

Same-Sex Couples

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Courts, sociologists, and psychologists have long debated same-sex marriage and its effect on the married couple, children in the home, and society as a whole. Legalizing it in the US allowed researchers to study these effects. The majority of the research shows that having the right to marry leaves those in a same-sex marriage with better mental health, their children's health and welfare are similar to different-sex couples and it has benefited society as a whole.

Descriptions or Definitions of Key Words and Terms

This paper will include discussion of formal rights and informal privileges. Formal rights are partnership benefits related to marriage and the right to adopt children, among others. Informal rights include things like public displays of affection and feeling safe in public spaces. Modern prejudice explains how people might be for legalizing same-sex marriage because they want to believe in equality, but are against seeing public displays of affection between those of the same sex because of long-standing stereotypes and puritanical beliefs. Modern prejudice is more subtle than traditional prejudice; instead of outright denial of rights, it's micro-aggressions against their informal privileges.

Modern prejudice leads to minority stress, which is social stress resulting from stigma, prejudice, and discrimination, which negatively impacts the mental health of individuals who identify with a sexual minority (Frost, et al., 2017). Same-sex couples are particularly affected by this minority stress.

Issues Faced by the Groups

Same-sex couples face unique mental health challenges due to minority stress, partly due to society's marginalization of the relationship. This couple-level minority stress is damaging to both the quality of the relationship and the individuals themselves. This stress leads to stress proliferation, which is the idea that stress causes more stress, and that one individual in a relationship can spread that stress to another. The majority of situations that cause couple-level majority stress were, in one study, found to happen in social and family settings (Frost, et al., 2017).

Same-sex couples have legally gained formal rights. They can marry and have the same legal rights as different-sex couples and they can adopt children. They have the same legal status. However, they still lack informal privileges in many situations. These are subtle advantages that a dominant group has over a minority group and show the marginalization of the minority group. For example, one study showed that heterosexual males were significantly less accepting of same-sex couples holding hands, kissing on the cheek, and French kissing, more so for gay men than for lesbians (Doan, Loehr, & Miller, 2014).

Same-sex couples have faced judgment from society in the matter of raising children. Previously, the accepted idea was that children raised with same-sex parents would face more challenges and less stability. Same-sex parents were seen as not as able to raise happy, healthy, and well-adjusted children. A lot of the research was based on used families who were the biological child of one parent, who later entered into a same-sex relationship. The family breakup that preceded that would lead to instability for the children. Newer research is based on a broader population, including families where same-sex partners used surrogates or

adopted children from birth. The American Sociological Association, after examining many studies concluded that there was no difference in how the children of same-sex parents fared compared to those of different-sex parents (Gates, 2015).

Human Sexuality Theory

Critical theory is a social constructionist viewpoint that emphasizes the fact that behaviors and types of people are social constructions. Included in critical theory is queer theory. Queer theory questions the binary idea of gender and sexuality. The queer theory argues that sexual identities are fluid and change depending on the situation.

It also challenges the idea of heteronormativity, the idea that heterosexuality is the only acceptable form of sexuality. It marginalizes other sexual orientations and leads to the minority stress that LGBT individuals experience (Hyde, 2019).

The idea of heteronormativity in queer theory explains most of the issues that same-sex couples face today. It says that they're wrong, immoral, and abnormal. This causes a social stigma that leads to stress and poorer mental health. The queer theory challenges the dominant and normalizing binaries that underscore the "accepted" understanding of gender and sexuality.

One Study Selected from the Articles Provided

In the study "Formal Rights and Informal Privileges for Same-Sex Couples: Evidence From a National Survey Experiment" from 2014, authors Long Doan, Annalise Loehr, and Lisa R Miller examine whether people distinguish between formal rights and informal privileges regarding same-sex couples and to what extent they agree that same-sex couples should have

both. They used a dataset representative of the US consisting of 258 lesbians, 310 gay men, 240 heterosexual females, and 265 heterosexual males for a total sample size of 1,073.

The respondents were given one of three vignettes featuring an unmarried couple who were cohabitating. These consisted of lesbian couples, gay couples, and heterosexual couples and only varied on the names and sex of the individuals in the couple. They were then asked to answer questions about how they perceived each couple. The questions, rated on a scale of 1 to 4, with 1 being strongly disagreed and 4 strongly agreeing, involved the couple being in various situations. These included telling others they are in a couple, holding hands in a park, giving a kiss on the cheek in a park, French kissing in a park, taking family leave to care for a sick partner, having hospital visitation rights, having inheritance rights, having health insurance benefits for their partner, and being able to get legally married.

The study found that heterosexuals, both men, and women, showed no significant difference in their approval of formal rights for lesbian, gay, or heterosexual couples. Lesbian and gay individuals showed more support for formal rights for lesbian and gay couples, but interestingly, they were more approving of formal rights for heterosexual couples than heterosexual males were.

In terms of approval for informal privileges, the study found that heterosexual males were significantly less approving of both the lesbian couple and the gay couple than the heterosexual couple, and less approving of the gay couple than the lesbian couple.

Heterosexual women were also less approving of informal privileges for both gay and lesbian couples.

Both lesbians and gays are significantly less approving of informal privileges (with the exception of telling people they are a couple) of gay and lesbian couples than heterosexual couples.

Conclusion

The results of this study show how heterosexual attitudes towards gay and lesbian couples and informal privileges lead to them being marginalized and experiencing both individual and couple-level minority stress. The fact that lesbians and gay men are more accepting of heterosexuals exhibiting public displays of affection proves that they have internalized the heteronormative attitudes held by much of society; they are less willing to give themselves those informal privileges than heterosexual couples. The study shows that while society has come a long way in legal rights for the LGBT community, it still has a long way to go before they are fully accepted.

References

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