



***Accounting for Same-Sex Divorce:
Relationship- Versus Self-Focused Divorce Accounts and the
Meanings of Marriage among Gay Men and Lesbians***

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Same-Sex Marriage and Divorce

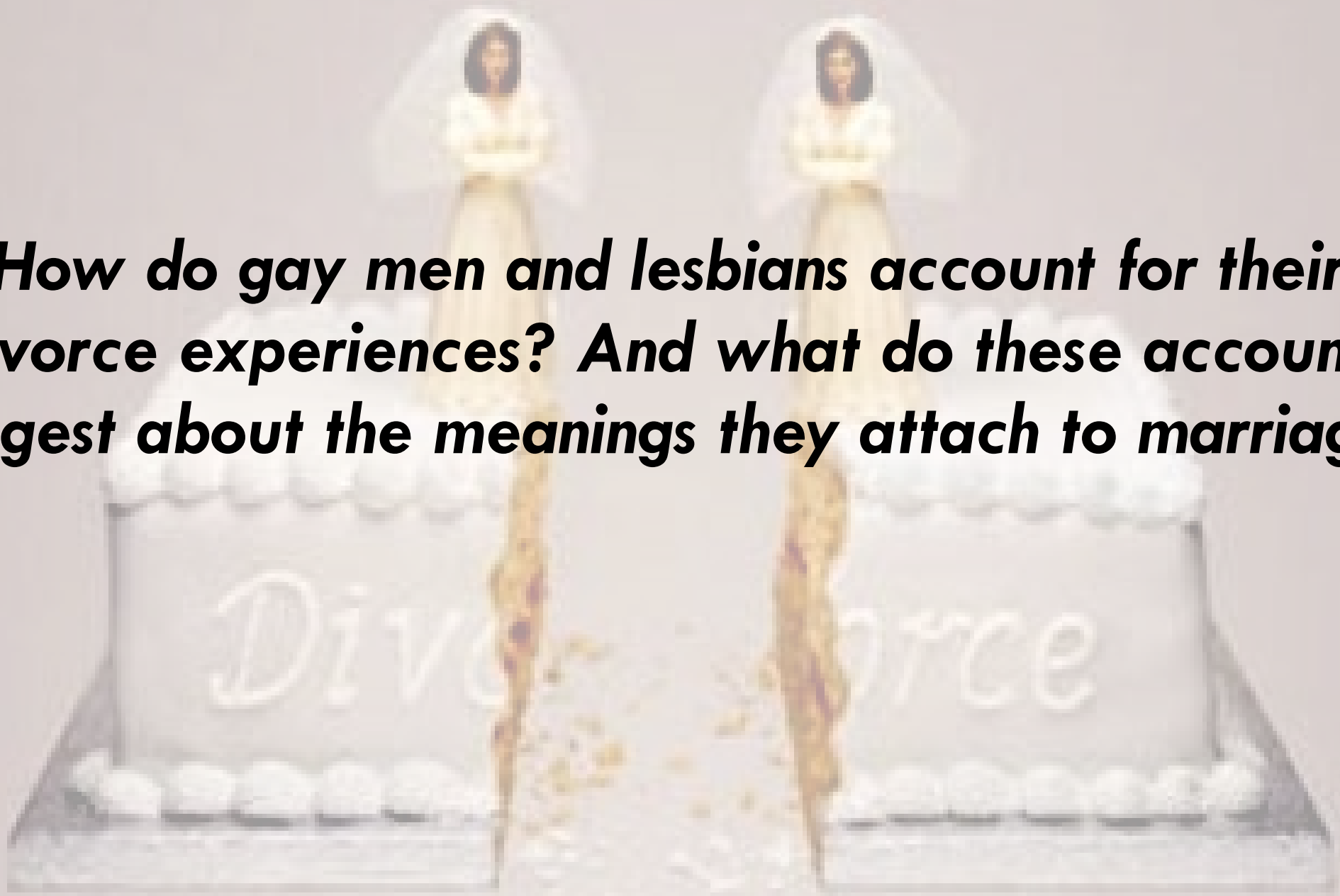
- **Same-Sex Marriage –**

- Hopes and expectations (Hull 2006; Lannutti 2005)
- Motivations for marrying (Kimport, 2014; Richman 2014; Rostosky et al. 2016)
- Effects of marital transition – health (LeBlanc et al. 2018), relationship dynamics (Garcia & Umberson 2019), family relationships (Ocobock 2013)

- **Same-Sex Divorce - ?**

- *Obergefell v. Hodges* – June 26, 2015
- Divorce rates comparable to different-sex couples (Badgett & Mallory 2014)

How do gay men and lesbians account for their divorce experiences? And what do these accounts suggest about the meanings they attach to marriage?



Accounts

- **Accounts** are the ways that people explain and justify their actions or experiences, especially those that defy social norms or expectations (Orbuch 1997; Scott & Lyman 1968)
 - *May not* reflect the events that transpired (Hopper 1993; Vaughn 1986)
 - Reflect instead how individuals understand their divorce experiences (Hopper 1993, 2001)
 - Draw on dominant meanings → Save face (Goffman 1963; Orbuch 1997)

The Evolving Meanings of Marriage

- ***Companionate Marriage (Burgess & Locke 1945) –***
 - Romantic love
 - Highly integrated and interdependent – “Two become one”
- ***Individualized Marriage (Cherlin 2004) –***
 - Self-development
 - Relatively autonomous and interdependent – “Alone together”
 - *Non-marital same-sex relationships highly individualized* (Green et al. 2016; Orne 2017; Stacey 2008; Weeks et al. 2001)

Methods

- **Semi-structured, in-depth interviews with non-random sample of 6 recently divorced gay men and lesbians**
 - 1 in-person, 5 via telephone
 - 3 women, 3 men – all cisgender
 - 5 White, 1 African American
 - Divorced, on average, for 2.5 years by interview
- **Inductive, grounded theory analysis**
 - Open coding and memoing

Relationship- vs. Self-Focused Accounts

- ***Relationship-Focused***

- Emphasize relationship problems – the coming undone of a formerly intimate bond
- Attach *companionate* meanings to marriage

- ***Self-Focused***

- Emphasize problems the marriage created for the account-teller – negative impacts of bad marriage
- Attach *individualized* meanings to marriage

Relationship-Focused

- **Rodney – 54, African American, Florida**
 - Divorced his husband, Craig, following Craig's infidelity and dishonesty
- *I felt hurt. I had been duped in so many ways, and that was just like a punch in the stomach, it really was. You're so in love with this person, but it's not even the person you married.*
- *As far as I was concerned, if you're not doing it for us and to save this marriage, then why do it? And that was actually my comment to him. I said: 'If you're not doing this for us, I'm not gonna bother because I'm not doing this relationship myself.'*

Relationship-Focused

- **Larry – 63, White, New York**

- Divorced his husband, Dan, after the two drifted apart
- *He was working seven days a week, and then what little time he had, he would spend with his biker friends, and in third place came his parents. And then I was a fourth-place interest, way behind everybody else. And I just kind of got tired of sitting around the house on my own, not having a partner anymore.*
- *We didn't do anything together, even around the house. I did the grocery shopping, and he did the laundry, so it wasn't even like we were a couple. We were more like roommates.*

Self-Focused

- **Lauren – 45, White, Massachusetts**
 - Divorced her wife, Margaret, due to their “different ways of existing”
- *I was like, ‘Let’s move to California!’ I sort of thought, ‘I have this partner, the world is our oyster, we’re going to go do all these things.’ And her vision is like, ‘Oh I have this partner, and now we’re going to stay home and build a white picket fence.’*
- *Like, I wanted to be able to keep doing my career, and I couldn’t do that with two kids. I knew I would end up not doing the things that I wanted to do with my life. At that point, I was already, like, kicking and screaming to be able to carve out my own existence or something.*

Self-Focused

- **Jay – 39, White, California**

- Divorced his husband, David, following Jay's infidelity and feelings of stagnation and frustration

- *I'd lost myself and I decided, I'm going to find myself. I've lost my career. I should have been in management; I should have been full-time teaching. I wanted to have a business; I wanted to have all these things in my field, never did, because I didn't have to, because David paid the bills. I didn't need to work. I should have for my self-worth. For my self-worth, I should have done it. But my marriage made me lazy; it made me complacent.*

Conclusions

- Multiple, complex ways of making sense of same-sex divorce
 - Not mutually exclusive – e.g., Sandy
- Both companionate and individualized meanings of marriage

Thank you! Questions? Comments?

A wedding cake with two groom figurines on top. The cake is decorated with red roses and silver beads. The groom figurines are wearing black tuxedos with white shirts and black bowties. The background is white.

If interested, this paper was published in the Journal of Divorce and Remarriage in 2020.

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