



“Laws Could Always Be Revoked”: Sociopolitical Uncertainty in the Transition to Marriage Equality

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Accepted: 8 April 2024 / Published online: 18 May 2024

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Abstract

Introduction Shifting sociopolitical landscapes may create doubts, questions, or concerns for individuals, especially those who hold a disenfranchised identity or are in marginalized relationships (Meyer in *Psychology of Sexualities Review* 7:81–90, 2016). As a result of political and societal opposition following the Supreme Court *Obergefell v. Hodges* (2015) decision, for example, legal and social uncertainties may lead to distress for same-sex couples.

Methods Guided by the Contextual Relational Uncertainty (CRU) model (Monk & Ogolsky in *Journal of Family Theory & Review*, 11(2):243–261, 2019), we test the association between sociopolitical uncertainties (i.e., uncertainty about legal recognition, social acceptance, and norms or scripts) and relational uncertainty (i.e., self, partner, and relationship uncertainty) among people in same-sex ($n = 180$) and different-sex ($n = 180$) relationships 1 year after the *Obergefell* ruling.

Results We found that most sources of sociopolitical uncertainty were positively associated with the sources of relational uncertainty. Using thematic analysis, we also analyzed responses to open-ended questions about concerns and experiences related to the *Obergefell v. Hodges* decision. We identified primary themes including increased (a) social certainty and (b) relational security, but also increased uncertainty related to (c) the breadth and permanence of legal recognition, (d) family norms and roles, and (e) potential backlash.

Conclusions Overall, these findings provide more evidence of the positive and negative consequences of precarious societal transitions on the lives of individuals, particularly people in marginalized relationships.

Policy Implications Policymakers and court system officials should be conscious of the full import of legislation. Even when producing legislation that is perceived to benefit a population, policies and educational resources should be considered that further support these communities across the transition.

Keywords Marriage · Same-sex marriage · Law and policy · Uncertainty · Marriage equality

Introduction

In addition to love and commitment motives (Lannutti, 2018), sexual minority individuals report legal protection and social validation as primary considerations that support

their decision to pursue marriage (Rostosky et al., 2016). However, the social, legal, and political landscape has been in flux for same-sex couples and people with sexual minority identities, leading to many doubts, questions, and concerns (see Kazyak, 2015; Riggle et al., 2021). Legal and social uncertainties can create considerable distress for individuals, especially individuals with minoritized identities or who are in marginalized relationships (Monk & Ogolsky, 2019). Uncertainty is greatest during periods of discontinuity when changes in established patterns result in doubts, questions, or concerns about the future (e.g., Solomon et al., 2016). Understanding the experience and sources of uncertainty is important given that uncertainties, like relational uncertainty (i.e., doubts and concerns about the future of a relationship), are associated with intrapersonal concerns, like depression and anxiety symptoms (Monk et al., 2022), as well as heightened cortisol stress reactivity (Priem & Solomon, 2011).

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Similarly, relational uncertainty is also associated with interpersonal upheaval, including increased conflict (Berger & Bradac, 1982), aggression (Knobloch & Solomon, 2003), and risk for overall relationship turmoil (Solomon et al., 2016) and dissolution (Lavner et al., 2012).

According to the Contextual Relational Uncertainty (CRU) model, a significant source of relational uncertainty for sexual minorities may stem from the sociopolitical environment in which they are embedded (Monk & Ogolsky, 2019). Political upheaval is reported to be the top stressor for many individuals in the United States (American Psychological Association, 2020). For example, political transitions like contentious presidential elections can increase stress for individuals (Affi et al., 2020; Hoyt et al., 2018; Lannutti, 2018). For people with sexual minority identities or who are in marginalized relationships in particular, heated debates and campaigns about marriage equality can leave them feeling uncertain about their legal and social standing due to the threat of losing rights (Frost & Fingerhut, 2016; Horne et al., 2011; Maisel & Fingerhut, 2011; Schecter et al., 2008). Although LGBTQ (i.e., lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, queer +) people have had to be adaptive and resilient (Suslovic & Lett, 2023), legal vulnerabilities may increase the risk for health and interpersonal functioning concerns (Siegel et al., 2021). Same-sex couples who observed the passage of Proposition 8 in California (Maisel & Fingerhut, 2011; Rostosky et al., 2016), for example, or other state laws revoking or banning rights for same-sex couples (Flores et al., 2018; Hatzenbuehler et al., 2010) reported considerable distress.

The Supreme Court of the United States (SCOTUS) ruling on *Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization* (2022) that overturned *Roe v. Wade* (1973), revoking the constitutional reproductive rights, demonstrates that concerns about rescinding rights are warranted. In addition to prompting fears about bodily autonomy and health care among many members of the LGBTQ community and beyond (Veldhuis et al., 2022), the *Dobbs* decision ushered in concerns about the overturning of other rights, with Supreme Court Justice Thomas (*Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization*, 2022) calling for the reconsideration of *Lawrence v. Texas* (2003) (sexual conduct with a member of the same-sex) and *Obergefell v. Hodges* (2015) (same-sex marriage) to “correct the error” of past decisions (p. 332). Despite a rapid increase in approval for marriage equality (see McCarthy, 2023), there was a coordinated opposition to same-sex marriage that continues today (see Veldhuis et al., 2018), including politicians questioning the power of SCOTUS, calls to overturn prior decisions, and the vocal support of individuals denying marriage licenses and services to same-sex couples on the basis of religious freedom (Huckabee, 2015; Lopez, 2015; Peters, 2015; Taylor, 2020; Wong, 2022). For example, the ruling on *303 Creative*

LLC v. Elenis (2023) opens the opportunity for businesses to refuse equal access to available goods or services when individuals feel the provision of work would conflict with their beliefs (e.g., a wedding website designer denying services to a same-sex couple). Thus, the ebb and flow of legal protections and legal uncertainty in the relational domain intersect with other areas of family life, with people potentially being concerned about what changing laws mean for other social policies, such as parenting rights (Kazyak, 2015) and housing discrimination (Eisenberg, 2015).

In addition to events that can create uncertainty about a couple's legal standing or future access to marriage (see Lannutti, 2018), federal marriage laws do not guarantee social acceptance (Clark et al., 2015; Thomas, 2014). Social acceptance and support provision are salient given the research illustrating their impacts on personal (Hatzenbuehler, 2010; Krueger & Upchurch, 2022) and relational (Lehmiller & Agnew, 2007) well-being¹. Social acceptance of and public opinion about same-sex marriage have improved over time (Charlesworth & Banaji, 2019; Tankard & Paluck, 2017), and same-sex marriage laws are associated with indicators of improved tolerance like decreased hate crimes and discrimination against LGBTQ people (e.g., Nikolaou, 2022). However, sexual minority people may still fear that anti-LGBTQ +rights advocates will view the *Obergefell v. Hodges* ruling as a threat to heteronormative beliefs and/or relationships and embolden individuals with sexual prejudice to lash-out against LGBTQ people. Holman and Oswald (2016), for example, argue that legal and social changes that occur “in the context of intense conflict and debate” likely surface prejudiced “sentiments and increased ideological polarization in some families and communities” (p. 214). As a result of this sentiment and polarization, sexual minority people may be reluctant to pursue marriage out of fear that it will make them “targets” of additional hostility (Lannutti, 2007). Even if legal and social support is present, the existence of opposition is likely to produce uncertainty during periods of change.

To date, few studies have explicitly focused on uncertainty in sexual minority populations (see Monk & Ogolsky, 2019; Allen, 2007). However, similar concepts that could promote uncertainty (see Owen et al., 2014) have been investigated such as ambivalence or opposing feelings and emotions about people, relationships (Reczek, 2016), or marriage-itself (Bosley-Smith & Reczek, 2018). Ambiguous social climates have led scholars to call for research investigating the

¹ We feel it is important to reiterate that same-sex couples thrive despite opposition (see Monk & Ogolsky, 2019) as they have had to be adaptive and resilient (Suslovic & Lett, 2023). For example, there are often few differences between same-sex and different-sex couples (e.g., Kurdek, 2005) and some studies point to sexual minority people as having greater relationship quality than their heterosexual counterparts (Balsam et al., 2008; Patterson et al., 2004).

effects of shifting sociopolitical landscapes (see Meyer, 2016; Umberson et al., 2015) and how changes in policies and resulting legal uncertainties influence the lives of people in same-sex relationships (Ogolsky et al., 2019a, b, 2022; Riggle et al., 2010). Therefore, we explored (a) the association between sociopolitical uncertainty (e.g., doubts, questions, or concerns about legal rights and social support) and relational uncertainty (e.g., doubts, questions, or concerns about the future of their relationships) and (b) broader concerns about the sociopolitical climate during the transition to marriage equality.

Theorizing About Socio-Political and Relational Uncertainties

The Contextual Relational Uncertainty (CRU) model posits that periods of sociopolitical upheaval can lead individuals to experience uncertainty regarding their position in society and in their relationships (Monk & Ogolsky, 2019). More specifically, ambiguous changes within society can promote uncertainty around legal recognition (e.g., “will our access to marriage last?”), social acceptance (e.g., “will our friends, family, and other people in our lives accept us or our relationship?”), or scripts, norms, behaviors, and roles (e.g., “how are we supposed to act now in certain situations?”), especially for those in a disenfranchised social standing or those most vulnerable to a societal change. In turn, this sociopolitical uncertainty may prompt people to experience concerns or questions about their relationships moving forward.

The CRU model is directly derived from relational turbulence theory (RTT; Solomon et al., 2016), which has historically focused on how relationship transitions (e.g., the transition from casually dating to exclusively dating) can prompt relational uncertainty due to discontinuity in established relational experiences, patterns, or expectations (Solomon & Knobloch, 2004). According to RTT, during transitions, individuals are more sensitive and reactive to events and experiences that may otherwise be mundane. As a result of these transitions, behavioral patterns can be disrupted and questions can emerge that leave individuals feeling unsettled (Solomon et al., 2016). Within this framework, relational uncertainty is characterized by questions about one’s own level of involvement (i.e., “self uncertainty”), doubts about a partner’s level of involvement (i.e., “partner uncertainty”), or concerns about the relationship itself (i.e., “relationship uncertainty”). In concert with transitions that alter the climate of a relationship, such uncertainty may lead to individuals experiencing their relationships as turbulent (Solomon et al., 2016). Partners may be reactive and defensive during transitions as they question their relationship confidence or security. Faced with the potential for loss or hurt, partners might change their relationship behaviors. Expanding

beyond the immediate environment, the CRU model emphasizes external, environmental events as catalysts for meaningful uncertainty for people (Monk & Ogolsky, 2019). As societal and political environments shift, even in directions that appear supportive or favorable, individuals in disenfranchised positions may experience unique uncertainties and added turbulence as they explore novel or tumultuous horizons.

The Present Study

Given sociopolitical upheaval may create uncertainty for disenfranchised people (Monk & Ogolsky, 2019), we sought to (a) understand if social and legal uncertainties are related to relational uncertainty and (b) gain insight into the experiences of uncertainty for individuals, especially people in same-sex relationships. Although individual identity is critical and considered in our study (e.g., lesbian identity), we primarily focus on relationship type (e.g., people in same-sex relationships) given the visibility of partnerships and the relational nature of marriage laws (e.g., although a bisexual person with a different-sex partner experiences minority stress related to their identity, their ability to marry their current, different-sex partner is not precarious). Nevertheless, we also examined sexual identity and include these findings as a supplemental file to reduce the potential for identity erasure.

The heated discourse and opposition to the *Obergefell v. Hodges* ruling may make people uncertain about their legal rights and social standing (Frost & Fingerhut, 2016; Maisel & Fingerhut, 2011). In addition, efforts to oppose or overturn the *Obergefell v. Hodges* ruling may create additional uncertainties, like concerns about safety (Lannutti, 2007). Therefore, we first explored the association between sociopolitical uncertainty (i.e., concerns about legal recognition, social acceptance, and social scripts) and relational uncertainty (i.e., self, partner, and relationship uncertainty) quantitatively using data collected 1 year following the *Obergefell v. Hodges* ruling. Simple comparisons between same-sex couples and different-sex couples on relational outcomes can inadvertently set heterosexuality as the “standard” or “norm” (see Monk et al., 2018). Instead, we include heterosexual individuals in different-sex relationships in order to investigate the assumption that sociopolitical uncertainty will be most pronounced for those seemingly most affected (Monk & Ogolsky, 2019). This hypothesis is in contrast to individuals opposing same-sex marriage: endorsing concerns that marriage equality could create uncertainty about the meaning of marriage for heterosexual individuals (Gallagher, 2004; Hawkins & Carroll, 2014). We put forth the following hypotheses:

1. We hypothesized that each component of sociopolitical uncertainty would be positively associated with the different sources of relational uncertainty.
2. We also hypothesized that these associations would be more pronounced for individuals in same-sex relationships compared to those in different-sex relationships.

To (a) add additional context to our quantitative findings, (b) explore the sources, content, and experience of uncertainty, and (c) allow for novel insights from participants, we next examined responses to open-ended questions collected after the first year of the *Obergefell v. Hodges* ruling. Specifically, we sought to answer the following research question:

3. What are the lingering doubts, concerns, and questions, if any, reported by individuals following the *Obergefell v. Hodges* ruling?

Method

Sample and Procedures

Data were derived from a larger project assessing the well-being of people across the transition to marriage equality, in which people in same-sex relationships were oversampled to allow adequate comparison (Ogolsky et al., 2019a). We focus on data collected 1 year after the *Obergefell v. Hodges* (2015) decision because that was the point in the study when items pertaining to uncertainty and relevant open-ended questions were included. This timing also encompassed the heightened opposition across the first year of the transition to marriage equality. The present study includes 360 individuals who self-reported being in same-sex ($n=180$) or different-sex ($n=180$) romantic relationships. Consent to participate in this study was obtained, and this study was approved by the Institutional Review Board at the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign. Participants were recruited through targeted advertisements and posts to the web-pages of online groups related to the study aims (e.g., religious groups, PFLAG) hosted on popular social media platforms. To qualify for the study, participants had to be at least 18 years of age and be in a romantic relationship at the onset of the study. Following recommendations by Robinson-Cimpian (2014), we screened data for mischievous responders to online surveys. See Table 1 for a list of demographic characteristics by relationship type.

Quantitative Measures

Sociopolitical Uncertainty

To assess sociopolitical uncertainty in reaction to the *Obergefell v. Hodges* (2015) ruling, we asked participants

questions proposed by the original CRU model (Monk & Ogolsky, 2019). Participants were asked “How certain are you that your relationship will be legally recognized the way you want it to be?” (i.e., *legal uncertainty*) and responded to 3-items accessing different dimensions (i.e., friends, family, people outside your friends and family) of *social uncertainty* (e.g., “how certain are you that your relationship will be socially accepted by your family the way you want it to be?”; $\alpha=.79$), on a scale of 1 (*completely certain*) to 6 (*completely uncertain*). Participants also responded to 6-items related to *uncertainty about social scripts, norms, behaviors, and roles* (henceforth abbreviated to “uncertainty about social scripts”). These items were also on a scale of 1 (*completely certain*) to 6 (*completely uncertain*). Example items include, “I know what society expects a marriage (or marriage-like relationship) to look like” and “I know which household roles I will take on and which my partner will take on” ($\alpha=.86$). Items were averaged prior to analysis. Sociopolitical uncertainty items are listed in the supplemental file.

Relational Uncertainty

We measured uncertainty about the future of a relationship using 12 items from the Relational Uncertainty Scale (Knobloch & Solomon, 1999). Participants responded to 4 items related to self uncertainty (e.g., “How certain are you about how you feel about this relationship?”; $\alpha=.95$), 4 items related to partner uncertainty (e.g., “How certain are you about how important this relationship is to your partner?”; $\alpha=.96$), and 4 items related to relationship uncertainty (e.g., “How certain are you about the definition of this relationship?”; $\alpha=.94$), measured on a 6-point scale (1 = *completely certain*; 6 = *completely uncertain*). Items were averaged prior to analysis.

Qualitative Questions

Participants were asked several open-ended questions about their lives and relationships. Namely, 1 year following the *Obergefell v. Hodges* ruling, participants were asked several open-ended questions about the potential influence of the event. We examined participants’ responses to questions that included the following: (1) “In what ways, if any, has the federal legalization of same-sex marriage influenced your relationship?” (2) “What current legal issues, if any, are influencing your relationship?” (3) “Marriage law and norms are rapidly changing. What are some areas of life, if any, that might be unclear for you or your relationship moving forward?” On average, participants provided 25.70 words in their open-ended responses, with an upper range of 171 words.

Table 1 Sample demographics

	Same-sex relationship <i>M</i> (SD) [range] / %	Different-sex relationship <i>M</i> (SD) [range] / %
Age	37.62 (12.16) [18–74]	33.76 (10.03) [18–72]
Marital status		
Legally married	41.1%	64.4%
Not legally married	58.9%	35.6%
Relationship length (years)	6.28 (6.46) [0–28]	7.96 (8.96) [0–51]
Parental status		
Parents	26.1%	52.8%
Not parents	73.9%	47.2%
Gender		
Man	46.1%	35.60%
Woman	49.4%	64.4%
Trans ^a	2.2%	0.0%
Other	2.2%	0.0%
Birth sex		
Female	53.3%	65.0%
Male	46.7%	35.0%
Sexual orientation		
Gay	45.0%	0.6%
Lesbian	37.2%	0.0%
Heterosexual/straight	1.1%	86.7%
Bisexual	8.3%	11.1%
Queer	7.2%	0.0%
Other	1.1%	1.7%
Race		
White	87.2%	93.3%
Latino/a/x	11.1%	6.1%
Black	6.7%	1.7%
American Indian or Alaska Native	2.2%	0.6%
Asian	0.6%	2.8%
Other	0.6%	0.0%
Median income	\$40,000–49,999	\$40,000–49,999
Education		
Junior high	0.0%	1.1%
Partial high school	0.0%	1.1%
High school or GED	8.9%	3.9%
Partial college or trade school	26.1%	19.6%
Four-year university	37.8%	43.6%
Graduate or professional degree	27.2%	30.7%

^aCollectively encompasses binary (e.g., transfeminine or transmasculine) trans identities and nonbinary (e.g., transgender) trans identities

Quantitative Data Analysis Plan

Data were analyzed with *t*-tests and multiple regression analyses using SPSS. First, we conducted independent samples *t*-tests to examine mean level differences in sociopolitical uncertainty (i.e., legal recognition, social acceptance, social scripts) across relationship types (0 = *different-sex relationship*, 1 = *same-sex relationship*). We used multiple

regression to assess the hypothesis that each component of sociopolitical uncertainty would be positively associated with the different sources of relational uncertainty. We included relationship status (0 = *not legally married*, 1 = *legally married*), birth sex (0 = *female*, 1 = *male*), parental status (0 = *no children*, 1 = *one or more children*), and relationship length in years as covariates in analyses. In addition to relationship type, we modeled main effects of legal

Table 2 Correlations and descriptive statistics

	1	2	3	4	5	6	<i>M</i> (<i>SD</i>)
1. Self uncertainty	-	0.84***	0.93***	0.40***	0.29***	0.61***	1.79 (1.06)
2. Partner uncertainty	0.83***	-	0.88***	0.27***	0.29***	0.48***	1.70 (.97)
3. Relationship uncertainty	0.91***	0.85***	-	0.36***	0.31***	0.60***	1.76 (1.03)
4. Legal uncertainty	0.61***	0.51***	0.59***	-	0.49***	0.54***	1.85 (1.05)
5. Social acceptance uncertainty	0.62***	0.62***	0.66***	0.74***	-	0.42***	2.21 (0.97)
6. Social scripts	0.58***	0.52***	0.57***	0.62***	0.59***	-	1.98 (0.87)
<i>M</i> (<i>SD</i>)	1.74 (1.05)	1.76 (1.02)	1.82 (1.10)	1.54 (1.18)	1.62 (0.99)	1.95 (0.81)	

Correlations and *M/SD* for same-sex relationships are above the diagonal; correlations and *M/SD* for different-sex relationships are below the diagonal

*** $p < .001$

uncertainty, social acceptance uncertainty, and uncertainty about social scripts (i.e., sociopolitical uncertainty) on self, partner, and relationship uncertainty (i.e., relational uncertainty). Next, we examined relationship type as a moderator to assess the hypothesis that these associations would be more pronounced for individuals in same-sex relationships compared to those in different-sex relationships. Main variables were centered for final analyses. Significant interactions were probed at ± 1 standard deviation around the mean (Aiken & West, 1991).

Qualitative Data Analysis Plan

We applied principles of thematic analysis to analyze the qualitative data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The first phase of the process was data familiarization, when the first and fourth authors carefully read all the open-ended responses from participants. Next, coders analyzed the data separately to generate initial codes based on salience and frequent occurrence. Coders met weekly to discuss overlapping codes, refine codes as they identified themes (e.g., “increasing significance of marriage” and “relationship implications” became “provision of social certainty” and “enhanced relationship security” to more precisely reflect the participants’ experiences), and come to consensus to establish a codebook, which provided a coding frame for the next phase. When reviewing potential themes, the coders applied the established codebook to the narratives of participants. We continued to identify and refine common themes by relabeling and condensing codes (e.g., concerns about violent and discriminatory experiences were initially collapsed into “uncertainty related to minority stress,” which largely encompassed fears related to backlash against the SCOTUS ruling, specifically; thus, this code became “uncertainty about backlash” for parsimony and precision). We continued this process until no new codes were identified (Charmaz, 2014), and we ceased talking about individual cases and began talking about broader themes across participants (Morse, 2015).

Borrowing from more deductive, theoretical thematic analysis traditions (Braun & Clarke, 2006), we recognized that the CRU model provided a unique a-priori guide to coding. Therefore, we noted sensitizing concepts or existing ideas that might inform or bias our coding (e.g., uncertainty about legal recognition) and remained mindful of these concepts throughout the process to ensure themes were grounded in the data (i.e., described directly by participants; see Charmaz, 2014). For example, coders engaged in incident-by-incident coding in the initial phases to remain close to the data and enhance trustworthiness that these uncertainties were present in participants’ narratives. Other indicators of trustworthiness included prolonged engagement (i.e., coders spent several semesters reading through the data multiple times) and peer debriefing by having remaining authors confirm the codes identified (Charmaz, 2014; Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Results

Quantitative Results

Given the relevance of questions included, we used data from the last wave of a multi-wave data set, which originally included 545 individuals in the first wave (Ogolsky et al., 2019a). Participants who dropped out after Time 1 ($n = 185$; and two participants who failed to provide relevant Wave 4 data for the current study) reported less education ($t [321] = 4.67, p < .001$) and less serious involvement in their relationships ($t [242] = 2.19, p < .05$) than those who remained in the sample. Missing data at the focal wave of the present study was minimal across variables of interest (3–6%). Nevertheless, we opted to perform multiple imputation to avoid excluding cases with missing information, which can yield biased results (Li et al., 2015). We performed 10 imputations using the expectation maximization algorithm. An additional 10 participants had inadequate data on focal study variables for the multiple imputation, which resulted in an analytic sample of $n = 348$ in the final models. Descriptive statistics and

Table 3 Final regression models predicting relational uncertainty

	Self uncertainty			Partner uncertainty			Relationship uncertainty		
	<i>B</i>	SE	β	<i>B</i>	SE	β	<i>B</i>	SE	β
Covariates									
Marital status	0.07	0.11	0.03	0.03	0.11	0.01	0.07	0.11	0.04
Birth sex	0.11	0.09	0.05	0.19	0.10	0.10*	0.15	0.09	0.07
Parental status	-0.05	0.11	-0.03	-0.04	0.11	-0.02	-0.11	0.11	-0.05
Relationship length	-0.01	0.01	-0.04	0.00	0.01	-0.00	-0.00	0.00	-0.03
Main effects									
Legal uncertainty	0.17	0.09	0.18 ^a	-0.03	0.09	-0.03	0.10	0.09	0.10
Social acceptance uncertainty	0.31	0.10	0.30**	0.50	0.10	0.52***	0.46	0.10	0.44***
Social scripts uncertainty	0.36	0.11	0.29***	0.29	0.11	0.25**	0.32	0.11	0.25**
^b Relationship type	-0.12	0.10	-0.06	-0.26	0.10	-0.13**	-0.28	0.10	-0.13**
2-way interactions									
Legal uncertainty \times relationship type	-0.10	0.12	-0.07	-0.02	0.12	-0.02	-0.10	0.12	-0.07
Social acceptance uncertainty \times relationship type	-0.29	0.13	-0.19*	-0.38	0.13	-0.27**	-0.39	0.13	-0.26**
Social scripts \times relationship type	0.31	0.14	0.18*	0.20	0.14	0.13	0.33	0.14	0.19*
<i>R</i> ²	43%			34%			44%		

B unstandardized beta, β standardized beta

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$

^a $p = .06$

^b1 same-sex relationship, 0 different-sex relationship

correlations for the full sample are provided in Table 2 by relationship type. In line with prior research, sources of relational uncertainty were positively correlated with each other in the full sample ($r = .83-.93, p < .001$). The components of sociopolitical uncertainty were also correlated with each other in the full sample ($r = .49-.63, p < .001$). According to the independent samples *t*-tests, we found no significant differences between those in same-sex and different-sex relationships in the components of relational uncertainty ($p = .60-.67$) nor uncertainty about social scripts ($p = .72$). Individuals in same-sex relationships had significantly higher levels of social acceptance uncertainty ($t [346] = -5.60, p < 0.001, 95\% \text{ CI } [-0.79, -0.38], d = 0.98$) and legal uncertainty ($t [346] = -2.60, p < 0.01, 95\% \text{ CI } [-0.54, -0.08], d = 1.11$) than individuals in different-sex relationships.

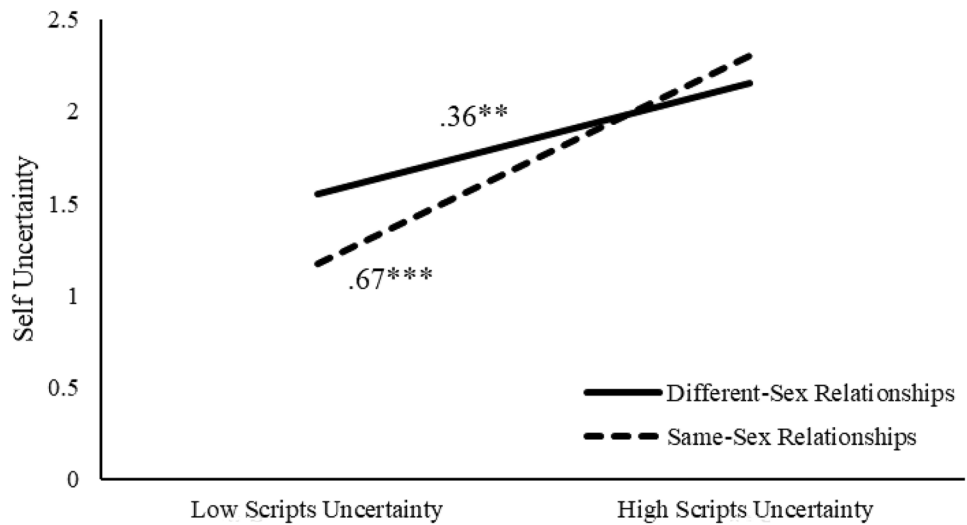
Our first hypothesis (H1) was that sociopolitical uncertainty would be positively associated with different components of relational uncertainty. For self uncertainty in models prior to including interaction terms, we found that sociopolitical uncertainty about legal recognition ($\beta = .14, p < 0.05$), social acceptance ($\beta = .13, p < .05$), and social scripts ($\beta = .43, p < .001$) were positively associated with participants' questions or concerns about their own level of involvement. We included interaction terms in the final models to test the second hypothesis (H2), and the association between legal uncertainty and self uncertainty was no longer significant at traditional thresholds (see Table 3). We found that the magnitude of the association between uncertainty

about social scripts and self uncertainty was larger among individuals in same-sex relationships. That is, individuals who were less certain about social scripts were also less certain about their own involvement in their relationship, and the slope of the effect was more pronounced among individuals in same-sex relationships (see Fig. 1). Conversely, the association between social acceptance uncertainty and self uncertainty was only significant for those in different-sex relationships (see Fig. 2).

For partner uncertainty, uncertainty about social acceptance ($\beta = .28, p < .001$) and uncertainty about social scripts ($\beta = .35, p < .001$) were positively associated with questions or concerns about a partner's involvement (H1). Next, when including the interaction terms (see Table 3 for final models), relationship type was a significant moderator of the link between uncertainty about social acceptance and partner uncertainty (H2), with the slope only being significant among those in different-sex relationships (see Fig. 3).

For relationship uncertainty, we found that uncertainty about social acceptance ($\beta = 0.22, p < .001$) and social scripts ($\beta = .41, p < .001$) were positively associated with questions or concerns about the relationship itself (H1). Next, when including interaction terms (see Table 3 for final models), the links between uncertainty about social acceptance, as well as uncertainty about social scripts, and relationship uncertainty were moderated by relationship type (H2). Among individuals in different-sex relationships, uncertainty about social acceptance was positively associated with relationship

Fig. 1 Association between social scripts uncertainty and self uncertainty by relationship type. *** $p < .001$, ** $p < .01$, * $p < .05$



uncertainty. Conversely, there was no significant association between uncertainty about social acceptance and relationship uncertainty among individuals in same-sex relationships (see Fig. 4). The magnitude of the association between uncertainty about social scripts and relationship uncertainty was larger among individuals in same-sex relationships than those in different-sex relationships (see Fig. 5). These results for the regression analyses were similar in terms of directionality and pattern of significance when looking at sexual identity (see Supplemental File for results by identity).

Qualitative Results

We identified several themes that underscored the benefits of the *Obergefell v. Hodges* ruling that provided security as

well as concerns that stem from ongoing and new uncertainties in a changing sociopolitical landscape.

Provision of Social Certainty

Overall, people in same-sex relationships noted that the legal rights and protections associated with marriage equity made them feel their identities were more valid, and hopeful that social recognition would follow the legal recognition. For example, participants described a sense of personal security derived from legal marriage benefits like federal recognition (e.g., creating consistency across states), financial benefits (e.g., merging assets, tax/social security benefits, estate planning, particularly for the older adults in the sample), parental rights (e.g., interest in adoption or the ability to secure step-parent rights), health insurance (e.g., provide or condense

Fig. 2 Association between social acceptance uncertainty and self uncertainty by relationship type. *** $p < .001$, ** $p < .01$, * $p < .05$

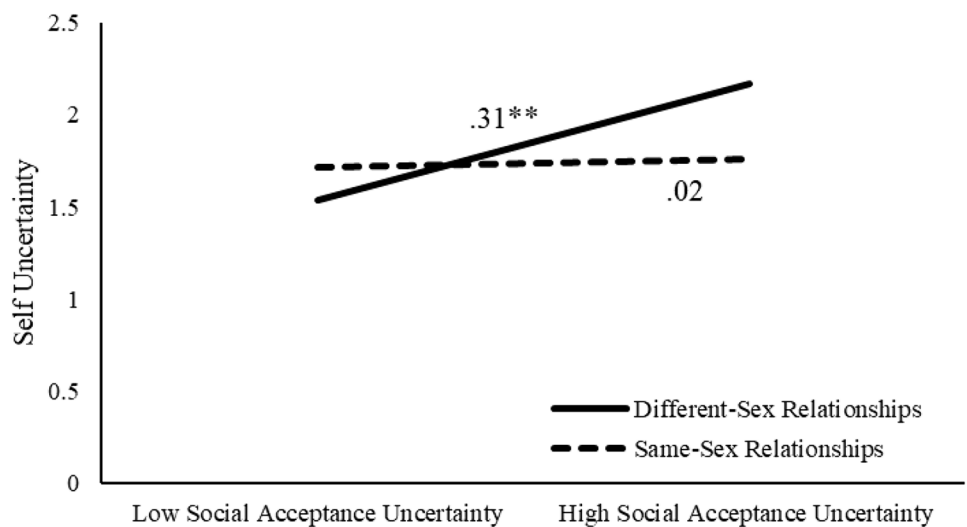
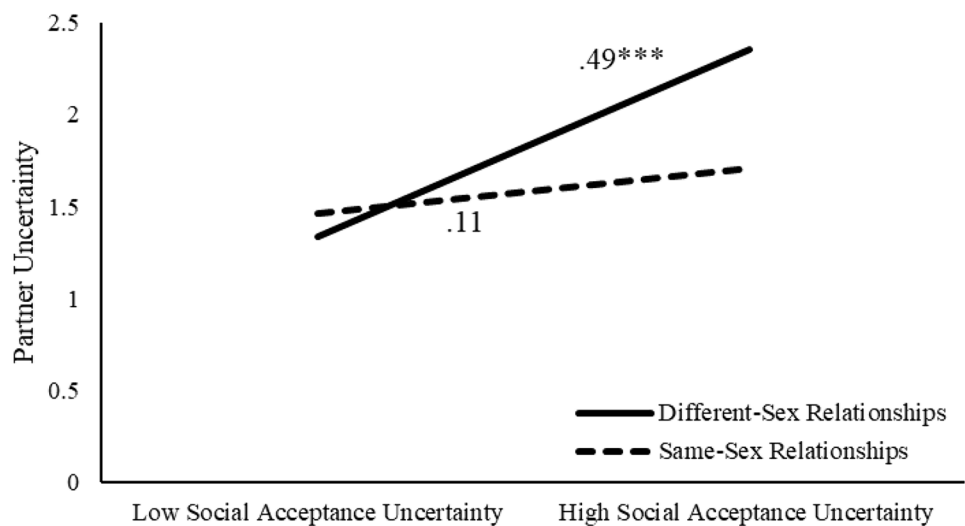


Fig. 3 Association between social acceptance uncertainty and partner uncertainty by relationship type. *** $p < .001$, ** $p < .01$, * $p < .05$



health benefits for the family), and personal fulfillment of life goals (e.g., for love and commitment). A participant (#3; 51 y [years old]; lesbian woman) said, “now our heartfelt relationship is recognized legally making it easier for us to purchase cars, homes, etc. together. And, there are no more questions about property or investments or any legal or monetary issues. We are equal in every way.” Another participant (#139; 34 y; bisexual woman) said, “it has made us feel much more accepted and comfortable when traveling, especially with our children. Visiting states outside of Illinois no longer seems to require extensive documentation of our relationship in case something bad happens.”

Although there was notable uncertainty in several areas of family life (e.g., limits and recognition of adoption rights), the federal recognition made those in same-sex relationships feel more belonging (e.g., the “legalization of marriage seems to open the closet door a few more inches”; #49; 57 y; gay man). A participant (#346; 52 y; gay man) said, “It allowed us to

legally marry and to not worry about which state we might live in or move to. It made us feel more secure. It made us feel like full citizens.” Similarly, another participant (#152; 67 y; gay man) said, “it has given credibility of our marriage in the entire country. It has taken away the aspect of being a second-class citizen by giving us all the rights that any married couple has.”

Enhanced Relationship Security

In addition to the practical benefits of legal marriage that provided participants with a sense of societal legitimacy, participants relatedly noted many positive impacts of this social recognition on their relationship itself, such as increased relational significance and that the ruling provides “symbolic validation [...] no matter where we end up moving” (#492; 24 y; lesbian woman). A participant (#121; 43 y; lesbian woman) said,

Fig. 4 Association between social acceptance uncertainty and relationship uncertainty by relationship type. *** $p < .001$, ** $p < .01$, * $p < .05$

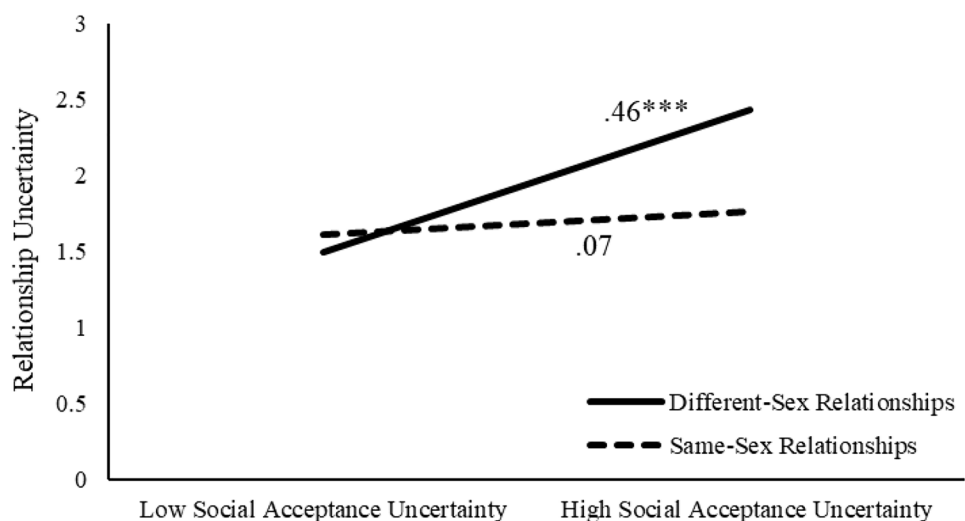
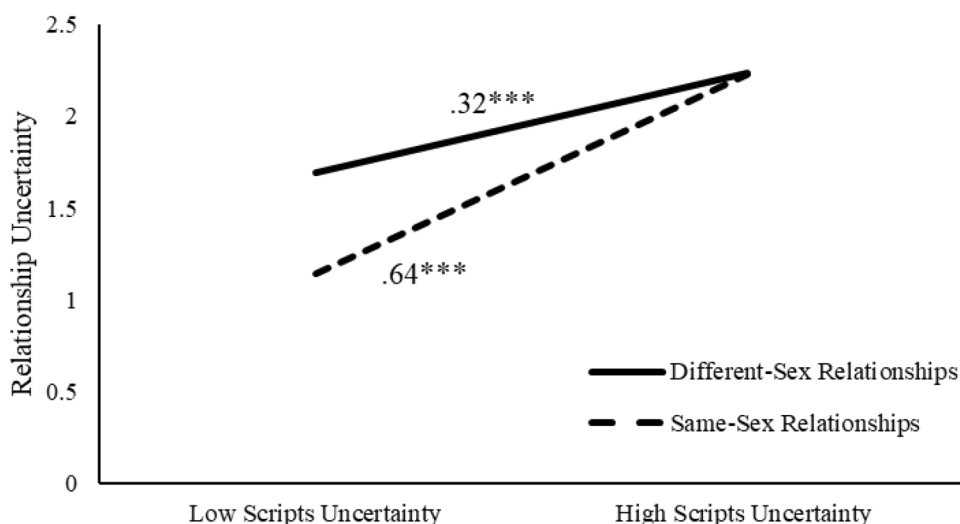


Fig. 5 Association between social scripts uncertainty and relationship uncertainty by relationship type. *** $p < .001$, ** $p < .01$, * $p < .05$



Marriage is possible and now more real. In past relationships pre-marriage equality, people (including myself) in my community threw around the word marriage, but it was really just commitment ceremonies. Now it's legally real and nothing to take lightly.

Similarly, another participant (#11; 35 y; bisexual woman) said, “[marriage equality] has made the idea of getting married more meaningful.”

People in same-sex relationships also described the ability to marry as providing more validation of their relationships in the eyes of outsiders, even if it did not change their relationship itself. For example, a participant (#306; 75 y; gay man) said, the decision “allowed us to express our relationship in an official and legal way, [showing] to the world evidence of our commitment [and] set an example for others.” Another participant (#357; 23 y; gay man) demonstrated how social legitimacy led to more relationship security by saying,

It has made us much more stable. I believe that most of our friends always saw us as a ‘normal’ couple regardless of the fact we are both male. However, I now feel like most people, including older adults, see us this way too.

Although there was still uncertainty and numerous other inequalities, participants felt a sense of freedom from this decision (e.g., “our relationship feels a bit more liberated. We both feel like it's a blessing to have equality in one aspect”; participant #208; 40 y; gay man). This recognition and the protections then made participants more confident in their relationship efficacy (e.g., “I think we both feel more secure in our rights to take care of each other”; participant #505; 39 y; gay man). Several participants felt the SCOTUS ruling made their relationship stronger as “all we are

and all we have could not be taken from us” (#143; 54 y; gay man). For example, one participant (#460; 27 y; lesbian woman) said, “it made our relationship stronger. Being able to commit ourselves emotionally and legally to each other in front of everyone we love meant a lot to us and made us feel extremely connected to one another.”

In addition to security and confidence, participants noted that the option to marry prompted more conversations between partners. These conversations were often viewed as a “positive influence” that reduced uncertainty by creating opportunities for “discussion of legal commitment, discussion of shared benefits” (participant #421; 46 y; gay man), and thinking about marriage “now that the option is there” (participant # 258; 38 y; lesbian woman).

Unlike people in same-sex relationships who reported enhanced relationship security, most individuals in different-sex relationships noted that the ruling did not influence their relationships, regardless of their opinion on the decision. For example, even a participant (#430; 28 y; heterosexual woman) who opposed the ruling acknowledged that “it hasn't [influenced our relationship], but we do have a lot of discussion on how we disagree with it.” However, most individuals in different-sex relationships were happy that the institution of marriage was able to be accessed by others and provided more legitimacy for the institution itself. For example, a participant (#307; 30 y; heterosexual woman) said, “[the ruling] has not directly influenced our relationship, other than making us happy that our friends in same-sex relationships can enjoy the same privileges and rights that are available to us as an opposite-sex couple.” Similarly, another participant (#467; 49 y; heterosexual woman) stated that the ruling “has not really influenced the relationship, per se [... It] makes us feel more positively about the institution of marriage, now that it is not an exclusionary

institution.” Given this equity, people in different-sex relationships reported positive benefits in their thinking (e.g., “it makes me feel less conflicted about considering marriage for myself”; #255; 32 y; heterosexual woman; “I feel less guilt about enjoying the benefit that only some people were able to access”; #547; 45 y; heterosexual woman).

As negative cases (Charmaz, 2014), some people in same-sex relationships felt similar to those in different-sex relationships, expressing that the ruling had no bearing on their relationship, at least in terms of love for or commitment to their partner. Although they also reported benefits (e.g., feeling more free, liberated, secure), participants made statements like, “[we are] not so sure either of us care to be legally married, we know our commitment to one another” (participant #208; 40 y; gay man), “either way I would be committed and love her for the rest of my life” (participant #359; 41 y lesbian woman), and “it forced our state to recognize our marriage, which is nice, [but...] we were committed before and we still are now” (participant #123; 42 y; queer person). As this quote illustrates, even though the ruling did not change partners’ love for one another, it did increase security and felt legitimacy from a social standpoint that was previously uncertain.

Uncertainty About Legal Breadth and Permanence

Despite gaining a sense of security and social validation, the sociopolitical transition that accompanied the *Obergefell v. Hodges* ruling also prompted some doubts, questions, and concerns. Even though the federal decision should grant access nationally, participants were unsure this would be upheld. For example, a participant (#220; 34 y; lesbian woman) said, “I question state to state rights. I know [LGBTQ] rights are not protected in my state (Tennessee). Also, North Carolina seems to be able to do whatever they please. My concern is even though laws are passed, I worry that from state to state they may vary.” Beyond breadth in terms of location, participants also had doubts or concerns about breadth of issues. For example, concerns may exist about rights and protections related to estate planning, hospital visits, and other protections typically accompanying marriage (e.g., “tax consequences, and how to plan a retirement and estate planning [or] home ownership [...] joint ownership of property; do we get a joint account? One pays this bill; one pays that bill?” #49; 57 y; gay man). Therefore, concerns about legal breadth were interconnected with questions about family norms and roles. These concerns often stemmed from uncertainties about how the laws would be followed by everyday citizens, which was also linked to potential backlash or felt sexual minority stress: “The laws are clear; those who follow the law will be clear on their expectations. However, society-at-large? How will they respond? That causes stress and the level of comfort we

experience in public spaces” (#244; 46 y; gay man). Similarly, although many noted the benefit of increased societal certainty, participants also noted concerns with what this ruling would mean for common-law marriage, civil unions, domestic partnerships, and other established commitment statuses. For example, a participant (#85; 59 y; gay man) said, “my partner’s work no longer recognizes domestic partnerships. You must get married to maintain those benefits.”

In addition to breadth, participants also had concerns about permanence, fearing that the ruling could be overturned. For example, a participant (#124; 65 y; gay man) was uncertain “that the legality of our marriage will not be challenged in the future.” Similarly, the participant (participant #505; 39 y; gay man) who said, “I think we both feel more secure in our rights to take care of each other” later noted that “the legislative backlash to restrict LGBT rights following the marriage equality expansion makes us a little nervous for the future.” This highlights that the ambiguous gain of rights, security, and efficacy also comes with some trepidation about the future due to the sociopolitical discourse to which sexual minorities are exposed.

Another participant (#359; 41 y; lesbian woman) stated, “the laws could always be revoked and changed is my fear. I won’t rush marriage because of that risk. Fear is there though that we could lose our right to marry or once married it could become unrecognized because we are in a same sex marriage.” As this quote illustrates, the *Obergefell v. Hodges* ruling triggered new thoughts and questions about marriage that may not have been present before. For example, participants made statements like “I think we are thinking of getting married because it is legal” (#49; 57 y; gay man) and “it opened up the possibility, which made us feel okay with taking our relationship to the next level (which we have had doubts about this choice a few times) but ultimately we are happy with how it influenced us” (#519; 21 y; gay man).

Participants in different-sex relationships, on the other hand, spoke less about legal changes prompting uncertainties, unless it was directed at how societal changes would affect their sexual and gender minority peers like one participant noted (#356; 36 y; heterosexual man): “[I am concerned about] women’s rights, and transgender rights.”

Uncertainty About Family Norms and Roles

Participants described notable aspects of uncertainty surrounding the legalization of same-sex marriage, such as concerns about norms or roles about their families more broadly (e.g., “division of household responsibilities is an ongoing concern, but it would be regardless of it being a same sex relationship”; #496; 57 y; lesbian woman), especially as it relates to parenting (e.g., having or adopting children, step-parenting). For example, a participant (#438; 26 y; queer woman) said, “we are currently pregnant. And therefore,

thinking about the legal concerns for adoption, or whether I just get to be a parent by default, etc.” Another participant (#394; 36 y; gay man) said, “we are in the midst of the legal hoops that eventually lead to adoption. It’s a long and frustrating road that has pulled us closer together more than anything.” The long legal process experienced by this couple and questions from partners with existing children illustrate that marriage equality is just one protection for families and reinforces that it is certainly not the end of sociopolitical uncertainty. Another participant (#134; 39 y; lesbian woman) said, “parenthood may pose a new set of problems due to being two same-sex parents.” Other roles and norms for same-sex couples centered around how to behave or interact in public spaces. For example, a participant (#506; 62 y; gay man) said they were uncertain about “how we behave with each other in public. Can we interact like straight couples in social situations, being affectionate, etc.?”

Although the presence of children creates uncertainty in roles for different-sex couples, as well (e.g., “we worry about maintaining an equal work family balance for both of us now that we have a child”; #103; 28 y; heterosexual woman), these general parenting concerns were not attributed to the federal granting of marriage equity. Thus, concerns about custody and adoption rights compounded general parenting stressors and uncertainties for the participants in same-sex relationships. For example, a participant (#394; 36 y; gay man) said, “since we are actively working to grow our immediate family, there is some uncertainty as to what aspects of our life/relationship will change, enhance, become more stressful as we move into a life and not always accepting world with children.” In addition to concerns about parenting rights, participants also voiced questions regarding rights and procedures related to other areas of family law:

We already considered ourselves married because we had a wedding [ceremony and civil union]. The legal rights given through government-sanctioned marriage are very important. [...] We both wanted to get married immediately after the SCOTUS decision but have waited until we are in a better financial position because we know minimum payment amounts on student loans will change once we are married. [...] We are buying a house and are not currently married but will get married once we move. I’m not sure how that changes property laws and rights of inheritance or survivorship. I’m also unsure of filing joint taxes. (#97; 32y; genderqueer pansexual).

Like uncertainty about legal breadth, in this example, questions about inheritance, taxes, and property laws existed and these questions may also prompt concerns about getting married. Although the couple in this example already considered themselves married, they noted a

social and legal legitimacy bestowed upon a “government-sanctioned” marriage that was considerable.

Uncertainties About Backlash

The most frequent source of uncertainty stemmed from concerns about backlash following the *Obergefell v. Hodges* decision, which can result in felt minority stress. Like the social validation that was felt following the ruling, there was also concern about negative societal reactions, which prompted other noted uncertainties (e.g., uncertainty about the permanence of marriage; uncertainty about how to behave in public). In fact, participants in same-sex relationships across ages and regions noted that they had concerns about increased violence and discrimination from those who opposed gay rights. For example, participants stated:

The most uncertain area would be changing social norms. From one day to the next it’s hard to assume how society will treat us. Changing tides of hate leave us as a semi-permanent target for bigots, so you never really know how society will treat you. (Participant #470; 23y; lesbian woman).

[I] sometimes worry when we are in public with all the violence happening against LGBT people (Participant #456; 56y; lesbian woman).

Right now...the largest uncertainty is how society will push back as the recognition of equality for gay people is institutionalized. I can NOT stop thinking about how much hate people have for who I am simply because of who I love. (Participant #193; 36y; gay man).

These narratives illustrate how concerns about the reactions of other individuals and institutions in society weighed heavily on people in same-sex relationships. In addition to the participant mentioning Tennessee specifically, another participant (#49; 57 y; gay man) said:

[My] partner is a physician and deep in the closet because he lives in a very conservative suburban community and is a prominent physician. He is fearful of losing his practice and hurting his employees. Also, we are unlikely to be able to combine households.

The fears of backlash and the general minority stress associated with living in an unsupportive climate made participants feel they needed to hide their identity and prompted doubts about the breadth of the ruling to ensure other protections. Another participant (#396; 40 y; bisexual woman) who was in a same-sex relationship described how these unsupportive climates might exacerbate mental health concerns and social isolation despite the encouraging SCOTUS ruling:

It gave us hope that the social climate of our country would change, and that our very conservative state

(Texas) would also see a shift outside of the already supportive urban areas. Some of the backlash against the law was hurtful [...] The shooting in Orlando is weighing heavy on my heart. I would say some of the emotions it stirred made me feel depressed and tempted me to isolate myself more.

The stressors associated with reactions to being in a same-sex relationship could be compounded by the intersection of another marginalized identity (e.g., “transphobic bathroom bills, etc., are frightening, particularly as my spouse, although cisgender, is gender non-conforming”; #376; 25 y; lesbian woman).

As expected, participants in different-sex relationships did not report experiencing prejudiced reactions or fears related to the unions they were in, with the exception of one participant (#318; 59 y; heterosexual woman) in an interracial relationship: “Moving forward, I am aware of a feeling of increased racial tensions in American society. Therefore, I am concerned about reactions to us in public settings. This concern has increased.” Instead, when discussing general discomfort associated with the sociopolitical landscape, a participant (#467; 49 y; heterosexual woman) said that “larger legal/political issues affect what we talk about and the general level of stress we feel.”

Discussion

Overall, our results support the idea that sociopolitical transitions, even when stemming from changes that further rights and protections, can prompt uncertainty for people that may linger beyond the event itself. In line with the CRU model (Monk & Ogolsky, 2019), sociopolitical uncertainties like doubts, concerns, or questions about legal recognition, social acceptance, and social scripts (e.g., norms, behaviors, roles) were associated with aspects of relational uncertainty (i.e., self, partner, and relationship uncertainty). Notably, uncertainty about legal recognition was positively associated with self uncertainty only, indicating that questions about the legal recognition of marriage were associated with increased questions about what this means for an individual’s involvement in the relationship. However, this association was marginally outside the traditional threshold for statistical significance when accounting for interactions with relationship type. Uncertainty about social acceptance was positively associated with self, partner, and relationship uncertainty, indicating that doubts about whether a relationship would be accepted by others following the *Obergefell v. Hodges* decision was connected to concerns about individuals’ own level of involvement (self uncertainty), their partner’s level of involvement in the relationship (partner

uncertainty), and the future of the relationship itself (relationship uncertainty). Similarly, uncertainty about social scripts in reaction to changing meanings of marriage was positively associated with all three components of relational uncertainty. These results largely support our first hypothesis that the sources of sociopolitical uncertainty would be associated with the sources of relational uncertainty, although uncertainty about legal recognition was not a consistent predictor of relational uncertainty across models.

The CRU model also posits that these sociopolitical changes will particularly influence the uncertainty of those most affected by the change (i.e., people in same-sex relationships following the *Obergefell v. Hodges* decision; Monk & Ogolsky, 2019). Although we found support for this hypothesis for the significant associations with uncertainty about social scripts, we noted that the effects of social acceptance uncertainty on relational uncertainty were greatest for those in different-sex relationships. These unexpected findings could demonstrate that policies influencing rights to other groups could be viewed by outsiders as influencing their lives too—reinforcing that their *perceptions* about policies matter for individuals’ level of concern. Nevertheless, the qualitative results suggest that individuals in different-sex relationship largely did not feel their relationships were affected by marriage equality, even if it did inspire new conversations and consideration of their LGBTQ peers. When studying different-sex relationships, research has found that a lack of support from outsiders (e.g., friends and family) can increase relationship instability or increased odds of dissolution (Sprecher & Feilmlee, 1992, 2000). Therefore, this finding in different-sex relationships may be particularly salient when family or friends of a couple member disapprove of a particular partner (as there is no widespread, systematic prejudice toward different-sex relationships), which could be an indicator of underlying problems that undermine the perceived future of the union. However, the lack of acceptance for a same-sex relationship may very well stem from prejudice about these types of relationships in general, not the specific relationship itself. Researchers have found that a lack of support and felt opposition in this case can actually prompt partners in same-sex relationships to turn toward each other for support as a united front against adversity (Frost, 2011, 2014), thus, potentially increasing certainty. Relatedly, people in same-sex relationships reported more legal and social acceptance uncertainties than those in different-sex relationships; however, there were no significant differences in relational uncertainties by relationship type. Although the mean levels of uncertainty were relatively modest, this finding alludes to a potential adaptive or buffering effect. According to the CRU model (Monk & Ogolsky, 2019), people in same-sex relationships engage in adaptive processes like relationship maintenance to buffer

the negative effects of shared stressors on their relationships, which should be explored in future research.

In line with our second hypothesis, the association between uncertainty about social scripts (norms, behaviors, and roles) and self and relationship uncertainty was pronounced for those in same-sex relationships. The CRU model (Monk & Ogolsky, 2019) argues that uncertainty about how partners should behave in public or about what marriage as an institution will look like in the future can influence concerns about the future of the relationship itself. This may be particularly salient for same-sex couples who the law is targeted toward and who, for example, experience the most concern related to public displays of affection (Doan et al., 2014).

Relational uncertainty scholars discuss the divergent nature of self, partner, and relationship uncertainty (e.g., Brisini et al., 2018), arguing that self uncertainty may be especially distressing for relationships because it, by definition, occurs if an individual is unsure of their own motivation to continue the relationship (Knobloch & Theiss, 2011; Solomon & Brisini, 2019). There may be a greater willingness to invest in and clarify the relationship when partner or relationship uncertainty is present compared to when an individual is uncertain about their own commitment to the relationship (Theiss & Knobloch, 2014). For example, individuals can use assurances and other forms of communicative relationship maintenance (Ogolsky et al., 2017; Stafford & Canary, 1991) to make a partner feel more secure when faced with external ambiguity. Being unsure if one wants to continue a relationship is quite different than having concerns that a partner may not be invested, despite both sources feeding into doubts about the future of the relationship (Solomon et al., 2016). Although speculative, any divergence in consistency across models (e.g., legal uncertainty was only associated with self uncertainty in one model; the interaction between social scripts uncertainty and relationship type was associated with self and relationship uncertainty, but not partner uncertainty) could indicate that questions about the lengths and limits of marriage laws and the recognition of them, for example, may be less likely to prompt uncertainty about a partner's commitment, especially if communication is present in the relationship or prompted by external ambiguity. Indeed, our qualitative findings point toward a sense of enhanced relationship security as partners discussed legal marriage recognition as a new avenue for reifying their commitment to one another. In general, legal recognition may also feel more settled than social acceptance, for example, which may feel more precarious.

Within the qualitative responses, we identified similar support for the CRU model while providing important explanatory context to the quantitative results. Although the *Obergefell v. Hodges* ruling provided social certainty and relationship security through felt validation, legitimacy,

and belonging among those in same-sex relationships, there were also doubts, concerns, and questions. Participants in same-sex relationships, for example, noted doubts about the enforcement of the rights across the US, what areas of life these protections would extend to, and how long these protections would last. They also expressed concerns about what changing sociopolitical norms would mean for family life, particularly around adoption and parenting. Last, we also identified fears related to sociopolitical backlash. Sexual minority people in same-sex relationships endorsed experiencing minority stress and concerns about retaliation resulting from the SCOTUS ruling, including targeted harassment and discrimination from individuals who opposed the changing sociopolitical landscape. These themes were most salient for participants in same-sex relationships, which largely aligns with the quantitative results and the CRU model in general (Monk & Ogolsky, 2019). Indeed, heterosexual individuals noted that the *Obergefell v. Hodges* ruling had no effect on their lives or relationships (i.e., “none” or “n/a”) beyond support and concerns on behalf of their sexual minority peers.

These narratives also expand the CRU model because the initial theorization, which was largely focused on uncertainties in the context of the couple relationship (Monk & Ogolsky, 2019), included limited discussion of broader family uncertainties like adoption and housing discrimination, and how these sociopolitical uncertainties can shape decisions and behaviors. Uncertainty is particularly relevant as politicized discourse continues to threaten fertility options, child custody decisions, and adoption rights for same-sex couples (see Lavietes, 2023, for example). Our qualitative results suggest that a broader lens of uncertainty—beyond just the relational—is critical for understanding the importance of concerns felt by people across sociopolitical transitions, even when those transitions are rooted in policies that should enhance legal rights and recognition of intimate relationships. Indeed, even as rights are granted or bans are lifted, people can experience new and unique uncertainties. For example, following the lifting of a same-sex parenting ban in Florida, gay parents describe several positive changes that occur, including a profound sense of relief and security, but new and lingering concerns exist when dealing with an unpredictable legal system (Goldberg et al., 2013). The lingering uncertainties existing following the granting of marriage rights may also help explain why marriage equality did not result in consistent or universal well-being benefits for LGBTQ people (Carpenter et al., 2021; Ogolsky et al., 2019a, b).

Not only do these findings validate and expand the CRU model, but they also extend other relevant frameworks like Boss's (2007) proposed concept of ambiguous gains. Much of the past work in this area has focused on ambiguous losses, which are those that remain unclear, unverified, or

unresolved, such as the complicated sense of loss for families of missing loved ones (see Boss et al., 2017). However, perceived gains can also be unclear and contribute to significant confusion and stress. Within our study, for example, participants noted benefits of the federal recognition of marriage. With this gain of rights, however, came a lot of questions, which validates the need to expand the ambiguous loss theory to include gains, additions, or benefits that result in increased uncertainty (Jensen, 2021).

Limitations and Future Directions

There are several considerations when interpreting the results of the present study. Namely, our sample was mostly white and cisgender. Research from an intersectional perspective demonstrates that discrimination (see Totenhagen et al., 2022) and uncertainty (Ogan et al., 2024) can also be disproportionately experienced by those with other or multiple identities that are marginalized by society and, thus, need to be considered in future research. Second, given that our measures of uncertainty were not asked at every wave of data collection in the larger study, we were unable to speak to temporal order or change over time. However, the associations between the different forms of uncertainty 1 year after the *Obergefell v. Hodges* ruling demonstrate the importance of understanding doubts and concerns that continue to linger after the onset of a transition. We also only collected data from individuals in relationships. Although collecting data from dyads is not without its limitations, including a greater likelihood for biased high-functioning samples (Barton et al., 2020; Park et al., 2021), gaining both perspectives within a couple could yield unique insights to complement this work. Our measure of sociopolitical uncertainty was based off prior conceptualizations (Monk & Ogolsky, 2019); however, future research is needed to develop and validate a formal measure of sociopolitical uncertainty across multiple samples. The present study provides preliminary evidence to support the construction of a sociopolitical uncertainty scale. Similarly, although our assessments of sociopolitical uncertainty were worded to directly link to the *Obergefell v. Hodges* ruling, any speculations about causality should be interpreted with the understanding that there was no control group (i.e., individuals who were not granted these rights for comparison, other than individuals in different-sex relationships) nor reports on uncertainty variables prior to the ruling in which to compare. Relatedly, the qualitative questions were limited in number to alleviate participant burden in the larger study. Although the open-ended questions in the survey format allowed for data collection from a large group of participants, responses were relatively brief in the survey form. More qualitative work is needed, particularly semi-structured interviews that would allow for the opportunity to probe for further details and more in-depth narratives,

to understand how various uncertainties may influence one another and unfold as a larger process.

Implications and Conclusion

Our findings support the hypothesized connections between sociopolitical and relational uncertainties in the CRU model (Monk & Ogolsky, 2019) by underscoring how the sociopolitical environment can cultivate certainties and uncertainties for minoritized populations. Even when sociopolitical changes grant rights, clinicians and educators should be aware that these transitions may generate new uncertainties and sustain or exacerbate lingering uncertainties. These professionals can also communicate the potential impact of this sociopolitical uncertainty on the lives and relationships of people, while helping them externalize and attribute these experiences to the sociopolitical context beyond their relationship (see Monk & Ogolsky, 2019). Boss's (2007) ambiguous gain framework might be a helpful lens to consider when helping people navigate what changes mean for families. Clinicians and educators may equip couples with cognitive, emotional, and behavioral tools to reframe stigma, take a united stance in the face of shared stressors (Frost, 2014), and transform uncertainties by acknowledging ambiguous gains (Boss, 2007) as ways to buffer against sociopolitical uncertainty. Indeed, when sociopolitical events are anxiety-provoking or unforeseeable, partners may turn to relational partners as a social safety net (Murray et al., 2021). Additionally, focusing on social identities as assets in intervention is critical during times of environmental change, particularly for those who possess a marginalized identity (Hoffman & Umaña-Taylor, 2023). Similarly, there are increasing calls for more educational trainings for family court representatives as laws fluctuate and ambiguity exists for vulnerable populations navigating adoption and custody arrangements (see Goldberg & Romero, 2018), which was a source of concern for our participants. Policymakers should be conscious of the full import of legislation. Even when legislation is produced that is a perceived benefit to a population, policies or resources should be considered that further support the population across the implementation transition. Such resources could educate people about what the changing policies mean for them, reduce disinformation, provide supports that protect against potential backlash, and promote security.

Supplementary Information The online version contains supplementary material available at <https://doi.org/10.1007/s13178-024-00975-8>.

Funding The project was partially supported by funds from the U.S. Department of Agriculture/National Institute of Food and Agriculture HATCH, Grant/Award Number: ILLU-793–356.

Data Availability Data can be made available by reaching out to the third author and further information about coding can be obtained from the first or second author.

Declarations

Ethics Approval This study was approved by the Institutional Review Board at the University of Illinois.

Consent to Participate Informed consent was obtained from all individuals in this study.

Competing Interests The authors declare no competing interests.

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