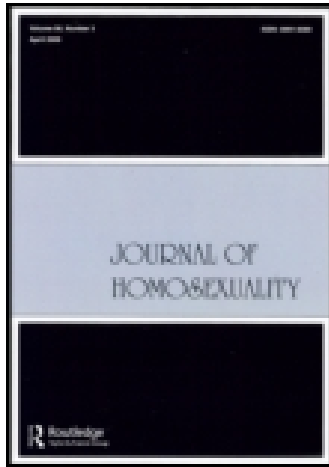


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## ***Windsor and Perry: Reactions of Siblings in Same-Sex and Heterosexual Couples***

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*The U.S. Supreme Court decisions in U.S. v. Windsor (570 U.S. 307) and Hollingsworth v. Perry (570 U.S. 399) created a focal point for public discussion of marriage equality for same-sex couples. This article reports the results of an exploratory study of the reactions of individuals currently or previously in same-sex couple relationships and a heterosexual sibling who is currently or previously married (N = 371) to the Supreme Court decisions. Thematic content analysis was used to explore participants' responses to an open-ended question on a survey. Reactions of individuals from same-sex couples revealed the following themes: (1) longitudinal perspectives on the advancement of rights for same-sex couples; (2) emotional responses celebrating the decisions or expressing relief; (3) affirmation of their relationship or rights; (4) practical consequences of the extension of rights; and (5) minority stress related to anticipation of future prejudice or discrimination.*

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*Themes in the heterosexual siblings' responses were (1) ally support; (2) flat support without emotion or elaboration; (3) indifference to or ignorance about the decisions; and (4) disapproval of the decisions. These themes are compared and discussed in light of prior research on reactions to marriage restriction debates and marriage (in)equality and family relationships.*

**KEYWORDS** *gay and lesbian, family, marriage, qualitative research, same-sex couples, siblings, U.S. Supreme Court*

On June 26, 2013, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled on two landmark cases regarding same-sex marriage. In the case of *U.S. v. Windsor* (570 U.S. 307; commonly referred to as the “*Windsor*” decision after the original plaintiff, Edith Windsor), the Court found that Section 3 of the Defense of Marriage Act (DOMA; 1 U.S.C. § 7), which specified “the word ‘marriage’ means only a legal union between one man and one woman as husband and wife, and the word ‘spouse’ refers only to a person of the opposite sex who is a husband or a wife,” was unconstitutional. This decision obligated the federal government to recognize civil marriages of same-sex couples. In *Hollingsworth v. Perry* (570 U.S. 399; commonly referred to as the “*Perry*” decision after the original lead plaintiff, Kristin Perry), delivered the same day as *Windsor*, the Supreme Court left in force a federal district court decision that held Proposition 8 (CA, 2008) unconstitutional and effectively allowed civil marriages of same-sex couples in California to resume.

Both of these cases were widely regarded as victories for supporters of marriage equality and marriage rights for same-sex couples. These decisions were the first Supreme Court rulings in favor of marriage equality and received a lot of attention in the general press and in the lesbian, gay, and bisexual (LGB) communities. They marked a sudden turning point in the recognition of civil marriages of same-sex couples by the federal government and, as such, had tangible and intangible implications for same-sex couples.

Previous studies have found a negative impact of marriage restriction campaigns on LGB individuals and family members of LGB individuals (e.g., Maisel & Fingerhut, 2011; Rostosky, Riggle, Horne, Denton, & Huellemeier, 2010; Rostosky, Riggle, Horne, & Miller, 2009; Russell, 2000; Russell & Richards, 2003). Additionally, legal recognition of marriage equality has been found to be associated with positive meaning and outcomes for LGB identified individuals and same-sex couples (e.g., Lannutti, 2011) and improvements in relationships with family because of the “legitimation” of same-sex relationships (Lannutti, 2014). The current study explored the reactions to the *Windsor* and *Perry* decisions of individuals who were currently

or previously part of a same-sex couple or a heterosexual married couple. Their reactions were thematically analyzed and compared.

## REACTIONS TO MARRIAGE (IN)EQUALITY AMONG LGBS

Prior to the *Windsor* and *Perry* decisions, 29 U.S. states had passed amendments to their state constitutions restricting the legal recognition of marriage within those states to “one man and one woman.” The federal government and 12 additional states had legislation with the same effect. After the *Windsor* and *Perry* decisions, there have been significant changes in marriage laws for same-sex couples. The federal government now recognizes same-sex marriages in almost all instances; civil marriage licenses are now available and recognized in approximately two thirds of states, and there are cases pending in federal court in every remaining state (as well as in many state courts).

Several studies of the debates surrounding marriage restriction amendments and laws have suggested negative effects of marriage inequality and stigmatizing public debates on the wellbeing of LGB-identified individuals. Previous research has found that state marriage restriction campaigns are associated with more psychological distress for LGB individuals (Rostosky et al., 2009). Maisel and Fingerhut (2011) found that Proposition 8 (on the California ballot in 2008) had a negative impact on LGB individuals’ wellbeing and their personal, professional, and community relationships. The lack of legal relationship recognition has been found to be associated with higher levels of psychological distress and lower levels of wellbeing in LGB identified individuals (Riggle, Rostosky, & Horne, 2010).

In contrast, having access to civil marriage may increase feelings of security and permanence in a same-sex relationship (Shulman, Gotta, & Green, 2012). Lannutti (2007) found that LGB individuals reported that the availability of same-sex marriage made them feel as though their current relationships were seen as more “real.” Analyzing interviews with older same-sex couples, Lannutti (2011) found mixed reactions, with some older adults associating legalized marriage with greater security and recognition, while also harboring misgivings about the institution of marriage.

## REACTIONS TO MARRIAGE (IN)EQUALITY AMONG HETEROSEXUALS

Marriage restriction amendments and the accompanying debates also have a negative impact on heterosexual-identified family members of LGB individuals. Heterosexual family members living in states during marriage restriction campaigns reported more exposure to negative messaging about LGBs and

more concern for LGB family members than those living in states without marriage restriction amendments on the ballot (Horne, Rostosky, & Riggle, 2011). A majority of family members also reported support for their LGB family members' right to marry and stated a willingness to engage in educating others and social activism on behalf of their LGB family members. In another study, heterosexual family members of LGB individuals experienced secondary minority stress associated with legislation aimed at reducing the rights of LGB people (Arm, Horne, & Levitt, 2009).

In contrast, some researchers have argued that siblings deidentify with each other in order to emphasize the ways in which they are unique (cf. Schachter, 1985; Whiteman & Christiansen, 2008). Developmental psychologists such as Feinberg and Hetherington (2001) have found that parents treat children differently, such that each sibling may perceive the family environment quite differently. Research on LGBs and their heterosexual siblings (cf. Rothblum, Balsam, Solomon, & Factor, 2005, for a review) has shown a number of differences between these groups; heterosexuals are more likely to be religious, have children, and live closer to their parents, and heterosexual women are more likely to be homemakers and do more of the housework and child care than LGB siblings. Rothblum (2010) has argued that this may reflect deidentification among siblings. For example, when one sister comes out as lesbian and moves to San Francisco, her heterosexual sister may become more religious and politically conservative. Therefore, sibling deidentification theory suggests that heterosexuals who have LGB siblings may not automatically be affirming of legislation that promotes LGB equality.

### Current Study of Reactions to *Windsor* and *Perry*

Whereas previous qualitative studies have focused on the immediate impact or reactions to marriage restriction events, the release of the *Windsor* and *Perry* decisions presented an opportunity to examine immediate reactions to an event that expanded the availability of marriage equality. While previous study of the marriage restriction events found themes related to minority stress and coping, the impact of positive outcomes for same-sex couples and their heterosexual siblings remained open to study. Using a sample that included individuals who were currently or previously in same-sex couples and one of their currently or previously married heterosexual siblings and their spouses, we asked for reactions to the Supreme Court decisions. Answers were thematically coded to discover the impact of the decisions in this sample.

## METHOD

The sample is a subset of participants who were originally recruited in 2002 for a longitudinal study of same-sex couples who obtained civil unions

in Vermont in 2000–2001 and a married heterosexual sibling of one of the couple members and their spouse. The choice to include siblings in the study was made in order to obtain participants with similarity in background. In most cases, heterosexual and LGB siblings share demographics such as race, ethnicity, age cohort, household of origin, schools, religion, adult caretakers, and socioeconomic background, thereby allowing the heterosexual sibling group to operate as a natural comparison group for the LGB siblings (Rothblum et al., 2005). The participants in the current study were surveyed between August 2013 and January 2014.

## Participants

A total of 603 individuals participated in an online survey as part of a longitudinal study of same-sex couples and their married siblings and spouses (Balsam, Rothblum, Beauchaine, & Solomon, 2008; Solomon, Rothblum, & Balsam, 2004, 2005). Responses to an open-ended question asking about their reactions to two U.S. Supreme Court decisions were submitted by 371 participants. The sample of participants who responded to the open-ended question included 273 participants who were currently or previously in a same-sex couple and 98 who were currently or previously in a heterosexual sibling couple. Among the same-sex couple sample, 64% ( $n = 175$ ) were female and 36% male ( $n = 98$ ). Among the heterosexual sibling couple sample, 51% were female ( $n = 50$ ) and 49% were male ( $n = 48$ ). The mean age of the participants was 56 years ( $SD = 8.58$ ). In this sample, 12% ( $n = 46$ ) had a high school degree or some college, 39% ( $n = 143$ ) held a college degree, and 49% ( $n = 181$ ) had earned a graduate (masters/doctoral/professional) degree. The median annual income was \$60,000 with a range of \$0 to \$3,000,000 ( $M = \$86,000$ ,  $SD = \$190,000$ ). Participants self-identified their racial or ethnic identity as White, 81% ( $n = 300$ ); Black/African American, 1% ( $n = 4$ ); Asian, <1% ( $n = 2$ ); American Indian/Alaska Native, <1% ( $n = 2$ ); Biracial/Multiracial, 2% ( $n = 9$ ); and Other, <1% ( $n = 1$ ).

Since responding to the original survey in 2002, 88% ( $n = 241$ ) of the individuals in same-sex couples were with their partner of 2002, 10% ( $n = 28$ ) had dissolved that relationship, and 2% ( $n = 4$ ) had a deceased partner. Of individuals in heterosexual sibling couples, 94% ( $n = 92$ ) were with their partner of 2002, 4% ( $n = 4$ ) had dissolved that relationship, and 2% ( $n = 2$ ) had a deceased partner. At the time of the survey, the same-sex couple sample reported their relationship status as 43% ( $n = 161$ ) in a civil marriage, 15% ( $n = 57$ ) in a civil union/domestic partnership, 10% ( $n = 37$ ) in a committed relationship, and 5% ( $n = 18$ ) single or dating. The heterosexual sibling couple sample reported their relationship status as 95% ( $n = 93$ ) married, 2% ( $n = 2$ ) in a committed relationship, and 3% ( $n = 3$ ) single or dating.

Participants were recruited via mail and e-mail as part of Wave 3 of a larger longitudinal study. They were eligible to participate if at least one

member of the couple had completed the survey during Wave 1 of the study in 2002. Those who responded to the recruitment efforts were sent a link to an online survey, or a paper version of the survey if requested. Each participant who completed the survey was given a \$50 prepaid gift card.

### Data and Coding Procedures

All participants were invited to respond to the following open-ended question: "Please tell us anything you would like us to know about your reactions to the Supreme Court decisions on June 26, 2013 regarding same-sex marriage." The completion rate for this question was 62%. The length of responses ranged from 1 word to 193 words.

Responses were separated to create a subsample for the same-sex couples and a subsample for the heterosexual sibling couples. A coding team of three researchers independently analyzed the data from each subsample. Responses were coded using a thematic analysis based on an inductive process, with themes emerging from the participants' responses. Answers were broken up into "meaning units" representing different types of responses or "thoughts" within a respondent's answer, allowing respondents to have more than one theme represented in their answer. After independently coding the responses, the coding team met to discuss and reach consensus on the emergent themes. Results were then recoded to reflect the consensus of the team on the themes represented.

## RESULTS

Five themes emerged from the same-sex couple data: (1) longitudinal perspectives on the advancement of rights for same-sex couples; (2) emotional responses celebrating the decisions or expressing relief; (3) affirmation of their relationship or rights; (4) practical consequences of the extension of rights; and (5) minority stress related to anticipation of future prejudice or discrimination. Four themes emerged from the heterosexual sibling couple data: (1) ally support; (2) flat support without emotion or elaboration; (3) indifference to or ignorance about the decisions; and (4) disapproval of the decisions. The following sections describe and illustrate each theme.

### Same-Sex Couple Responses

#### LONGITUDINAL PERSPECTIVES: "ABOUT TIME!"

Participants' responses commonly placed the Supreme Court decisions within the historical context of marriage restrictions and, more broadly, within the



LGBT civil rights movement. Within this context, the decisions were experienced as a milestone, or as one step in a long process moving toward equality. Several participants started their comments with “about time,” “finally,” or “I didn’t think it would happen in my lifetime.”

Participants put the decisions in the perspective of being a “step” in progress toward equality. For example, a 70-year-old woman noted, “While I wish they had gone further to make marriage available to all Americans, this is a big step.” Another participant, a 59-year-old man wrote, “One in a long series of steps to acceptance of gay people as equals.” A 43-year-old male participant added an international movement perspective, stating, “I see the decision as a first step. There is much more that needs to be done before we’re on par with European countries that have same-sex marriage.”

Other participants reflected on collective lived history. For example, one 65-year-old woman noted that “I thought about the pioneers of the movement, many of whom are gone now, and about the many people who died before they had this opportunity.” Other participants put the decisions in broader political perspectives, including a 52-year-old woman who wrote, “In light of the decision to end the voting rights act the day before, I have very mixed feelings.”

#### EMOTION-BASED: “AMAZED HAPPINESS!”

Participants used a wide variety of emotion-based words in their answers. Their responses included words such as “absolutely elated,” “amazed happiness,” “euphoric,” “grateful,” “happy,” “relieved,” “proud,” and “pleasantly surprised.” Many participants noted their deep emotions, including a 71-year-old man who had been in a relationship with his partner for 49 years, writing “I was overjoyed, I cried.” Others experienced a sense of hope; for example, this 49-year-old man stated that the decisions “give me hope, and I feel it strengthens my legal standing with my partner of 18 years.”

A number of participants admitted that they were “shocked” or “surprised” by the decisions. As one participant, a 55-year-old woman, noted, “I was surprised and thrilled—didn’t think it would happen yet.” Another felt “immense joy and near disbelief at this unexpected decision.” One 35-year-old woman in a 14-year relationship described a series of emotions leading up to and following the decisions: “I was much more anxious beforehand and excited after the decisions were relayed than I thought I would be. I’m surprised at how quickly things are moving forward in the various states.”

Some participants described experiencing a “huge sigh of relief.” As explained by a 70-year-old woman in a 19-year relationship, “We were camping in the Canadian Maritimes and rather out of touch with news unless we hit wifi. It took a bit to let it sink in that our goal had been achieved. Then we exhaled.” Another participant, a 58-year-old woman, noted that “My initial

reaction was one of emotion, tears, happiness. A great pain of inequity was lifted.”

Several participants expressed a sense of longing or a feeling of exclusion from same-sex relationship rights. For example, one 48-year-old man who had been in a relationship for 25 years wrote: “I had mixed reactions. I was happy for the legal result and for our community but a bit sad because my relationship had recently ended.” In another example, a 52-year-old man whose partner was deceased explained: “I cried. I wished my deceased partner had lived to see it. I wished me and my deceased partner had been able to marry legally before he died in 2002.”

#### AFFIRMATION: “VALIDATION!”

Affirmation of relationships and LGB identities was described at individual, interpersonal, and societal levels. For some, affirmation operated differently across levels of identity. For example, a 54-year-old woman stated, “The decision didn’t make me more proud of who I am, but it helped support all of us. It’s helping with the societal stigma, helping remove the ignorance that prevails.” Another participant, a 71-year-old man in a 20-year relationship, noted, “I was elated and finally felt what true freedom is like. I feel more secure in my future to finally be able to get married.” For some, it was the use of words that made a difference, such as this 58-year-old woman in a 32-year relationship: “Suddenly, I could write ‘wife’ on paperwork and it was real! A great feeling.”

For some, the decisions affected the way they felt in their interactions with others. One 50-year-old woman wrote, “I was actually surprised at how I felt different (in a good way) just walking down the aisle of a grocery store . . . I guess I just felt more accepted even though people around me were not behaving any differently.” For another participant, a 52-year-old man in a 25-year relationship, “I think it makes it more difficult for co-workers and colleagues to disregard or disrespect my relationship with my spouse and the relationships of other lesbians and gay men with their partners.”

Some saw the affirmation as having an impact on the larger community. For example, one 65-year-old male participant stated, “I think it’s a great help for young people and will have a profound effect on teenagers who can expect a much more welcoming world.” A 52-year-old male participant wrote: “It tastes like freedom. Our country needs to do this more often—live up to our core principles of ‘liberty and justice for all.’”

Some participants noted that the affirmation was the result of a long process of societal change. For example, one 66-year-old woman wrote: “It was very affirming and felt like a reward for all the hard work all the active LGB people have done over the years!” Another 58-year-old woman noted, “I am proud to be the person I am, regardless of whether the Supreme Court thinks I have value. The decision, which is certainly positive, reflects changes in

society that we as LGBTQ people made possible before the broader society affirmed us.”

#### PRACTICAL: “BENEFITS”

Many participants’ responses focused on the tangible benefits that they and their partner expected to access as a result of the Court’s decisions. Participants mentioned specific benefits, such as insurance, Social Security, pensions, and immigration rights. One 45-year-old woman in a 25-year relationship wrote, “Immediate tangible benefit, besides taxes, is that spouse’s Catholic employer was required to add me to her health insurance.” For another 68-year-old woman, partnered for 16 years, the decisions “allow us to save money by filing joint income taxes.”

Other participants wrote about the “patchwork equality” effect of some states recognizing the marriages of same-sex couples while others still did not. For some, this meant that the decisions would have limited impact initially. A 54-year-old resident of Indiana illustrated this: “Pleased it happened so quickly. However, given the narrowness of the ruling, it does not affect me because of the conservative state in which I live. Much of my life will not change until US Supreme Court finds equal protection across the board.” For another 42-year-old man in a 17-year relationship, “We are very happy with the decision. However, given that we live in Georgia, we know the ruling does not fully protect us as a family unit until the Georgia DOMA is struck down.”

For some participants, federal recognition made a difference in how they felt about living in or entering the United States. For example,

I was very happy about the decision. My husband and I now live in Australia. We had been traveling back and forth for many years until my immigration to Australia occurred last July (2013). My husband was staying with me in the U.S. for 6 months at a time and I was staying with him in Australia for 3 months at a time. Eventually, U.S. Immigration detained my husband for about 2 hours each time (this happened 3 times, but he was always allowed in). This was extremely nerve-racking and caused him to NOT WANT to enter the US. Anyway, since the Supreme Court decision, we feel much better about entering the U.S.

#### MINORITY STRESS: “CAUTIOUSLY OPTIMISTIC”

Minority stress was a factor in the reactions of some participants. For many, the minority stress of anticipating rejection was evident, and they were “suspicious” of the progress made by the decisions. Some noted that while the

laws may change, societal change was ongoing. For example, one 49-year-old female participant wrote, "It doesn't change how I feel about myself, nor does it change the tolerance or acceptance of others in the short term." For another 56-year-old woman, "I'm very happy to have equality. However, 'marriage' has been spoiled for me by the haters."

Some participants expected challenges to the rulings. A 64-year-old woman wrote, "Don't want it to be overturned! I worry that it will." Another 87-year-old woman noted, "I am very concerned about a long-term acceptance, as there is a possibility of strong Republican or religious activity to wipe out laws protecting us." One 54-year-old woman stated, "I am pleased that it took place but slightly resentful that it has taken so long. I feel even more resentful when I consider that the interpretation of this ruling could be challenged by state and local governments everywhere."

Past experience with discrimination also influenced reactions. For example, a 56-year-old woman wrote, "I live in California and I don't know if I will ever get over the fact that Prop 8 passed. While polls show that Prop 8 would not likely pass today, it's hard to get past that devastating loss—having others vote on your civil rights is very painful." A 45-year-old male participant partnered for 15 years put the decision into a broader perspective:

I used to think that once marriage was recognized that so much discrimination would be erased. I was sad when I realized that I still don't feel comfortable holding my husband's hand in public for fear of harassment and in other parts of the country the Supreme Court decision won't alleviate threats of violence towards gay couples.

## Heterosexual Sibling Couple Responses

ALLY: "AWESOME!"

The majority of heterosexual siblings and their spouses supported the Supreme Court decisions. Some of the support was emotional and unequivocally approving and reflected the fact that they were allies for the rights of same-sex couples. Some participants' responses were brief and celebratory, such as "utterly delighted!," "absolutely thrilled," and "Woo-Hoo!" Others elaborated on their thoughts, including this 73-year-old woman whose sister is in a same-sex relationship: "As a PFLAG member, I was elated and relieved," and a 62-year old woman whose brother is gay wrote, "I strongly support marriage equality and celebrate the decision."

In some cases, heterosexual participants recognized the issue of same-sex marriage equality as part of a larger equal rights movement. A 60-year-old man whose brother-in-law is in a same-sex relationship wrote, "For me, it was a culturally defining moment. I believe it is the civil rights issue of this generation." Others, however, noted that the decisions "did not go far

enough,” were “long overdue,” and “great decision, but I wish that it settled the issues for all states.”

Other participants supported the decision in the context of their family relationship. As siblings of individuals in same-sex relationships, some noted their personal support of their family member. For example, one 49-year-old man stated, “My twin brother is married to his partner and I fully support their relationship or anyone else who would like to be married regardless of gender.” Another 49-year-old man wrote, “Thank God. My own attitudes have changed since I first remember thinking about the issue, but I still find it hard to believe it is even a question. The value of societal recognition of my marriage was substantially diminished by the lack of recognition given to my sister’s marriage.”

#### FLAT SUPPORT: “AGREE”

Many heterosexual participants expressed support for the decisions without further elaboration or suggestion of an emotional reaction. Responses such as “agreed with decision,” “approve,” and “fine with me,” were common. Others noted simply, “I think it was good,” and “I am in favor.” Approval was put into context by a 53-year-old male participant whose sister-in-law is a lesbian; he suggested that “I believe the courts are finally catching up with popular opinion.” Another participant found the decisions “very sensible.”

A few supportive responses suggested a degree of ambivalence or pragmatism. One 62-year-old participant noted that he was “favorable” toward the opinion and that it went “far enough but not too far, preserving states rights at this time is probably important to the long term process of achieving full equality.” A 50-year-old sister of a lesbian participant wrote, “I believe that same sex couples should be allowed to marry, not subject to the decisions of state governments.” A 53-year-old woman replied, “On a personal level, I didn’t feel it would affect me that much right now, but I am glad for others.”

#### INDIFFERENCE AND IGNORANCE: “UNSURE”

A number of heterosexual couple members responded that they were indifferent or ignorant about the decisions. For example, a 61-year-old male participant whose sister is a lesbian stated, “the facts are still cloudy to me.” Another participant, a 48-year-old man, was “unsure if I agree with this decision.” Several people wrote that they were not knowledgeable enough to have a stance on the issue and thus had “no opinion.”

Some participants expressed support for same-sex relationship rights while noting that they knew little about the Supreme Court cases. A 43-year-old woman whose sister is a lesbian described her reaction as, “I haven’t followed the rulings closely but I am strongly in favor of same-sex marriage benefits.” Another participant noted, “I haven’t heard anything about it.”

## DISAPPROVAL: "DO NOT AGREE"

Several participants unequivocally disapproved of the Supreme Court decisions. Some responses simply stated their disapproval as "not for it," or "I do not agree." Others elaborated slightly by sharing that their disapproval is based on their belief that "marriage is between a man and a woman."

Some participants who disapproved of the decisions expressed a belief that marriage was different from other types of legalized relationships and should be reserved for heterosexual couples. A 70-year-old woman whose sister-in law is a lesbian wrote, "did not agree with the decision; support civil union, not marriage [for same-sex couples]." One participant, a 53-year-old man whose brother-in-law is gay, replied, "I think it is fair to give equal treatment to homosexual couples, however I think that the word marriage should be reserved for one man and one woman. Homosexuals should be joined by a civil union or the like, but not marriage." A 44-year-old female participant stated that "I understand why they want it, but my religious views [mean that] I don't agree with same-sex marriage."

## DISCUSSION

The themes of responses from individuals in same-sex and heterosexual couples differed in several respects. For example, while individuals from both types of couples expressed support for the decisions, their responses reflected differences in the type of impact the decisions had on their lives. Responses of individuals from same-sex couples reflected a direct emotional, practical, and immediate impact of the decisions. Responses of individuals from heterosexual sibling couples reflected an impact by association, which included direct emotional impact for some, but not practical or immediate impact on their lives.

While a few individuals from the same-sex couple subsample expressed that they "do not believe in marriage," they were still supportive of the decisions and saw them as important for other same-sex couples. All of the individuals in the same-sex couple subsample knew about the decisions. On the other hand, several individuals in the heterosexual sibling couple subsample expressed disapproval of the decisions, responded that they had not heard about the decisions or stated that did not know enough about the decisions to have an opinion. These differences in reactions and support may affect family relationships and perceptions of family acceptance for same-sex couples.

Comparing the results of this study to findings of previous studies on marriage restrictions suggests several important differences in the impact of the events, as well as some similarities. Prior research on reactions of LGB-identified individuals to marriage restrictions have been interpreted using the

framework of minority stress (e.g., Rostosky et al., 2009). Minority stress was evident in the answers of individuals from same-sex couples in this study. Several individuals expressed some distrust of the short- or long-term impact of the decisions. This wariness may be attributed to anticipation of rejection and past experiences with discrimination, both factors in minority stress. Previous research has indicated that LGB individuals may adopt a “movement perspective” (see Russell & Richards, 2003) that serves as a resilience factor by placing antigay actions in political context. The cautious optimism expressed by some individuals in the same-sex couple subsample in the current study suggests that individuals may also employ this psychological strategy during positive milestones in the LGB rights movement.

The emotions expressed by this subsample reflected the positive outcome of these decisions. Emotions were positive, and feelings of affirmation contrasted to previous findings of negative emotions and alienation (see Rostosky et al., 2010). Feelings of affirmation and inclusion are more conducive to wellbeing than feelings of alienation and exclusion.

The reactions of individuals from heterosexual sibling couples had more variation than those of same-sex couples. There were many heterosexual couple members who viewed themselves as allies of their LGB sibling or in-law, with corresponding joy and other positive emotions. Several studies have found that interpersonal relationships between LGB individuals and heterosexuals are associated with more support for LGB issues among these heterosexuals (Stotzer, 2009), as well as predicted ally development and activism (Duhigg, Rostosky, Gray, & Wimsatt, 2010; Maisel & Fingerhut, 2011). This may apply as well to the relationship between LGB individuals and their heterosexual family members, especially siblings.

On the other hand, there were heterosexual participants who expressed disapproval of same-sex marriage or who reported that they were not familiar with the Supreme Court rulings. These results indicate that merely having an LGB sibling or in-law in the family does not make heterosexuals knowledgeable or supportive of legal decisions affecting those relatives. It also provides some support for a suggestion that siblings may deidentify with each other, prompting them to diverge politically or in their personal values.

### Limitations

The participants in this study are from a unique sample of same-sex couples who obtained a civil union in Vermont in 2000–2001 and married heterosexual couples recruited from siblings. While the initial sampling method was population-based (i.e., the sample represented the entire population that obtained a civil union), these individuals may differ in systematic ways from other individuals in same-sex and heterosexual couples. For example, this sampling method may have yielded participants who are more likely to be aware of the Supreme Court decisions and to attach personal relevance

to these events. Reassessing LGB individuals' reactions to federal marriage equality among a more diverse sample recruited through different methods could deepen understanding of the knowledge of and support for legal decisions affecting LGB communities.

The participants in the present sample were older and had higher education and income levels than national averages. Younger individuals and individuals from lower socioeconomic classes may have different reactions based on their experiences and social contexts. The sample is predominately "White/Caucasian"; reactions of individuals who identify as persons of color, or non-White individuals, may be different. The sample is composed primarily of individuals in long-term relationships and may not adequately represent the reactions of uncoupled, dating, or newly coupled LGB individuals, or those who oppose marriage.

## CONCLUSIONS

The U.S. Supreme Court decision in *Windsor* (and, to a lesser extent, *Perry*) expanded federal recognition of the civil marriages of same-sex couples and created opportunities for marriage equality advocates in all states to challenge marriage restrictions. This change in law created a new policy environment for same-sex couples and their heterosexual sibling and other family members. This article explored reactions to the event (*Windsor* and *Perry*) as distinct from past research on reactions to negative events (e.g., passing marriage restrictions amendments in the states). Individuals from same-sex couples exhibited primarily positive reactions, yet the impact of minority stress in their lives remains. This suggests that the minority stress framework is still useful for understanding the experiences of sexual minorities even in a context of expanded civil rights. Further research will be needed to explore both the short- and long-term consequences of changes in marriage policy on the lives of LGB and heterosexual family members.

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