

The background of the slide is a dark, semi-transparent image. On the left, there are two wedding cake toppers of a bride and groom. On the right, there is a photograph of a man and a woman in wedding attire, with the woman holding a bouquet of flowers. The text is overlaid on this background.

Aaron Hoy
Syracuse University
Eastern Sociological Society
February 22, 2018

*Lavish Weddings,
Ambiguous
Anniversaries: How
Relationship
Histories Shape the
Experience of
Getting Married for
Gays and Lesbians*

Marriage-as-Transformative

- ***The marriage-as-transformative paradigm*** – Marriage is a symbolically and emotionally significant moment that meaningfully transforms individuals and their intimate relationships
- Pre-marriage equality, advocates argued that marriage would –
 - *Legitimize same-sex relationships* (Eskridge and Spedale 2006; Kaplan 1997; Merin 2002; Wolfson 2005)
 - *Increase commitment and strengthen marital bonds* (Rauch 1997; Rotello 1997; Sullivan 1996)
 - *Improve financial, physical, and psychological well-being* (Herdt and Kertzner 2006)

Marriage-as-Transformative

- To date, sociologists have found that getting married –
 - *Legitimizes same-sex relationships*
 - More acceptance and support from family members, friends, and colleagues (Ocobock 2013; Kimport 2014; Richman 2014)
 - Stronger family ties (Green 2010; Ocobock 2013)
 - *Promotes confidence, feelings of empowerment* (Kimport 2014)
 - *Promotes psychological well-being* (Riggle et al. 2016; Wright et al. 2013)
 - *Increases commitment to the relationship* (Green 2010; Kimport 2014)
- Mostly attributed to the power of marriage as an institution

Marriage-as-Transformative

“Across my interviews, I heard stories from respondents about how their newly acquired status as married compelled a cascade of changes in their everyday lives. The emergence of these apparent spoils of normativity absent respondents’ intent demonstrates the potency of marital status to cue the legitimacy of family relationships” (Kimport 2014: 105)

QUEERING MARRIAGE

Challenging Family Formation
in the United States



KATRINA KIMPORT

Open Questions

- Existing research assumes that the institution of marriage straightforwardly produces uniform outcomes
 - These likely vary by individual and relationship characteristics
- Looks only at LGBTQ people who married during a moment of historic legal change
 - Kimport (2014) and Richman (2014) – Individuals who married during the Winter of Love
 - Experiences likely reflect these contexts

Methods

- In-depth interviews with 28 currently married gays and lesbians
 - Participants recruited through non-profit organizations and law firms, snowball sampling
 - Conducted in person and via telephone
 - Lasted between 1 and 2.5 hours
- Sample characteristics –
 - 16 women, 12 men
 - Predominantly white
 - Ages range between 28 and 78, though most between 35 and 55
- Analyzed using grounded theory (Charmaz, 2006)
 - 3-step inductive process: line-by-line coding, focused coding, analytic memos

Pathways to Marriage

Short and Direct (N=11)

- Couples had been together a relatively short period of time before marrying
 - Average of 3.9 years
 - Similar to national average (Frances-Tan and Mialon 2015)
- Marriage was a new and meaningful experience
- Average age: 35.9 years old

Long and Winding (N=17)

- Couples who had been together many years before getting married
 - Average of 16.3 years
 - Often had domestic partnerships, civil unions, and/or commitment ceremonies
- Felt married even before getting legally married
- Average age: 50.5 years old



Weddings – Short and Direct vs. Long and Winding

Short and Direct

“All told, our parents contributed \$15,000 to our wedding, which was so big and beautiful....For my mom to be there, crying and supportive, was great. It meant the world to me. My stepdad was there, and he was very supportive, too...It was the happiest day of my life” – Charity (28, White, Kentucky)

Long and Winding

“We had it in our house. Everybody stayed here, and we had cake and a nice dinner, but then everything was back to normal. I went back to work on Monday. We kept it a surprise, a secret because we were trying to keep everything as low-key as possible for [our son]. I mean, how could we explain that to an 8-year-old who thought that his parents were married – you know, to him, we were normal. He accepted everything as fact” – Jessica (39, White, Ohio)



Ambiguous Anniversaries

“So now we have two anniversaries, and it’s kinda fun to joke around about which one we’re supposed to be celebrating. I think we celebrate the first one the most, our commitment ceremony anniversary. And when we had the one-year anniversary of the legal marriage, it was like, ‘OK, I guess we should celebrate this one.’ But at the same time, it’s like, that first one, that was obviously the one that started it all, that was kinda like, the start of our life together. So that’s been the anniversary all this time. I mean, we bought a house and we have a kid and all this time together”

– Diana (38, White, Ohio)

Reactions – Short and Direct

“I feel like, since we got *married* married, the way that people see our relationship is a little bit different, which is a little bit annoying to me to be honest. So, um, I think like, the same friends who totally crashed our romantic time in Paris, have actually several times been, like, ‘Well, you’re newlyweds, you need your time.’ And this was the same person who, before, had, like, no problem just jumping on or becoming a part of our plans. So I think in that way it has become pretty clear that people think strangely, differently about our relationship even though they have only ever known us being together”

– Bayley (32, White, Virginia)

Reactions – Long and Winding

“Everybody was like, ‘Well, you already are married.’ Like, no big deal. They had no reaction whatsoever. Like, none. And like, I don’t know that they were even supportive or not supportive. They just didn’t have any response whatsoever because for all these years, in their eyes, we’d been a married couple anyway. So, like, ‘Who cares if you’re legally married now? If you have this piece of paper?’”

– Dean (46, White, New York)

Conclusions

- The marriage-as-transformative paradigm –
 - Overlooks variation in experiences
 - May overstate the symbolic power of marriage (see also Ocobock 2013)
- The long and winding pathway is likely particular to the first cohort of same-sex marriages

