

# A Literary Perspective to Prejudice and Confidentiality in the Same-Sex Relationships

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**ABSTRACT:** *Lesbian, gay, and bisexual people in romantic relationships suffer stigma, prejudice, and discrimination resulting from pervasive societal devaluing of same-sex partnerships. Research on same-sex couples has shown a negative connection between feelings of stigma and relationship quality. However, important issues remain unresolved about how feelings of stigma become more or less relevant within the setting of same-sex partnerships. This article provides a study of the tales that a purposive sample of 99 people in same-sex relationships wrote about their relational high points, low points, choices, and aspirations, as well as their experiences of stigma directly linked to their relationships. Narrative analysis of these tales showed that participants used various psychological techniques for making sense of their experiences of stigma within the framework of their relationships. Some participants viewed stigma as having a detrimental effect on their relationships, while others saw stigma as important, but external to their lives. Some participants viewed stigma as offering a chance to redefine concepts of commitment and relationship validity. Additionally, several participants viewed stigma as bringing them closer to their spouses and deepening the connection within their relationships. The findings of this research reveal the psychological methods people in same-sex couples employ to make sense of, deal with, and overcome social devaluation thus improving understandings of the connection between stigma and intimacy within disadvantaged partnerships.*

**KEYWORDS:** *Heterosexual, Intimacy, LGB, Same-Sex Relationships, Stigma.*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Lesbian, gay and bisexual persons (LGB) are stigmatized because of their sexual minority status and because of their romantic engagement in the same sex partner. Same sex partnerships are not accepted and acknowledged by society as equal to heterosexuals. This results in stigmatization, prejudice and discrimination among the same sex couples, frequently on a daily basis. These kinds of "minority stressors" define an atmosphere which makes it harder for people in same sex partnerships to fulfil their intimacy requirements and objectives. LGBs are thus at danger of not reaching their intimate objectives, but also of declining well-being and mental health. In addition, the social devaluation of intimacy in the lives of LGB people may influence the manner in which intimacy is and stays an ally for LGB individuals [1], [2].

### *1.1 Stigma and Intimacy Among Sexual Minorities:*

Many people have erroneous preconceptions and hypotheses that closeness and love relationships imply different things for LGB and heterosexual people. Public opinion surveys indicate that most individuals believe that interactions between men and women should not be recognized under the same law as heterosexual partnerships. Although many Americans favor legal recognition of equal sex as civil units, the majority still reject equal marriage rights by establishing a separate but not

equal difference between homosexual and heterosexual connections that adds to the stigma of homosexual partnerships. In the lives and relationships of LGB, negative stereotypes establish and reinforce heterosexual possibilities frameworks that favor the chances for heterosexuals to express and achieve intimacy while hindering LGB people' Intimacy aspirations. The absence of popular support for the acknowledgment of equal partnerships demonstrates that many individuals think that same-sex relationships on the political, legal and moral levels are less than heterosexual. This societal discourse of devaluing of homosexual partnerships is likely to have an impact on gay men and lesbians beyond their rejection of marriage. The negation of equal rights connected with partnership creates second-class citizens as same-sex couples and may impair the social and psychological well-being of LGB people [3], [4].

In same-sex partnerships, LGB people can suffer interpersonal stigma. Some same-sex couples, for example, suffer prejudice in the form of violence and hate crimes as well as everyday havoc and harassment. LGB persons have a higher stress than solitary LGBs in partnerships, due to the fact that they are not accepted and misunderstood by others in their life, particularly their families. Same-sex couples frequently feel the need to dissimulate their relationships with others to avoid stigma. While this may allow outward stigma to be avoided shortly, disguise one's identity and relationships are a cognitive load leading to additional social hardship. The social stigma surrounding homosexual relationships may also be internalized by people of the same sex, leading to internal stigma. Stigmatization experiences in its various forms are social stresses that are linked with worse quality and pleasure of the relationship, and greater conflicts, loneliness and sexual difficulties [5], [6].

The aforementioned research has consistently shown a broad link between stigma and relationship functioning. These studies indicate that the average member of a same-sex couple is associated with negative stigma and quality of relationship. However, additional research is needed to grasp the complicated nature of the impact that stigma plays in people's lives in homosexual partnerships. For instance, although stigma among same sex couples is a frequent experience, many flourish in happy and healthy relationships. Same-sex and heterosexual couples show comparable quality of connection. Therefore, it is essential to understand how and when LGB individuals see stigma as significant in their relationships and therefore provide a more nuanced perspective of how stigma experiences in homosexual pairs are managed [7], [8].

### *1.2 Relationship Stories:*

The current research used a narrative method to advanced knowledge of the function of stigma in homosexual interactions. Narrative methods concentrate on how people construct tales and narratives which reflect a sense of themselves that is interwoven into the many settings in their lives, reveals what is more or less significant, valued and self-defined in their lives. In this respect, the creation of narratives reflects the process by which people create their life experiences significance. By examining the stories systematically, researchers will get an insight into how and what elements of the social environment meaningfully become part of the experience of people via inclusion in their stories [9].

The tales people tell themselves and others about their interpersonal love relationships help to give them sense of their connections. Relationship tales include both components of conduct and perception. Research has repeatedly shown that narrative descriptions of relationships are

frequently important to the overall narration and sense of self of the person. Individuals create sense by building relationship history by selecting from a wide "menu" of culture, experience, values and purposes to include in their tales the most relevant and essential elements of their experiences. A story about a high point in the relation of a gay person, for instance, could include several components: what actually happened between him and his partner; his values within the relationship; his perceptions of his family's values; his recognition of cultural values of "legitimization" of relationships, and of social structures limiting his relationship with his partner. Therefore, relationship stories are continuously developing analytic units, with which researchers and therapists may explore interpersonal interactions in a comprehensive way [10].

Narratives also offer unique information on methods of shaping the meaning of people's connections in culture and social institutions, such as stigma and minority stresses. This led to the theoretical and empirical application of narrative and life story methods to understanding the life of LGB people, and shows how cultural and historic issues influence the formation of LGB identities. Therefore, studying how stigma emerges within LGB, disruptions, difficulties, and/or is overcome may offer an insight into how stigma might be seen and experienced in homosexual interactions. Understanding how stigma becomes relevant in intimate encounters is essential to develop current understanding of how stigma and minority stresses affect LGBs' daily experiences in same-sex romance connections.

### *1.3 The Present Study:*

This research investigated systematically how people in same-sex relationships narratively created the connection between stigma and closeness. Previous quantitative research has shown unidirectional and negative correlations between stigma and closeness. However, this association can be examined by examining how stigma and intimacy arise and interconnect as relevant in relationships between people in homosexual relations, in terms of whether and how stigma and intimacy coexist psychologically and become meaningful in the context of same-sex relationships.

## **2. METHODOLOGY**

### *2.1 Contestants and Procedure:*

The Relationship Stories Project draws narrative data for the present research: a study of how relationship narratives are created and linked with wellness indicators. Recruitment announcements have been issued from March to June 2008 at a total of 55 websites. In order to prevent biasing the sample in relation to sexual identity, stigma and intimacy, the invitation to participation was extremely broad. The research focuses on "how elements of the lives and relationships of individuals are linked to their well-being" to the participants. The research was also called "interesting to include a variety of individuals in terms of age, race/ethnicity and sexual orientation." To achieve a varied sample, three recruiting methods were employed. The tactics were aggressive; passive; and snowball strategies. Notices have been posted in lusters or forums particularly aimed at dating, relationships, sex or relationship issues to prevent sample bias.

### *2.2 Connections of The Participants:*

For them to readily reflect on different situations in their relationships, people had to be eligible for at least two years in a partnership. In addition, people must be 21 years old, identify as LGB and presently have the same sex (measured by asking for partner gender). A comparisons group of

heterosexuals in heterosexual relationships were also recruited for the parent study, however the data from that sub-sample will not be reported. Every prospective participant had to complete an on-line eligibility questionnaire to verify that the sample fulfilled the aforementioned eligibility requirements. Criteria for eligibility have not been revealed. The 4-point Couples Satisfaction Inventory included eligibility questionnaires in addition to questions on demographic and relationship factors. The quotas for recruitment were aimed at an equal number of males and women and equal amounts of those above and below the median CSI response. This was intended to create diversity in the quality and relationship tales of participants. These quota-based sample methods have been used to further minimize sampling and participant preconceptions. Individuals of transgender were not eligible.

The eligibility questionnaire was completed by a total of 6,360 people and 3,391 were qualified for the research. Due to a significant excess sample for the heterosexual recruiting requirements, only 247 eligible people were contacted for participation. Of the 247 people contacted, 160 completed the survey. Ten individuals were removed from the final sample because either they did not give sufficient data or broke up with their partners before the research. This resulted in a 61 percent response rate. The final sample of 150 people consisted of 99 persons identified by LGB who supplied narrative data for the present research. LGB participants were on average aged 34.38 years ( $SD=9.53$ ), with an average of 6.86 years ( $SD=5.00$ ) in their relations. Most of the people were married ( $n = 83$ ) and one-fourth ( $n = 26$ ). The sample included 48 males and 51 females. The majority ( $N = 77$ ), followed by Black/African-American ( $n = 11$ ) and Asian ( $n = 6$ ), were classified as white. Most participants had at least some education at the college level ( $n = 91$ ) and they had full-time employment ( $n = 60$ ). Participants lived in 36 United States countries.

### *2.3 Method of Elicitation of Relationship Story:*

A modified version of McAdams' guided autobiography was provided on the final internet-based questionnaire. The survey was adapted to produce stories of key events in current relationships: highpoint experiences; low-point experiences; decisions; and experiences related to an essential aim of their relationships. Participants were instructed to write one to two paragraphs for each occasion by creating tales about these important occurrences. For each narrative, five questions/aspects of the event were posed by the participants: (a) what happened? (b) Who and how have they been involved? (c) What were your thoughts, feeling and desiring partners and/or your partner? (d) Why do you believe that in your relationship this is an essential event? And (e) How do you believe that this incident occurred in society, period and/or location as to how things ended out? Each tale was distributed individually by the participants and instructed to answer five questions in whatever order they wanted.

Each participant had the same unclear incentives for their tales about their relationship. Using unclear instructions, stigma experiences in the connection develop naturally as participants considered them significant. Given the stigma experienced by participants in their relationships, which were not reflected in the first four generic stories, the participants responded to a 5th tale prompt that specifically invited them to recall their experience of stigma, harm or discrimination in connection with their relationship with their partners. This speed was last given and participants could not go back to past tales to prevent biased answers to the generic story leads. The research ran around 45 minutes and participants got a coupon of \$15 from Amazon.com.

The use of Internet techniques to re-search homosexual relationships is not without precedence. The social environment of the Internet enables researchers to sample a wider range of same sex partnerships in both demographic and relational features than with geographically limited samples of comfort. The Internet may also be anonymous and secure; thus participants may be more inclined than conventional face-to-face interviews to share unpleasant situations online. Finally, early study has shown that the integrity, depth and quality of the data gathered via Internet do not vary from that gathered through face-to-face techniques.

#### *2.4 Plan of Analysis:*

A two-phase qualitative analysis of the relationship history data was used in the present research. The first step consisted of a preliminary content analysis of the relationship tales of all 99 participants. In the content analysis, 75 participants reported a total of 120 tales included in the final narrative analysis. Each step of analysis and comprehensive information on the number of participants and tales examined are given below.

Analysis of content. Each tale (99 participants = 5 stories each study = 495 stories overall) was initially analyzed for the presence or lack of stigma and intimate topics. The theory-based stigma-related content indicators were (a) experiences/expectations of refusal, (b) dis-crimination, (c) masks of the sexual orientation or connection, and (d) internal homophobia. Meyer's minority stress model and qualitative study on minority stress in same-sex couples produced the definitions for these markers. Indicators of intimacy related contents have been developed in a romantic relationship from cognitive, emotional, and behavioral theories of intimate experiences. Specifically, material relating to intimacy includes (a) physical intimacy, (b) communications, (c) emotional intimacy, (d) dedication, and (e) confidence. In an intimacy research among homosexual males, the definitions used for classifying intimacy were established. The author and an advanced degree student trained in qualitative techniques were coded in each tale by two independent raters. The resultant dependability coefficients for material linked to stigma and intimacy were .87 and .81 respectively. The content analysis found 394 tales with intimate issues and 166 stories with stigma-related topics. A total of 120 tales included co-existences of stigma and intimacy: 74 stories were equivocal; 46 responded quickly to stigma. Co-occurrences have been provided to 75 participants. The following study focuses exclusively on tales that include stigma and intimacy co-occurrences.

Analysis of the narrative. Narrative analytical methods centered on an understanding of how people actively shaped connections in homosexual partnerships, which combined stigma and intimate experiences. This method to narrative analysis stressed the hermeneutics of restoration: accepting the tales of participants as the best indicator of its subjective reality from which the investigator could examine underlying meaning-making processes. The tales were also examined using demystification hermeneutics: the interpretation of significance from factors outside the objective text, such as inconsistencies and a lack of material to be addressed on the basis of current research. Readings of relationship history, for example, needed an analytical method that enabled us to grasp how social structures affected interactions. Since the subtle impact of such variables was frequently unrealized in the tales of participants, they took advantage of the hermeneutic of demystification to interpret what was really written in connection to the theory-oriented understandings of the life and relationships of LGBs.

Stories with co-occurrences of stigma and content of intimacy have been read by the author in many ways that the stories of participants show their subjective interpretations of links between their experiences of stigma and intimacy in their relationships. These links found in the stories are referred to as strategies, since they are evidence of participants' efforts to give meaning to their experiences of stigma and intimacy via stories. The author found six different techniques in the tales of the participants through several close readings. Even if no one tale used more than one approach, one participant might have used more than one method throughout the five stories he or she created. Next, a definition code book was created for the strategies and each narrative of the stigma and intimacy co-occurrence was coded for the kind of approach employed. The tales were individually coded for technique usage by the author and qualitative analysis was performed by a graduate student rater. Coders have achieved or have surpassed an acceptable degree of dependability for each approach, and any differences have been addressed via discussion.

### 3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The narrative analysis identified observable strategies in participant stories, which gave insights into how the participants could allow their experiences of stigma and of intimacy to co-exist in an integrative story and thus illuminate how stigma is more or less significant in their quest and experiences of intimacy. The experiences of these individuals specifically highlighted six distinct methods for framing intimacy stigma. The following were the following: The 'heavy weight' of stigma; Stigma as a source of contamination; Stigma as a generative experiment; and Stigma as an opportunity for (re)definition. Each approach is discussed below with an example narrative and its frequency of use. Many individuals reported stigma experiences as having a detrimental impact on their relationships. This weight has frequently been depicted as typical of the "company ongoing" 's devaluing of non-heterosexual sexuality and identity as well as family rejection of the "choice" of a partner of the same sex. This approach is most clearly stated in an objective narrative written by a lesbian lady, 40, who lives in the south of the United States for 3 years.

This research showed that people in homosexual partnerships use a number of methods to frame the connection between stigma and intimacy. These techniques are significant analytical units since they show how people manage their experiences of intimate stigma in same-sex partnerships. The methods disclosed in the tales of same sex couples may generally be classified as good or negative, considering the manner they were used to discuss stigma and its link with their experience of intimacy. The methods which depicted a detrimental impact on intimacy include "Stigma as 'Heavy Weight,' stigma as pollination," and to a lesser extent "Declining Stigma Importance" and "Stigma Isn't a Big Deal but" These methods are strongly related to earlier studies on stigma and the quality of interactions between equal sex partners who demonstrate the complicated but enduring and harmful impacts of stigmatization on same sex relationships. The two methods left showed the positive impacts that stigma experiences may have in individual relations: "stigma as generative experience" and "stigma as an opportunity for (re) definition." In all instances, the negative impacts of stigma were shown to be secondary to the good connection that results in the coping, resistance and overcoming of stigma. These two methods reflect the positive narrative resolution of tough experiences in life: a kind of narrative treatment that indicates improved wellbeing.

These results are comparable to earlier studies on the link between stigma and self-esteem. For example, researchers have pointed out that experiences of stigma may improve themselves under

specific conditions. In addition to the methods indicated in the accounts, the contents of participant stories recommended seeking or creating safe places, groups and rituals which may mitigate the harmful impacts of stigma. These strategies match Meyer's notion of community coping mechanisms for addressing minority stress and stigma and further show how stigma and exclusion can be generational, and how opportunities can be redefined for homosexual couples to be included in local and macro structures that are otherwise exclusionary.

#### 4. CONCLUSION

This research, despite ongoing stigmatic experiences and minority stress, shows that many people in homosexual partnerships have reported happy and fulfilling relationships. Future investigations must focus on further understanding the conditions under which couples can successfully navigate the negative effects of stigma, as well as determining the conditions for stigma to hold in relationships and have a detrimental impact on the relational and psychological wellbeing of couples. The methods shown in the relationship tales of people in homosexual relationships offer a valid beginning point for such research. Knowledge of the complexity and subtleties of these methods is surely helpful in future research goals and actions.

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