fluctuations in the wage economy and women’s suffrage, propelled the fight for equal rights for women within marriages. The feminist movement continuing through the 1970s substantially contributed to the now gender-neutral and mutual obligations of legally bound marriage. Around the same time, divorce settlements were transformed and arrangements were tailored based on the actual circumstances of a couple rather than the long assumed roles of men and women within a marriage (Chauncey, 2005; Wriggins, 2000). Husbands and wives owed one another the same things, and marriage became a relationship between equals in the eyes of the law (Chauncey, 2005; Wriggins, 2000). As a result, men and women became freer to negotiate their own roles within marriage. The idea of distinct family roles assigned to “husband” and “wife” have become less significant, broadening the concept of what marriage looks like (Chauncey, 2005; Neuman, 2013). Thus, the idea that marriage can only consist of a man and a woman is challenged.

As laws around marriage became more egalitarian, legal marriage continued to be a primary source in allocating state and private benefits (Chauncey, 2005; Doskow & Hertz, 2016). In the United States, marriage has become connected to the allocation of public and private benefits with significant economic and legal consequences. Automatic rights awarded to spouses include state and federal tax incentives, health and life insurance coverage, inheritance, pension, and other benefits (Chauncey, 2005; Doskow & Hertz, 2016). The American social insurance system was therefore built on an inequitable distribution of benefits to married individuals, leaving those who chose not to marry (or in the case of gays and lesbians, those unable to legally marry their partners of choice) at a disadvantage (Chauncey, 2005; Doskow & Hertz, 2016).
Legal marriage became tied to undeniable advantages, thus the exclusion of same-sex couples not only denied them the “fundamental right” to marry the person of their choice, but also denied them the opportunity to gain the other benefits connected with legal marriage. As the Stonewall generation of the gay community began to age and these marital advantages became more pertinent in terms of insurance, inheritance, and other legal matters tied to marriage, the equal rights movement became powerfully connected to marriage equality (Chauncey, 2005).

Finally, religious influences on marriage have become less significant over time. The power of any one religious group to impose its marriage rules on others has sharply declined (Baunach, 2012; Chauncey, 2005). Opponents of same-sex marriage often argue that the concept of marriage is a religious institution between a man and a woman, offering to legalize same-sex relationships by other names such as civil unions or domestic partnerships. Furthermore, the idea of marriage as an institution for procreation has also shifted over time. Though children are often left out of the formal definition of marriage, their existence is a primary reason for the social construction of such an institution (Blankenhorn, 2007). Historically, religious beliefs about marriage have been complex and complicated in that not all churches or faiths have agreed on the sacramental definition of marriage (Chauncey, 2005). As the concept of marriage evolved over time and was seen to include both social and practical implications as civil liberties, religious concepts of marriage also shifted. When Massachusetts became the first state to legalize same-sex marriage, the Unitarian Universalist Association, Reform Judaism, Reconstructionist Judaism, and the Metropolitan Community Church immediately encouraged their clergy to officiate weddings between same-sex partners (Chauncey, 2005; Paulson, 2004). Non-protestants and Jews in particular have been more supportive of same-sex marriage throughout the years, likely due to their lack of systematic gay condemnation within their traditions (Baunach, 2012;
Olson, Cadge, & Harrison, 2006). Despite the openness among some faiths, the Roman Catholic Church, the Episcopal Church, United Methodist Church, Presbyterian Church, National Baptist Convention, and many other Protestant and Orthodox denominations prohibited clergy from officiated same-sex weddings and denounced the idea of same-sex marriage (Chauncey, 2005, Paulson, 2004). By the early 2000s, the debate within the religious community left no single definition of marriage across faiths (Baunach, 2012; Chauncey, 2005).

Why Marriage?

Equal rights for gays and lesbians in the United States is an ongoing social and political endeavor. In the last several decades, acceptance into all aspects of American life have included a fight for equal protection with regards to employment discrimination, housing access, medical treatment, partner benefits, adoption, political representation, and legal marriage (Alms, 2000; Chauncey, 2005). The right to marry took center stage in the equal rights movement for gay and lesbian individuals in both social and political arenas as the institution of marriage, and all the advantages offered through legal marriage, came to be seen as civil rights. Gerstmann (2004) discussed the extreme value Americans place on “having a happy marriage,” rating this as one of their two most important goals or as a very important goal. Furthermore, marriage has been linked to health, longevity, and psychological wellbeing (Cabaj & Purcell, 1998; Gerstmann, 2004). Mortality rates are 50% higher for unmarried women than for married women. Unmarried patients have longer and more expensive hospital stays than married patients, and are two and a half times more likely to be discharged into a nursing home even after accounting for alternative factors such as severity of illness, age, race, and diagnosis, leaving the elderly at particular risk (Gerstmann, 2004).
Furthermore, marriage is historically tied to the concept of lifelong commitment. Lesbian and gay individuals of all ages have grown up in a culture that values coupling and models marriage as the embodiment of intimate romantic relationships (Chauncey, 2005; Gerstmann, 2004). Despite the heteronormative concept of marriage, individuals growing up in American culture are generally taught to value marriage as the ultimate way of committing to a partner. Gay and lesbian individuals have grown up in a culture that teaches them to value something that was unavailable and unattainable to them until recently. Marriage, then, offers not only the opportunity to commit to a partner in a way that society has modeled as normative and appropriate, but it also offers health and psychological benefits.

**Intra-Community Debate**

Within the gay community, individuals have historically stood on both sides of the argument for and against same-sex marriage. Like many heterosexuals, not all gay and lesbian individuals have the desire to marry. Despite a decline in heterosexual marriages in the last several years, the cultural expectation that adults are supposed to marry remains. Gay and lesbian individuals who take the *radical position* argue that the institution of marriage is not only oppressive in nature, but forces same-sex couples into defining their relationship based on heterosexual norms and view marriage as an institution of patriarchy (Schecter, Tracy, Page, & Luong, 2008; Yep et al., 2003).

The same-sex marriage movement has been led by those who take the *assimilationist position*, with the belief that equal rights to marry for gay and lesbian individuals will lead to a better quality of life (Yep, et al., 2003). Before legal recognition of same-sex relationships became an option, same-sex couples created their own ways of committing to one another and giving recognition to the validity of their relationships (Eskridge, 2001; Schecter, et al., 2008).
Commitment ceremonies, despite their lack of legal recognition and benefits, often combined aspects of traditional heterosexual weddings with personalized aspects unique to their relationships to convey messages about the depth of the couple’s love for one another, the affirmation of their relationship, and about their sexual orientation (McQueeny, 2003; Schecter, et al., 2008). In addition to affirming their feelings to one another within the relationship, couples that chose to publicly commit to one another also cited the importance of being recognized by others (Schecter, et al., 2008).

Despite some differing views within the gay community, the same-sex marriage movement has come to represent a fight for civil liberties and equal rights of gays and lesbians in the United States. With the fight for marriage equality, gay couples are now included in a greater, heteronormative expectation to marry (Rothblum, 2005). As federal laws now protect and offer gay and lesbian individuals the right to marry, the expectations for couples have shifted. With the right to marry, gay and lesbian couples are now subjected to society’s assumptions of how relationships are generally defined and what marriage means.

**Recognition of Same-Sex Relationships**

The equal rights movement for gay and lesbian individuals has made significant strides within the last 50 years. Although some supporters feel that change is not happening quickly enough, the gay rights movement has rapidly gained momentum when compared to other equal rights movements, such as the Civil Rights Movement, in United States history (Chamberlain & Mumford, 2013). Despite significant differences in these two movements, equal rights remain at the core of both. In the movement toward equal rights for sexual minorities, marriage equality remains a significant focus within the gay community (Eskridge, 2001; Pew Research Center, 2011).
The legal recognition of same-sex couples has been a debate at the state and federal levels of government, as well as a focus of the general public for decades. Opposition to gay marriage dropped 20% from 1988 to 2006 (Baunach, 2010) and that number continues to decline. Over the last 15 years, support for same-sex marriage has steadily increased over the last (Pew Research Center, 2016). Polls done in 2001 found that 35% of Americans favored same-sex marriage while 57% opposed it. In March 2016, the same poll found that 55% of Americans favor same-sex marriage while 37% oppose it (Pew Research Center, 2016). In less than 20 years, same-sex marriage was legalized in 36 states and the District of Columbia, preceding the federal legalization of same-sex marriage in 2015. Changes in legislation, public opinion, and messages from religious figures have contributed to the movement toward marriage equality in the last few decades.

**Legislative Change**

On the macrosystemic level, the marriage equality movement has made significant gains through changes in legislation. Legal recognition of same-sex couples has included domestic partnerships, civil unions, and marriage. Shifts on the state and federal levels of government have impacted same-sex couples across the United States in the last 30 years. Furthermore, public opinion has continued to increase in favor of gay marriage (Baunach, 2010). By examining these major legislative changes over time, a timeline of events may give insight into chronosystemic influences on gay and lesbian individuals.

In 1996, President Bill Clinton signed the Defense of Marriage Act (DOMA), banning federal recognition of same-sex marriage. DOMA defined marriage as “a legal union between one man and one woman as husband and wife,” effectively denying same-sex couples equal rights to heterosexual couples (Defense of Marriage Act, 110 Stat. 2419, 1996). Following this
federal legislation, several states began Supreme Court hearings on the constitutionality of denying equal rights to same-sex couples. Since the late 1990s, legislation has shifted a number of times based on judicial rulings around the constitutionality of same-sex marriage and state-level recognition of same-sex marriages. In some states, civil unions and domestic partnerships were created to legally recognize same-sex couples without the label of marriage. California became the first state to offer domestic partnerships for same-sex couples in 1999, while Vermont established civil unions in an effort to provide same-sex couples with a limited number of the protections offered in marriage (Rothblum, 2008).

In 2004, Massachusetts became the first state to issue marriage licenses to same-sex couples. California and Connecticut joined Massachusetts in 2008 and five more states offered same-sex marriage in the following year. However, the movement toward marriage equality for gay and lesbian couples did not move forward without opposition. Several court hearings challenged legislation legalizing same-sex marriage and amending state constitutions to ban same-sex marriage. In 2004 alone, 11 states passed amendments banning same-sex marriage. Rostosky et al., (2009) published a study demonstrating the impact of macrosystemic factors on individuals, reporting that gay and lesbian individuals experience higher levels of psychological distress in states with marriage amendments banning or overturning same-sex marriage. Civil unions and domestic partnerships continued to be passed in several states throughout the mid-2000s, offering legal recognition and some benefits for more same-sex couples. By the end of 2009, the marriage equality movement gained momentum with seven more states legalizing same-sex marriage.

In 2010, CNN released a national poll showing, for the first time, a national majority supporting marriage equality (Cable News Network, 2010). Seemingly following a shift in
public opinion, several United States district courts ruled DOMA unconstitutional in 2012. Support for legalizing same-sex marriage continued to increase, with a record breaking 58% of Americans believing in legal marriage for gay and lesbian couples while 36% believed same-sex marriage should be illegal (Washington Post-ABC News, 2013). By the year 2014, 10 more states passed laws legalizing same-sex marriage. Several court cases continued to strike down marriage bans for same-sex couples, and the momentum for marriage equality continued to grow.

In addition to these developments in individual states, same-sex marriage was gaining support on a federal level by both the President and the Supreme Court. President Barack Obama became the first president in history to endorse support for same-sex marriage in his 2015 State of the Union address. Furthermore, in April 2015, SCOTUS granted review of many cases in which same-sex marriages were not recognized by Ohio, Michigan, Kentucky, and Tennessee (Lambda Legal, 2015). The cases brought forward questioned whether or not the United States Constitution requires marriage for all couples or whether this right can be determined by individual states. Additionally, addressed was the right of states not to recognize same-sex marriages performed in other states. In June 2015, SCOTUS ruled, “that same-sex couples may exercise the fundamental right to marry” under the Fourteenth Amendment of the Constitution (Obergefell v. Hodges, 2015). Furthermore, SCOTUS ruled, “that there is no lawful basis for a State to refuse to recognize a lawful same-sex marriage performed in another State on the ground of its same-sex character” (Obergefell v. Hodges, 2015).

Societal and Cultural Change

The relationship between personal values and public opinion is one that has been examined in many ways (Kinder & Sanders, 1996, Koch, 1998; Nelson, Clawson, & Oxley,
It is difficult to discern whether a shift in personal values is followed by changes in public opinion, or if a movement in public opinion changes personal values. According to Gordon Allport (1979), the establishment of laws creates a public conscience that checks overt expression of prejudice, and with this change of expression likely comes a change in thought processes. Although it is difficult to distinguish whether the shift in societal attitudes was followed by legislative changes, or vice versa, support for same-sex marriage continues to increase (Baunach, 2010).

Regardless of which comes first, mass media has an undeniable impact on both individual perspectives as well as greater societal perspectives on various issues over time (Cochran, 2011; McCombs, 2013). In the late 1990s and early 2000s, the discussion of same-sex marriage appeared in the news more frequently than ever before (Bennett, 1998; Cochran, 2011). In addition to increased news media coverage, exposure to minority sexual orientations has also increased in mainstream television and popular culture. Technology has brought larger macrosystemic factors down to a microsystemic level. Television shows like Modern Family, Grey’s Anatomy, Scandal, and Empire portray gay (and married) characters within a contextual frame to which many Americans relate. As more Americans allowed these stories and characters into their homes, societal attitudes about what it means to be gay have shifted (Loftus, 2001). Easy access to the Internet and social media outlets continues to bring awareness to the equal rights movement. Media campaigns such as Say No to Hate and It Gets Better exemplify the reach that the Internet has offered to sexual minorities nationwide, involving a space where celebrities and public figures provide messages to others who may be experiencing difficulty around their sexual identity. National organizations such as The Human Rights Campaign (HRC) and Lambda Legal have worked not only to bring awareness to issues impacting sexual
minorities, but have also actively worked to bring about social and legislative changes for equality.

While the media undoubtedly has an impact on public opinion, there seem to be a variety of other factors influencing public opinion on gay marriage. Female gender, higher education levels, and younger age predict greater odds of support for gay marriage (Todd & Ong, 2012). Younger generations of Americans are impacted more by personal contact, microsystemic connections such as having gay friends or acquaintances, than their older counterparts (Becker & Scheufele, 2011). Furthermore, younger individuals have higher levels of active engagement when it comes to their position on gay rights (Becker & Scheufele, 2011).

Religions attitudes toward gays and lesbians have shifted over the years, also impacting public opinion. In the 1970s, many mainline Protestant denominations issued official statements condemning legal discrimination against those in the gay community (Chauncey, 2005). Before 1980, The Lutheran Church in America, the Unitarian Universalist Association, the United Methodist Church, the United Church of Christ, and the United Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A. all issued statements in support of gay rights (Chauncey, 2005). Older individuals seem to be more influenced by religious and ideological beliefs when it comes to opinions on same-sex marriage (Becker & Scheufele, 2011). Overall, those who attend religious services less or are more liberal in theological and political views have greater odds of supporting gay marriage (Todd & Ong, 2012). As some religious fronts, including many branches of Christian and Jewish faiths, become more flexible in their acknowledgment of same-sex unions, the ways in which religion plays a role in personal opinion of same-sex marriage may also become more accepting (Masci, 2014). Furthermore, the impact of this openness is two-fold. Gay and lesbian individuals identifying with these more accepting religious fronts minimizes conflict between
one’s sexuality and one’s religious values. Additionally, heterosexuals who identify with these more accepting religious sects are in turn more likely to have an openness to the idea of same-sex marriage.

Impact of Marriage on Same-sex Couples

Practical Benefits

Although marriage is often simply associated with a couple’s commitment to one another, several other legal and practical benefits accompany legal recognition of marriage (Doskow & Hertz, 2016; Hunter, 2004; Munoz, 2005). These legal obligations and benefits include:

1. Mutual obligations of financial support for one another.
2. Death benefits and automatic inheritance rights when one partner dies without leaving a will.
3. The right to sue for injuries to the other partner.
4. The right to petition for legal-immigration status for a spouse.
5. Federal and state tax benefits.
6. Estate planning and housing benefits.
7. Social security, Medicare, and disability benefits for a spouse.
8. Employment benefits.
9. Medical benefits.

Health benefits and employee-related spousal benefits offered by private entities are also impacted by legal marriage. Furthermore, marriage offers the opportunity for various other consumer benefits including “family” discounts and frequent flyer miles (Doskow & Hertz, 2016; Hunter, 2004; Munoz, 2005).
The benefits that a legal marriage offers both legally and financially are unmatched by other forms of commitment. While some of these benefits may occur in common law marriages, domestic partnerships, or civil unions, legally married same-sex couples, regardless of sex designation, are immediately provided with pension and health benefits, income tax, power of attorney, and immigration law in the same way that heterosexual married couples are (Doskow & Hertz, 2016; MacIntosh et al., 2010). Same-sex couples were provided with these immediate benefits only after DOMA was struck down and the federal government was willing to recognize any marriage. Legal recognition has been identified as a primary reason for many same-sex couples that choose to marry, including feelings of being protected by the law and being given the opportunity for equal parental rights (MacIntosh et al., 2010; Ramos, Goldberg, & Badgett, 2009; Schecter et al., 2008). Other legal benefits identified by couples have included the automatic right to care for their partner in case of illness or injury and to act on other legal matters (Alderson, 2004; Doskow & Hertz, 2016).

**Coming out**

The process of coming out has been theoretically viewed as a developmental process where same-sex attracted individuals begin to recognize this attraction and share it with others (Cass, 1979; Dunlap, 2014). In some cases, it is possible that legalized marriage would increase disclosure and positively impact relationship satisfaction in same-sex couples (Cabaj & Purcel, 1998). Lesbians in civil unions have been shown to have higher levels of outness than lesbians not in civil unions, further suggesting that legal recognition of relationships impacts level of disclosure (Solomon, Rothblum, & Balsam, 2004). Disclosure of one’s sexual orientation often occurs in stages, marking level of outness based on whom the person shares this information with (Balsam et al., 2008; Cabaj & Purcel, 1998; Solomon, Rothblum, & Balsam, 2007). For
example, one may be out to friends but not family, or may be out in personal relationships but not at work. Balsam et al. (2008) found that level of outness is a positive predictor of relationship quality in gay men. Thus, couples that chose to legally marry may be more likely to disclose their sexual orientation and relationship based on the formal recognition of marriage, and this may also be associated with higher levels of relationship satisfaction (MacIntosh et al., 2010).

In order to benefit from tax exemptions and joint healthcare, gay and lesbian individuals must disclose their same-sex marriage to employers and insurance companies. Thus, marriage may force individuals to come out to employers or coworkers to receive these benefits. Ramos et al. (2009) found that over 80% of participants indicated that being in a same-sex marriage had caused them to be more likely to come out to coworkers and healthcare providers. However, despite major legislative changes in the marriage equality movement, same-sex couples still face fear of workplace discrimination as laws protecting rights of sexual minorities in both public and private sectors have not caught up to the momentum of same-sex marriage laws (Lambda Legal, 2015).

**Social Support**

Relationships develop within the context of their environment. Solomon, Rothblum, and Balsam (2003, 2004) found that heterosexual married women perceived more support from and had more contact with their families of origin than did lesbians. Same-sex couples receive higher levels of support from friends than they do from family (Kurdek 2005, 2006). In response to negative familial reactions to one’s sexual identity or choice to marry a same-sex partner, gay and lesbian individuals often create a friend network that provides social support. Legal marriage for same-sex couples has increased societal support, and subsequently social support, due to the higher level of social recognition (Balsam et al., 2008; Lannutti, 2008; Ramos et al., 2009).
With increased social recognition, it is possible that family members of gay and lesbian individuals might not only provide familial recognition but also contribute to support from family members. Dunlap (2014) examined generational changes in narratives of the coming out process. Results indicated vast differences among generations in personal difficulties (such as the loss of friends) as individuals came to accept and integrate their sexual identity. Older generations seemed to wonder how different their lives might have been growing up in later generations. Despite increased acceptance, not all same-sex couples have experienced increased support from friends and family. Some research has found that gay and lesbian individuals describe feelings of anguish and hurt when their loved ones respond to their legalized marriage with anger (Alderson, 2004; Lannutti, 2008).

With the changes in public opinion and societal acceptance of same-sex couples through legal recognition of marriage, support for couples has likely shifted. Generationally, younger cohorts of gay and lesbian individuals have developed relationships within a cultural context that is more accepting than that of their older counterparts. The cultural climate has also become physically safer for gay and lesbian individuals to come out. This study sought to explore the relationship between the changing sociopolitical climate and the support that gay and lesbian persons receive from family and friends. Have younger generations of same-sex couples received more support from family than older generations? If so, how has this contributed to the quality of their relationship and their decision to marry?

**Relationship Satisfaction**

Gay and lesbian couples have similar factors contributing to relationship satisfaction as heterosexual couples (Gottman et al., 2003; Jones, Campbell, & Green, 2009; Kurdek, 2003, 2005, 2006). Jones et al. (2009) performed a longitudinal study measuring relationship
satisfaction in gay male couples over a nine-year period, comparing couples who chose to legalize their marriage in that timeframe with those who did not. Couples who chose to legally marry ranked significantly higher on levels of closeness and caregiving as well as in the amount of supportive recognition received as gay men individually and as a couple. Legally married same-sex couples have also been found to note an increase in commitment and connection, expressing greater feelings of love and a closer emotional bond (Alderson, 2004; Lannutti, 2008; Ramos et al., 2009; Schecter et al., 2008). The correlation between levels of closeness and connection with marriage may be two-fold. It is possible that couples who felt this closer level of connection before marriage chose to marry due to these feelings. Furthermore, it may be that the commitment of marriage contributes to increased experiences of emotional bonding.

Some research suggests same-sex couples report higher levels of relationship satisfaction than do heterosexual married couples, regardless of their legal status (Balsam et al., 2008; MacIntosh, et al., 2010). Additionally, gay male and lesbian cohabitating couples show consistent relationship quality over time whereas heterosexual couples appear to decline in relationship quality when they begin living together (Kurdek, 2008). The commitment and meaning attributed to cohabitation may contribute to the consistent relationship quality of same-sex couples. Although this is true for the majority of same-sex couples, the factors that contribute to relationship quality in gay male couples and lesbian couples differ. Balsam et al. (2008) found that relationship quality in gay men was predicted by less conflict, greater level of outness, and shorter relationship length. In lesbian couples, less conflict and more frequent sex at the beginning of their relationship were identified as longitudinal predictors of relationship quality (Balsam et al., 2008).
In comparing same-sex couples in civil unions, same-sex couples not in civil unions, and heterosexual married couples in Vermont, Balsam et al. (2008) found that same sex-couples not in civil unions did not differ from those in civil unions over a 3-year period. However, those not in a civil union were more likely to end their relationship than same-sex couples in a civil union and heterosexual married couples. While relationship recognition may not be the sole predictor of couples’ future relationship status, it appears that legally recognized couples are less likely to terminate their relationship (Balsam et al., 2008; Kurdek, 2004).

**Previous Research on Cohort Changes**

Shifts in sociopolitical climate and American culture have impacted the world in which gay and lesbian individuals form their identity, maintain relationships, and make decisions around their lives. In contrast to older cohorts, younger generations of same-sex attracted youth tend to maintain their peer groups as well as maintain positive relationships with their families (Grierson & Smith, 2005; Savin-Williams, 2006, 2008). Additionally, the majority of younger gay and lesbian individuals have been exposed to a significant amount of positive gay and lesbian cultural images and icons (Grierson & Smith, 2005; Savin-Williams, 2006, 2008). Dunlap (2014) found a significant theme of *how different I would have been* in older cohorts of gay and lesbian individuals discussing the process of coming out. Furthermore, in comparison to older groups, fewer young gay and lesbian participants endorsed more than one type of problem in coming out than do older adults (Dunlap, 2014). Younger cohorts seem to report more support from friends and family, with less of a need to separate from their old life (Dunlap, 2014; Elze, 2005).

The cultural shifts in visibility and acceptance of gay and lesbian individuals have also impacted the age at which individuals reach developmental milestones (Drasin et al., 2008;
Dube, 2000). Dube (2000) studied three cohorts of gay males (16-21, 22-29, and 30-39 years of age) finding the Younger cohort was more likely to self-identify as gay before engaging in same-sex sexual activity, whereas older cohorts engaged in same-sex sexual behavior before self-identifying as gay. Drasin et al. (2008) found that social, sexual, and psychological milestones are occurring at earlier ages for younger cohorts of gay males. While similar research has not been replicated in lesbians, this evidence suggests a cultural component to the identity development of same-sex attracted individuals.

Decisions around legalizing relationships also seem to have generational as well as gender differences. Same-sex couples in the United States who marry or legalize their relationship tend to be younger than opposite-sex couples (Badgett & Herman, 2011). Additionally, women are more likely to formalize their relationships than are men (Badgett & Herman, 2011). Since the impactful SCOTUS decisions in *Windsor v. United States* in June 2013 and *Obergefell v. Hodges* in June 2015, the rate of marriage for same-sex couples has steadily increased. In 2013, 21% of all same-sex couples were married; by June 2015 38% of all same-sex couples chose to marry; and by the end of 2015, an estimated 45% of same-sex couples married (Gates & Brown, 2015). Though literature in the last decade has begun to reflect an understanding of the dynamics of same-sex marriage, very little has focused on how these dynamics differ among generations of gay and lesbian individuals. Additionally, extant literature seems to lack an understanding of how individuals in same-sex marriages receive support around their marriage and how this support differs across age groups.

**Summary**

Since the Stonewall riots of 1969, the equal rights movement for gay and lesbian individuals has progressed quickly and significantly (Eskridge, 2001). The number of states with
legalized same-sex marriage has increased every year since 2008, with significant legislation passed in the last 12 months alone, culminating with the Supreme Court’s ruling to nationally legalize same-sex marriage. Same-sex couples find practical benefits such as pension and health benefits, income tax, and power of attorney as important pieces of the right to marry. As same-sex relationships develop within their environments, social support from friends and family play a role in the way same-sex couples relate to one another and the world around them.

Research has shown that cultural shifts and changes in sociopolitical climate have impacted the way in which gay and lesbian individuals develop and integrate their identity as well as the way they come out to their family and friends (Dunlap, 2014; Savin-Williams, 2008). Furthermore, these effects differ in various generations (Dunlap, 2014; Savin-Williams, 2008). The current study examined the impact of social support on relationship satisfaction in legally married same-sex couples. Additionally, this study sought to understand the ways that major shifts in culture have influenced the social support that gay and lesbian persons receive from friends and family.
Chapter 3: Research Design and Methodology

The current study consisted of a concurrent mixed methods design, which involved collecting and analyzing quantitative and qualitative data in a single, concurrent phase (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011). This mixed methods approach allowed for triangulation of data, converging and corroborating multiple methods to provide greater richness to findings (Greene & Caracelli, 1997). Furthermore, complementarity allowed for the elaboration and enhancement of quantitative results from the findings of qualitative methods (Greene & Caracelli, 1997).

This study sought to answer the following questions using both quantitative and qualitative measures: What is the effect of age on social support of gay and lesbian individuals in legal same-sex marriages? How have cultural shifts impacted the support that individuals receive?

Qualitative data collection was guided by phenomenological theory, highlighting and emphasizing the importance of subjective experience and personal perspective (Goulding, 2004). Phenomenological theory describes and classifies individual experiences to establish deeper, richer understanding through language (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011; Goulding, 2004). Phenomenological theory contributed to this online study by increasing participants’ ability to express their unique experiences, while also supporting an integration of experiences to find similarities and differences among participant responses collectively.

Quantitative data was collected through a demographic questionnaire, including gender, sexual orientation, and age. The independent variable (IV) in this study was participant age. The dependent variables (DV) were social support received from family and social support received from friends as measured by a quantitative, Likert-scale questionnaire.
This study explored the perceived social support that gay and lesbian individuals receive from friends and family, how relationships with others impact each participant’s marriage, and how marriage has impacted each participant’s relationships with their spouse as well as their social network. Furthermore, patterns in social support were examined based on age of the participants. It was hypothesized that younger cohorts of gay and lesbian individuals receive more support from friends and family based on the sociopolitical climate in which they have been raised. Whereas older cohorts may experience more support from friends, this study hypothesized that younger cohorts receive more significant support from family in addition to friends.

**Sample**

The study recruited 96 participants, of which 65 individuals qualified to participate. Participants must have been 18 years or older, identify as gay or lesbian, and were legally married in any state or territory of the United States for a minimum of 6 months. Additionally, to ensure that their experiences were within the context of American culture, participants also resided in the United States for a minimum of half their lifetime. Participants were then divided into different age cohorts based on patterns found in qualitative responses.

**Procedures**

All measures were compiled into an online survey through a link to SurveyMonkey.com. Convenience sampling through personal and professional contacts within the LGBT community was utilized to begin distributing the survey link, followed by snowball sampling via personal and professional connections. The survey consisted of four parts including: (a) a consent form, (b) demographic information and inclusion criteria, (c) quantitative questionnaire, and (d) open-ended questions regarding participants’ same-sex marriage.
**Informed Consent**

After clicking the link provided, participants were directed to a page outlining the risks and rewards of the study. This page also indicated the voluntary nature of this study, outlining the participant’s right to discontinue the survey at any time without repercussions. Participants were asked to consent or refuse consent before continuing the survey (see Appendix A). Those who consented were brought to the demographic questionnaire. Those who do not give consent were informed that they were ineligible to participate in the study. Finally, all participants were brought to a page thanking them for their participation and provided with a link to the study website, where results will be posted in July 2016.

**Demographic Information**

Participants who gave consent to participate in the study completed a demographic survey with questions about age, race, gender, ethnicity, highest level of education, income, sexual orientation, and religion (see Appendix B). Also collected was information regarding number of years residing in the United States, geographic location, and length of legal marriage. No identifying information was collected, and thus anonymity of participants was protected.

**Social Support**

Social support was assessed by quantitatively measuring the extent to which respondents believe that friends and families of origin fulfill their needs for support, feedback, and information (Rothblum, Balsam, & Solomon, 2008). After a thorough search, the extant literature lacked a scale related to the perceived social support of individuals specifically related to their marriage. Therefore, this study utilized questions based on a scale assessing general social support (Procidano & Heller, 1983) that were adjusted to specifically address issues around marital support (see Appendices C and D). Participants were asked to answer each
question based on a Likert-scale (5= Almost always; 4= Sometimes; 3= Every Once in a While; 2= Rarely; and 1= Never).

**Open-ended Survey Questions**

In addition to quantitative methods, this study posed open-ended questions for participants in a survey format to collect more in-depth data on participants’ perception and experience of the relationship between legal marriage and the support they receive from family and friends. These questions (1 and 2 adapted from MacIntosh et al., 2010) formed a qualitative, exploratory piece of the current study in order to gain a better understanding of the experience of same-sex couples choosing to marry:

1. What were your reasons for getting legally married?
2. How did legally marrying your partner impact your relationships with family? With friends?
3. How did your family impact your decision to marry? How did your friends impact your decision to marry?

**Data Collection**

The study used a concurrent mixed methods design, using an online survey with both quantitative and qualitative questions (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011). Convenience sampling through personal and professional contacts within the LGBT community was utilized to begin distributing the survey link, followed by snowball sampling via personal and professional connections. The quantitative portion of the survey consisted of data from the demographic questionnaire, which included exclusion criteria, as well as the social support scales of family and friends. The qualitative portion consisted of responses to three open-ended questions that
explored individuals’ reasons for legally marrying and the impact legal marriage had on their relationships with family and friends.

**Data Analysis**

Data from the quantitative and qualitative components were collected at the same time in one survey, in line with a concurrent design. Both sets of data were analyzed and the qualitative data were explored to see how it expanded the findings produced by the quantitative analysis and vice versa. Following data collection, participants were divided into three age cohorts based on the age range of those who participated in the study: Younger (33 years old or younger); Middle (34-42 years old); and Older (43 years old or older). Each participant received two scores measuring social support: one for social support received from family and one score for social support received from friends computed based on the sum of responses to each Likert-scale questionnaire. Quantitative data were analyzed using SPSS.

Qualitative data were analyzed from the phenomenological perspective, allowing the researcher to understand the individual’s experience as they describe and perceive it (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011). Thematic analysis methods were used to derive descriptions of data through generating themes or codes (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011). Responses to these questions were coded based on common themes and emerging categories within and across age cohorts. The researcher initially searched for co-occurring or reoccurring keywords that could be seen between respondents. These keywords were gathered and organized to develop into main themes and categories. To establish inter-rater reliability, responses were coded independently by this researcher and an additional research assistant. Both raters then met to discuss the findings and agreed upon global categories and general themes in responses to each question.
Chapter 4: Results

Through a concurrent mixed methods design, this study collected quantitative and qualitative data on gay and lesbian individuals in same-sex marriages and their perceptions of social support received from family and friends. Data was collected via the Internet through an online survey using SurveyMonkey, a survey development software that allows researchers to create their own format, utilizing specific features that qualify and disqualify participants for the research criteria. The survey for this study consisted of a demographic questionnaire, an adjusted version of Procidano & Heller’s (1983) social support questionnaire to assess support specifically around marriage, and open-ended questions.

Quantitative data were exported from SurveyMonkey and analyzed using SPSS. The demographic information gathered from disqualified participants was deleted, as were any incomplete cases. Descriptive data analysis was conducted first to check if there was any problem with the data, and then necessary cleaning and processing were performed to prepare the data for final analysis.

Qualitative data were analyzed by me, as the primary researcher, and a research assistant who served as a secondary coder. Themes to each qualitative question were analyzed generally across all ages. In addition, patterns in themes were examined across all participants in order to group participants by age and compare experiences of participants based on their age (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011).

Variables in this correlational study include the age of participants (IV) and the social support received by family (DV) and the social support received by friends (DV). Pearson’s correlation ($r$) was used to determine if there was a relationship between a participant’s age and the social support he or she received from friends and family. Following data collection,
participants were divided into three age cohorts through grouping, based on patterns of themes seen across age groups: Younger (33-years-old or younger); Middle (34 to 42-years-old); and Older (43-years-old or older). Each participant received two scores measuring social support: one for social support received from family and one score for social support received from friends. Both were computed based on the sum of responses to each Likert-scale questionnaire. Two, one-way Univariate Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) tests were conducted to determine any significant difference in the mean scores of social support received from friends as well as social support received from family among the age cohorts in order to determine any significant differences based on cultural shifts. Post-hoc tests were then completed to determine what accounts for any significant differences between cohorts.

Sample Demographics

Of the 96 participants who began the online survey, 65 participants qualified and completed the study (N=65). Demographic information collected from these participants indicated that the study sample predominantly identified as female (n=53, 81.5%) and Caucasian/White (n=59, 90.8%). In addition, all participants completed at least some college, representing an overall highly educated sample (see Table 1).
Table 1

**Demographics**

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<th>Percentage</th>
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*Note.* *values rounded to the nearest .1*
**Quantitative Analyses**

**Age and Social Support**

The first research question addressed in this study was: What is the effect of age on social support of gay and lesbian individuals in legal same-sex marriages? In order to understand the relationship between age (the independent variable) and social support (the dependent variable), a bivariate correlation analysis was used. Pearson’s correlation ($r$) was first calculated to determine the relationship between age and social support received by friends. Results indicate that there was a no significant correlation between the age of the participant and the support received from friends, $r(63)= .003$, $p>.05$. Pearson’s correlation ($r$) was also calculated to determine the relationship between age and social support received by family. In this case, there was a significant correlation between age and social support received by family, $r(63)= -.268$, $p<.05$. Age is negatively correlated with social support received by family. Results indicate that as age increases, support from family decreases. Thus, on average, younger participants in this study reportedly received more support from family than their older counterparts.

The second research question addressed in this study was: How have cultural shifts impacted the support that individuals receive? In order to address this question, patterns in responses to qualitative questions were analyzed. Participants were grouped into three age cohorts based on frequently occurring themes in qualitative responses (See Table 2). Participants were divided into three age cohorts: Younger (23-33 years old, $n=21$); Middle (34-42 years old, $n=22$); and Older (43-69 years old, $n=22$). Each participant received two scores measuring social support: one for social support received from family and one score for social support received from friends based on the sum of responses to each Likert-scale questionnaire. In order to determine differences among cohorts, the mean scores of each cohort were compared. Two, one-
way Univariate Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) tests were conducted to determine any significant difference in the mean scores of social support received from friends between age cohorts as well as social support received from family between age cohorts (see Figure 2). The two null hypotheses in this study assume there is no significant difference of social support received from friends between age cohorts as well as no significant difference of social support received from family between age cohorts. Results indicated a significant difference between groups for social support received from friends ($p=.039$). Furthermore, results showed a significant difference between groups for social support received from family ($p=.039$). Thus, both null hypotheses are rejected as ANOVA tests show a significant difference between groups for both support received from friends and from family.

Following significant ANOVA results, post-hoc tests to compare the means of each cohort were conducted to determine what accounts for the significant difference and where the significant differences occur. Using Fisher's Least Significant Difference (LSD) with a significance level of .05, post-hoc analyses found significant differences between the cohorts in support received from both friends and family.

Table 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age Cohorts</th>
<th>Ages</th>
<th>% Females ($n$)</th>
<th>% Males ($n$)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Younger</td>
<td>23-33</td>
<td>90.5 (19)</td>
<td>9.5 (2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle</td>
<td>34-42</td>
<td>100 (22)</td>
<td>0 (0)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Older</td>
<td>43-69</td>
<td>54.5 (12)</td>
<td>45.5 (10)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Figure 2. Mean Comparisons Between Cohorts

Social support received from friends. Post-hoc analyses compared the means of each group in order to determine significant differences in the support participants receive from friends around their marriage (see Table 3). Results indicated a significant difference between the Older cohort and the Middle cohort, with the Older cohort reporting significantly more support than the Middle cohort (p=.030). Furthermore, results indicated a significant difference between the Middle cohort and the Younger cohort, with the Younger reporting significantly more support than the Middle cohort (p=.025). There was no significant difference in the social support received from friends by the Older cohort and Younger.

Table 3

Social Support Received from Friends

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cohort</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Standard Deviation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Older</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>41.50</td>
<td>3.89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>38.86</td>
<td>4.78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Younger</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>41.62</td>
<td>2.85</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Social support received from family. Post-hoc analyses compared the means of each group in order to determine significant differences in the support participants receive from family around their marriage (see Table 4). Results indicated a significant difference between the Older cohort and the Younger cohort, with the Younger reporting significantly more support than the Older cohort ($p=.029$). Additionally, results indicated a significant difference between the Middle cohort and the Younger cohort, with Younger reporting significantly more support than the Middle cohort ($p=.025$). There was no significant difference in the social support received from family by the Older cohort and Middle cohort.

Table 4

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cohort</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Standard Deviation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Older</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>34.86</td>
<td>11.20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>34.68</td>
<td>10.12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Younger</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>41.10</td>
<td>4.42</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Qualitative Analysis

Qualitative analyses were conducted on 62 total participants ($N=62$). The Older cohort had once less participant complete the qualitative questions ($n=21$); the Middle cohort had two less participants complete the qualitative questions ($n=20$); and the Younger cohort had all participants complete the qualitative questions ($n=22$). Qualitative analyses were completed by coding themes in participant responses to three questions:

1. What were your reasons for getting legally married?
2. How did legally marrying your partner impact your relationships with family? With friends?
3. How did your family impact your decision to marry? How did your friends impact your decision to marry?
Themes were coded generally for each question by the primary researcher and a secondary research assistant independently. The research assistant and I then compared findings and concluded general themes for each question (see Table 2). I then examined patterns in themes across age cohorts to better understand similarities or differences in responses.

Table 5

*General themes*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1. What were your reasons for getting legally married?</th>
<th>2. How did legally marrying your partner impact your relationships with family? With friends?</th>
<th>3. How did your family impact your decision to marry? How did your friends impact your decision to marry?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Practical benefits</td>
<td>No impact</td>
<td>No impact</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children/Family</td>
<td>Increased support</td>
<td>Meaningfully supportive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Love/commitment</td>
<td>Legitimized relationship for family</td>
<td>Family of origin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Length of relationship/ “Next step”</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Reasons for Marriage**

*General.* As participants described their reasons for legally marrying their partners, the theme of practical benefits ($n=37; 59\%$) was identified as an important aspect of this decision. Participants cited the practical benefits, such as health insurance, legal protection, taxes and other financial reasons, as a contributing factor to their decision to legalize their relationships through marriage. Additionally, participants discussed these benefits as a “fundamental right” that had always been offered to heterosexual couples and deemed it important to take advantage of the equal opportunity to marry their spouse. The theme of starting a family was another important aspect of individuals' decision to marry ($n=16; 25\%$). Participants discussed the ways in which marriage made the process of having children more feasible. Love and commitment to their
spouse also played a large role in the decision to marry for participants \( n=28; 44\% \). As one participant noted, marriage was a way to "document what was always in our hearts." Furthermore, participants often cited the length of their relationship with their partner and identified the fact that marriage seemed to be the "next step" in their relationship as contributing to their decision to legally marry their spouse \( n=14; 22\% \).

![Figure 3](image-url)

**Figure 3.** Question 1 themes across all participants

**Comparison between age cohorts.** The practical benefits of marriage appeared to be a consistent and common theme throughout age cohorts. However, this reason was mentioned more frequently among the Older and Middle cohorts. Based on their qualitative responses, 68% of participants in the Older cohort and 70% of participants in the Middle cohort described the practical benefits of legal marriage as contributing to their decision to marry. In comparison, 36% of participants in the Younger cohort identified practical benefits as a reason for marrying their partner. The Middle and the Younger cohort shared the reasoning of children or beginning a
family, with 40% and 36% citing this factor, respectively. In contrast, zero participants in the Older cohort mentioned this as a reason for legally marrying their partner. In addition, the length of their relationship seemed to be more important to the Older cohort with 43% indicating that marriage was the “next step” in their relationship. Participants in the Older cohort often cited the length of time they have been with their partner, beginning responses with “we have been together 32 years” and “we had waited 24 years” when discussing their decision to marry their spouse. Only one Middle participant shared this reasoning, while 18% of the Younger cohort identified marriage to be the next step in their relationship as a reason contributing to their decision to marry. Finally, the theme of love and commitment to their spouse was shared across age cohorts, with 38% of the Older cohort, 45% of the Middle cohort, and 50% of the Younger cohort citing this as a reason they chose to legally marry. Participants discussed their feelings of love for their partners as a primary reason for choosing to legalize their relationship through marriage, with one Older participant describing marriage as a way to “publically celebrate our relationship and long-term love and commitment.”

Figure 4. Question 1 themes between age cohorts
Impact of Marriage on Social Network

**General.** When asked about how their marriage impacted relationships with family and friends, many participants indicated that their marriage had no impact on these relationships \(n=35; \ 56\%\). Within the responses that indicated that marriage had no impact on participants’ social network, participant responses suggested that their relationships with family and friends remained unchanged, whether these relationships were close or distant. As one participant noted, his family “recognized us as a couple for many years” and his relationship with them remained the same. Some participants who discussed ways in which their marriage impacted relationships in their social network indicated that marrying their significant other positively impacted relationships with both friends and family by increasing the support that they received from others \(n=21; \ 33\%\). One participant’s experience was marked by the reaction of her parents as she described they “prevented me from coming out to family for 10 years and after our cake tasting with both sets of parents my dad called the whole family.” However, consistent with the quantitative findings of this study, participants noted that friends were more supportive of their marriage than family in some cases. Finally, as participants reflected specifically on relationships with family members, a theme of relationship acknowledgement emerged. Participants noted that their marriage seemed to "legitimize" their relationship for family members \(n=10; \ 16\%\).

*Figure.4. Question 2 themes across all participants*
Comparison between age cohorts. An individual’s decision to marry their spouse often had no impact on their relationships with friends and family across age cohorts, with 52% of Older participants, 65% of Middle participants, and 50% of the Younger participants indicating that their relationships with friends and family did not change after marrying their spouse. Participants in the Older seemed to experience an increase in social support from friends and family after marrying their spouse more significantly, with 43% reporting this change. In comparison, 25% of Middle participants and 32% of the Younger cohort described experiencing an increase in support after marrying their spouse. Lastly, the experience of “legitimizing” their relationship for family members was shared only among Middle and the Younger cohorts, with 25% and 23% describing this experience, respectively. Zero participants in the Older cohort discussed relationship legitimization as a change induced by their marriage. Despite being an infrequent theme throughout all age cohorts, five participants in the Older and Middle cohorts indicated that their marriage was significantly more supported by friends than by family and that family negatively responded to their decision to marry. As one participant in the Middle cohort noted, her “Christian family did not attend [the wedding] and were disappointed in me.” This theme was not found in the Younger cohort.

Figure 5. Question 2 themes between age cohorts
Impact of Social Network on Marriage

**General.** In reflecting on how their families and friends impacted their decision to marry, many participants noted that they had no impact on this decision ($n=38; 60\%$). Participants who reported that their support network had an impact on their decision to marry indicated that the support they received from friends and family around wedding planning and their marriage was meaningful ($n=25; 40\%$). Additionally, participants cited reasons associated with their family of origin when deciding to marry their significant other ($n=16; 25\%$). Participants discussed valuing marriage based on their family history, such as reasons associated with individuals' experience of his/her parental relationship, other familial marriages, and the death of loved ones.

![Figure 6. Question 3 themes across all participants](image)

**Comparison between age cohorts.** Similar to the way in which participants believed their marriage impacted their relationships with family and friends, many responses indicated that friends and family had no impact on participants’ decisions to marry their significant others. The Younger and the Older cohort discussed their social network having no impact on their decision about half the time, with $50\%$ and $57\%$ citing this reason, respectively. This theme appeared more often for participants in the Middle cohort ($75\%$). For those participants who indicated their social network had some impact on their decision to marry, $53\%$ of the Older
cohort, 25% of the Middle cohort, and 41% of the Younger cohort discussed a generally supportive social network. Participants reflected on how meaningful it was to have the support of family and/or friends not only at their wedding ceremony but also throughout the length of their marriages. Finally, the mention of issues regarding participants’ family of origin was another recurring theme across cohorts. Participants in the Older cohort (24%) discussed valuing their “traditional” upbringing, with a theme of marriage carrying an “emotional bond” as well as marriage being “the natural progression of a relationship.” The Middle cohort (20%) also discussed their family of origin as impacting their decision to marry, with one participant indicated surprise that she decided to get married based on her parents’ “bitter and nasty divorce” while another participant stated that both sets of partners’ parents were married for over 30 years, influencing their desire “to create a lasting commitment to each other.” The Younger cohort also mentioned an impact of their family of origin (32%), with one participant identifying the unexpected death of his father as a reminder of “how short life is.” Another participant in the Younger cohort discussed her adoption by lesbian parents as positively impacting her decision to marry, while another mentioned the divorce of her parents as a reason to marry “the person I knew I was going to spend the rest of my life with.”

![Figure 7. Question 3 themes between age cohorts](image-url)
Chapter 5: Discussion, Limitations, and Conclusions

Bronfenbrenner’s ecological systems theory understands individual functioning as it relates to the levels of environmental factors that influence each person (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). This study sought to understand the impact of age on the support received by same-sex married individuals. Furthermore, it sought to explore and understand the impact of microsystemic factors, such as relationships with family and friends, on an individual’s decision to marry. Furthermore, the impact of macrosystemic factors, such as the social culture and laws, was examined by comparing the experiences of social support that participants of different generations have experienced around their marriage. Exosystemic factors that influence an individual’s decision to marry have been inferred based on the influence of these other systems. In looking at the experiences among different age groups, the chronosystemic impact of cultural shifts over time was also examined (See Figure 8).

**Microsystemic Impact**

The microsystem is closest in proximity to an individual, consisting of systems the person directly interacts with (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, 1994). The emotions and interactions within a romantic relationship highly impact the decision to marry. Love and commitment within a marriage remains a consistent reason that individuals identified as an important component of their decision to marry their spouse. Furthermore, considerations regarding creating a family of their own, either with children already present or with the dream of having children in the future, also factored into participants’ decision to marry their spouse.

Interactions with friends and family were less impactful on participants’ decision to marry their spouses than other personal reasons for making the decision. When relationships within their social network were impactful, participants often experienced increased support
from those around them. For many, marrying their spouse positively impacted their relationships. Thus, marriage may have increased connections to an individual’s social network and even improved relationships with friends and family. Perhaps this is a result of feeling more included, or of being able to connect with other married friends and family members in a different way.

The mesosystem involves the interaction of various microsystemic influences in an individual’s life (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, 1994). In the context of this study, an individual’s family history with their family of origin impacted their marital relationships in a variety of ways. When a person thinks about marriage with their same-sex partner, their ideas around marriage often come from values or examples from their family history.

**Exosystemic Impact**

The exosystem consists of environmental settings that a person does not directly interact with, and thus indirectly influence an individual’s life (Bronfenbrenner 1979, 1994). Though this study did not focus on the impact of exosystemic factors, the exosystem undoubtedly plays a role in the decision to marry one’s spouse as well as the dynamics of one’s marriage. For example, some practical benefits of marriage such as healthcare coverage through a spouse’s insurance would be considered an exosystemic factor that might an individual’s decision to marry. Additionally, a spouse’s relationship with his or her own family and friends adds to the couple’s social network and likely also impacts the decision to marry and their relationship.

**Macrosystemic Impact**

Bronfenbrenner (1979, 1994) described the macrosystem as the outermost level of this developmental model that is comprised of social culture, values, and laws. Macrosystemic influences such as societal norms and beliefs comprise an environment in which a person creates his or her own beliefs and values about him or herself and the world. The practical benefits
associated with marriage are undeniable, and the impact of these macrosystemic factors are apparent in the experiences of participants in this study. As research has shown (Hunter, 2004; Munoz, 2005; MacIntosh et al., 2010), tax consequences, healthcare considerations, and power of attorney, among other practical benefits, significantly contribute to gay and lesbian individuals’ decision to marry. The experiences of participants in this study provide further support for the understanding that legal recognition, and the benefits that accompany it, continue to be a primary contributing factor to the decision to marry. Interestingly, these benefits appear to be most salient for the Older and Middle cohorts. The differences in reasons for marrying across age groups may be reflective of varying priorities at different ages due to stage of life concerns. For example, older adults may be more concerned about health benefits and end of life arrangements than their younger counterparts.

The practical benefits of marriage signify the legislative, macrosystemic impact on an individual’s choice to marry his or her partner. The movement for marriage equality has not been met without resistance, despite significant changes in legislation and the impact of SCOTUS’s ruling to legalize same-sex marriage nationwide. In spite of the federal legalization of same-sex marriage, same-sex couples in many states have had difficulty obtaining marriage licenses. The issue of marriage equality remains a topic of debate as candidates in the 2016 presidential election continue to threaten these rights. Thus, despite the major legislative victories over the last few years, anxiety among those in the gay community who have chosen to marry or who would like to marry their same-sex partner in the future continues.

Marriage also impacts a person’s relationships with others. Previous research has suggested that same-sex couples receive higher levels of support from friends than they do from family (Kurdek, 2005, 2006). Over time, however, legal marriage for same-sex couples has
increased societal support, and subsequently social support, due to the higher level of social recognition (Balsam et al., 2008; Lannutti, 2008; Ramos et al., 2009). Additionally, the findings of this study suggest that married gay and lesbian persons of younger ages receive equal support from both family and friends. Generationally, younger cohorts of gay and lesbian individuals have developed and maintained relationships within a cultural context that is more accepting than that of their older counterparts. Thus, support for those in same-sex marriages has shifted along with public opinion.

**Chronosystemic Impact**

The social support received by gay and lesbian individuals has shifted over time, as indicated by the impact of age on social support received by same-sex married individuals. On average, older individuals reported less support from their family around their marriage than their younger counterparts. Furthermore, younger participants did not discuss any negative responses from their families around their marriage, whereas the middle and older participants discussed a negative impact. These results suggest support for the hypothesis that younger generations of gay and lesbian individuals receive more support from family than do older generations. Interestingly, participants in the Middle range of this study seem to receive less support from friends than participants older and younger than them.

The chronosystemic factors influencing same-sex couples are a combination of those microsystems and macrosystems that individuals are a part of over time. The idea that different factors are more important to individuals based on their age or stage of life when they decide to marry their partner is an important factor to consider when understanding a person’s decision to marry. In addition to legislative changes over time, the social support individuals receive may also be impacted by advances in technology over the years. Younger generations of Americans
have grown up with access to the Internet, so it is possible they have had the opportunity to feel more connected to and receive support from a group of people who may not be geographically accessible. Another factor that may impact the difference in experiences of younger generations is access to the wealth of information that comes with increased online access and may also play a role in the increased social support experienced by younger individuals.

The reasons a person chooses to marry is also impacted by time in the sense that age seems to shift the stage of life factors that contribute to this decision. Love and commitment were shared themes across all ages of individuals choosing to legalize their relationship through marriage, however this was more commonly mentioned in younger participants. Although the practical benefits of marriage were also a consistent reason across ages, younger individuals seemed less concerned with this aspect when making the choice to marry. Practical benefits such as health insurance and power of attorney may be more significant concerns of older individuals based on their stage of life. The idea of starting a family and having children was more impactful participants in the younger and middle cohorts in comparison to older generations, which also supports the idea that reasons for marrying one’s partner vary across time.
Figure 8. Systemic factors influencing same-sex married individuals
Limitations and Future Research

Although this study provides some insight into the social support received by married gay and lesbian individuals, there are several factors that limit the generalizability of the results. Firstly, the sample of participants is not representative of the larger population for many reasons. As with many studies completed online, the sample is overwhelmingly White/Caucasian and educated. The sample represents a population of individuals who not only have access to internet but are also likely engaged in relevant research as indicated by their participant in this study. The lack of ethnic and racial diversity in this sample limits the application of results to the diverse American population. Future research should aim to recruit a more diverse sample that is a better representation of the larger population. Studies in the future may also look into examining the experiences of those who identify with multiple minority statuses in an effort to understand how the intersectionality of these identities impacts the social support they receive.

Additionally, this study recruited significantly more female participants than male participants. Although this may be a reflection consistent with previous research that women are more likely to formalize their relationships than men, the sample of this study may not be representative of the general population of those who choose to marry their same-sex partner (Badgett & Herman, 2011). In addition to the analyses completed with all participants seen in the results of this study, further analyses were completed to determine the impact of the male participants’ responses. These additional analyses omitted male participant quantitative responses, and the average social support received from friends and family did not alter significantly. It is possible that this suggests the experience of male and female participants in the study do not differ significantly; however, it is also possible that the number of male participants was not substantial enough to exert significant influence on the findings.
Furthermore, male participants were not equally distributed throughout the age groups, with 10 males in the Older cohort, zero in the Middle cohort, and two in the Younger cohort. Although additional analyses without male participants did not significantly alter the quantitative data, it is possible that the results of this study capture a more accurate representation of the experience of females in same-sex marriages. Further research should attempt to recruit a similar number of female and male participants both overall as well as in each cohort. Future studies might also consider comparing and contrasting the experiences of men and women in same-sex marriages.

This study also used a binary system when asking participants to identify both their gender and sexual orientation despite the understanding that the nature of these identities may be more fluid. This binary system was used in order to capture the unique experience of men and women who identify as gay and lesbian, but fails to recognize the experience of those who identify as any other gender or sexual orientation. It is important that future research expand on the findings of this study by focusing on understanding the experience of other sexual minorities in same-sex marriages.

The federal legalization of same-sex marriage is a recent event with significant implications for the future of equal rights for those in the gay community. Future research on the experiences of individuals in same-sex marriages may focus on how these experiences continue to change over time. Additionally, it may be interesting to examine how region and area of the country impact the social support received by individuals in same-sex marriages as sociopolitical climate may also be further impacted by location. Previous research has shown that the decision to marry has an impact on the social support received by individuals, as this study expanded upon, as well as an impact on relationship satisfaction (MacIntosh et al., 2010). Future research
may expand upon these findings by examining generational differences in relationship satisfaction of married same-sex couples.

**Clinical Implications**

**Working with Clients**

The findings of this study highlight the importance of the biopsychosocial model of understanding clients and the problems they face. Age, sexual orientation, relationships with others, and cultural environment all impact the ways in which individuals function and interact with the world around them. When working with gay and lesbian individuals as well as same-sex couples, it is particularly important to consider each of these factors as we understand the complex dynamics of the various systems in which they are a part of. Furthermore, this study highlights the variety of individual experiences of gay and lesbian individuals in same-sex marriages and how many systemic factors impact these experiences.

A support system is often an important resource for clients. This study highlights the importance of asking clients about and exploring the support they receive from their social network as a means of understanding their friends and/or family as resources. As indicated in the experiences of participants in this study, the impact of age on the support that gay men and lesbians receive around their marriage is a relevant aspect of understanding the support a client might receive. For example, older individuals may experience less support from family than younger persons. Thus, older clients might rely more on friends as a source of support when it comes to issues surrounding their marriage, whereas younger individuals might feel as though they can turn to both friends and family for this kind of support. It might be helpful to ask clients whom they feel supports them or whom they turn to for support to get an understanding of who their support system consists of. Additionally, it is important to keep in mind a client’s age as it
relates to understanding the societal and cultural context that he or she has lived in as this may impact the social support he or she receives as well as his or her decision to marry a significant other. While younger generations of gay men and lesbians may have experienced a society that is more accepting of same-sex marriage for the majority of their lives, older generations have lived through significant shifts in the attitudes toward sexual minorities that may also impact their experiences of social support and same-sex marriage.

The findings of this study may also be relevant when working with clients who are considering marriage. A person’s decision to marry their same-sex partner may also be different based on his or her stage of life is another important factor to consider when working with gay and lesbian individuals or couples. Love and commitment were shared themes across all ages of individuals choosing to legalize their relationship through marriage, however this was more commonly mentioned in younger participants. Although the practical benefits of marriage were also a consistent reason across ages, younger individuals seemed less concerned with this aspect when making the choice to marry. Furthermore, the idea of starting a family and having children was more impactful for the younger and middle participants. The differences in reasons for marrying across age groups may be reflective of varying priorities at different ages due to stage of life concerns. For example, older adults may prioritize health benefits and end of life arrangements whereas younger adults may be more concerned with having children. These implications of varying stage of life concerns at different ages offers clinicians some insight as they are charged with the task of working with clients to explore and understand their thoughts around marrying their partner.
Advocacy and Change

The marriage equality movement has made significantly more progress than equal rights in other areas. Despite major legislative changes in the marriage equality movement, same-sex couples continue to face fears of workplace discrimination as laws protecting rights of sexual minorities in both public and private sectors have not caught up to the momentum of same-sex marriage laws (Lambda Legal, 2015). Furthermore, many states are currently proposing and passing “religious freedom” laws that allow businesses and employers to discriminate against those in the LGBT population. Although the practical benefits of legal marriage continue to be a primary priority for many individuals who choose to marry their same-sex partners, this also requires a level of disclosure at work that may cause distress. In order to benefit from tax exemptions and joint healthcare, gay and lesbian individuals must disclose their same-sex marriage to employers and insurance companies. Ramos et al. (2009) found that over 80% of participants indicated that being in a same-sex marriage had caused them to be more likely to come out to coworkers and healthcare providers. Thus, marriage forces individuals to come out to employers or coworkers to receive these benefits. However, in states where sexual minorities are not protected against workplace discrimination, coming out at work or to healthcare providers may cause more stress due to fears of losing their jobs and benefits altogether.

Additionally, this study also highlights the importance and impact of advocacy as a part of our work as clinicians. Despite gains in the movement toward equality for sexual minorities, the uncertainty and anxiety surrounding legislative and societal change continues to impact those in the gay community. Whether we advocate on an individual, microsystemic level for a client’s access to resources or we are involved in larger, macrosystemic advocacy like consulting with
legislators or conducting research, those who work in the field of psychology must continue to
fight for the rights of those in marginalized populations.
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Appendix A: Informed Consent

Informed Consent

Thank you for your interest in participating in a research study about the social support and relationship satisfaction dynamics within same-sex marriages. We ask that you read this form and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to participate in this study. This study is being conducted by Danielle Zohrob, M.A., a doctoral student at The Chicago School of Professional Psychology.

Background information: The purpose of this study is gain an understanding of the effects of social support on relationship satisfaction and examine changes within these dynamics across different age groups of gay and lesbian individuals in same-sex marriages.

Procedures: If you agree to participate in this study, we ask that you complete an online survey. You will answer questions about your marital satisfaction and the support you receive from friends and family around your marriage.

Risks and Benefits of Being in the Study: You will be asked about personal aspects of your marriage as well as your relationships with family and friends. Completion of the study may remind you of difficult experiences you have dealt with in the past or are presently experiencing. These risks are no greater than thinking about such experiences or feelings in your everyday life. The benefits to participate are that you may help professionals to gain a greater understanding of how same-sex married couples are impacted by social support and cultural changes. Furthermore, your participation may offer clinicians a better understanding of the relationship between social support and relationship satisfaction in same-sex marriages.

Confidentiality: The records of this study will be kept private. No names or other identifying information will be asked within the survey. Only general demographic information (e.g., age, gender, etc.) will be requested. In any sort of report we might publish, we will not include any information that will make it possible to identify you. Research records will be kept in a locked file. Only the researchers will have access to these records.
Appendix B: Demographic Questionnaire

Demographic Questionnaire

Please answer the following questions truthfully.

1. Do you identify as: Male  Female  Other

2. How do you identify your sexual orientation?  Gay  Lesbian  Other

3. Are you currently married to your same-sex partner?  Yes  No

4. How do you identify your race/ethnicity?
   a. African American/Black
   b. Caucasian/White
   c. American Indian or Alaska Native
   d. Asian
   e. Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
   f. Other (please specify)

5. What is the highest level of education you have completed?
   a. Less than high school
   b. High school diploma/GED
   c. Some college
   d. Bachelor’s degree completed
   e. Master’s degree completed
   f. Doctorate completed

6. How long have you been married to your current same-sex partner?
   a. Less than 6 months
   b. 6 months to 1 year
   c. 2 years to 5 years
   d. 6 years to 10 years
   e. 11 years to 15 years
   f. Longer than 15 years

7. In what year were you born? Please respond with the 4-digit year (For example: 1956)

8. Have you lived in the United States for at least half of your life?  Yes  No

9. In what city and state do you live?
Appendix C: Social Support—Friends

**Social Support - Friends**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Q.</th>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Almost always</th>
<th>Sometimes</th>
<th>Every Once in a While</th>
<th>Rarely</th>
<th>Never</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>My friends give me the moral support I need surrounding my marriage.</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>I rely on my friends for emotional support about my marriage.</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>There is a friend I could go to if I were feeling down about my marriage, without feeling funny about it later.</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>My friends acknowledge my spouse as my partner.</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>My friends are sensitive to my personal needs.</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>My friends are good at helping me solve problems that come up in my marriage.</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.</td>
<td>When I confide in friends about my marriage, it makes me feel uncomfortable.</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.</td>
<td>I could rely on my friends for financial support if I needed it.</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.</td>
<td>My friends offer my spouse and I support as a married couple.</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.</td>
<td>My friends would be helpful if my spouse was ill.</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Appendix D: Social Support—Family

#### Social Support - Family

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Almost always</th>
<th>Sometimes</th>
<th>Every Once in a While</th>
<th>Rarely</th>
<th>Never</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. My family gives me the moral support I need surrounding my marriage.</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. I rely on my family for emotional support about my marriage.</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. There is a family member I could go to if I were feeling down about my marriage, without feeling funny about it later.</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. My family acknowledges my spouse as my partner.</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. My family is sensitive to my personal needs.</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. My family is good at helping me solve problems that come up in my marriage.</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. When I confide in a family member about my marriage, it makes me feel uncomfortable.</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. I could rely on my family for financial support if I needed it.</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. My family offers my spouse and I support as a married couple.</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. My family would be helpful if my spouse was ill.</td>
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<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
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</table>