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Effects of Political Environment on Individuals and Relationship

Ariana Blethen – MSW Pursuant, Caroline Shanti PhD

Abstract

North American political policies have undergone many changes in the country's history. A significant Supreme Court ruling allowed same sex couples to marry when the Defense of Marriage Act was overturned. Marriage equality, particularly, has been shown to have an effect on internalized homophobia in both youth (Raifman et. al., 2017) and adults (Cramer et. al., 2015; Wells & Hansen, 20013). In addition, social attitudes surrounding homosexuality are shown to be associated with the political environment, specifically in relation to legality of same-sex marriage (Dickenson & Huebner, 2016; Mahaffey & Bryan, 2016; Hooghe & Meeusen, 2013). Participants in this study include ten lesbian couples whose relationships span one to twenty-two years together. Preliminary analysis of qualitative data identifies three major trends in responses from these women. The first suggests a strong expression of concern for the well-being of LGBT youth, with a some participants working with organizations that support this population. Another common theme of preliminary findings holds a strong focus on marriage equality and legalization in the state of Maine and nationally. The third initially identified trend brings other disenfranchised populations to the discussion, with each participant highlighting the importance of equality for all of America's inhabitants.

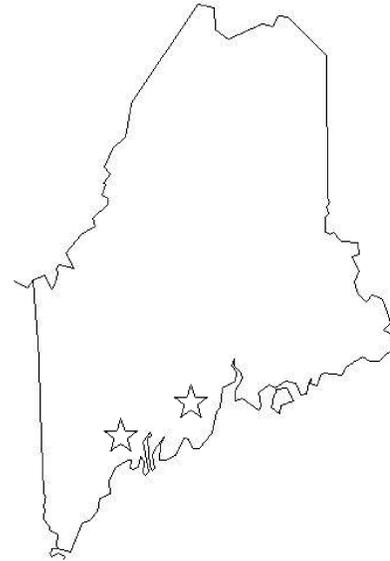
Acknowledgements:

I would like to sincerely thank my participants who made this research possible and agreed to participate in data collection. I would also like to thank my professor, Caroline Shanti for her ongoing support as well as the support of my classmates.

References:

Please inquire if you would like to receive additional information.

Participants reside in both urban Portland and rural Midcoast Maine. Despite differences in population between two areas of a very small state, the importance of advocacy through local politics was a common focus among subjects.



Methods

- Participants were interviewed in their homes in couple pairs to prevent identification of information across couples.
- One participant pair was interviewed in a split fashion, but with strong communication between partners.
- 8 Individuals were interviewed; 4 partner pairs.
- Participants ranged in age from mid-20's to mid-60's.

Overview and Research Question

The intended purpose of this study is to provide participants with a platform to share their experience in both the current political environment and through other political times in their lifetime as an individual and as a person in a same sex relationship. The research question addressed was focused on individual experiences over time, experiences as a couple, views on current politics and perception of the impact of the political environment on individuals and couples' experience of life. In summation, a primary research question could be brought to "How do you feel the current political environment affects you as an individual and you and your partner as a couple?"

Results

Preliminary analysis suggest specific trends in responses across participants.

Some of these trends include social advocacy at the local level, the importance of the legality of marriage on individuals' personal lives, the experience of coming out and the age at which participants came out, the experience of travel both domestic and international, among others.

Specific political influences varied depending on the level of political activism of specific participants.

Additional analysis will be completed to look at any differences between age groups, as 4 participants were under 45, and 4 participants were over age 45.

Discussion

- Discussion will be developed upon complete data analysis.

Limitations

- A potential weakness of this study was also purposeful, in order to protect the confidentiality of participants.
- Additionally, although participants were selected from two differing locations from the State of Maine, Maine is a state that is well known for liberal views and little diversity.
- Participants were selected from individuals known to researcher and were therefore likely to share views similar to researcher, as well as potentially share bias views to match liberal beliefs.