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# Religion, institutionalism, legalism, and same-sex marriage: comparative experiences of non-heterosexual males in Northern Ireland and Tennessee

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Religion, Institutionalism, Legalism, and Same-Sex Marriage: Comparative Experiences  
of Non-Heterosexual Males in Northern Ireland and Tennessee

by

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## I

**Abstract**

The intersection of religion, legalism, institutionalism, and sexuality is historically one of controversy. Consequential discord often leads to the marginalization of certain members of a community, which creates lasting psychological and social effects that shape how these individuals define themselves within their culture. This study identifies shared experiences between two groups of non-heterosexual adult males near Coleraine, Northern Ireland, where same-sex marriage is illegal, and Chattanooga, Tennessee, where the practice is federally accepted. The samples provide a look into the effects of religiously-motivated, discriminatory legislation on the personal lives of the subsequent population. Specifically, participants are asked to reflect on the roles of religion and sexuality in shaping their character to determine whether or not the legalization of same-sex marriage (or lack thereof) affects their lives. Respondents report mostly positive experiences in both communities and few recall instances of direct abuse, whether verbal or physical. Religious practices are more common among respondents from Northern Ireland, who also tend to mention slightly more negative interactions and feelings. Marriage continues to be important to most participants, regardless of religious affiliation or location. Overall, the lack of anti-LGBTQ+ legislation seems to contribute to a more positive experience for those potentially affected, however difficulties persist. Participants remain concerned about bureaucratic and legal protections, including the right to a same-sex divorce in Tennessee and the ability to marry in Northern Ireland, as well as social acceptance and education on sexuality.

## II

### Introduction

Marriage initially served as a method to cultivate alliances and satisfy social duties which were based on an individual's biology and perceived gender. As a result, traditional marriages in European societies were between men and women, sanctified through a religious ceremony. Couples were expected to bear children, and those that did not were often deemed ungodly and represented one of the few justifiable grounds for divorce. Contemporarily, the custom has developed to serve as a means of intimate and legal union in place of religious or social fulfillment. As alternative lifestyles develop that do not adhere to the heterosexual archetype, the definition and purpose of marriage is likely to change alongside.

The end of the 19th century is often credited with being the "birth of modern criminology" wherein the medical community applied "the scientific method to investigate crime and criminals --" a theory known as biological determinism (Woods 2015, 131.) More recently, people that did not conform to binary sexuality and gender systems were seen as "criminals, psychopaths, sinners, and perverts" overtaken by a mental illness or sickness (132; Slovenko 1985, 449). This notion led to the "homosexual deviancy theory" which posits "intersecting formal and informal legal, societal, and political mechanisms of social control... which explicitly defined homosexuality and gender nonconformity as forms of sexual deviance, have shaped the overwhelming treatment of LGBTQ [+] populations" (Woods 2015, 132). As a result,

many religiously institutionalized countries created systems that criminalize not only same-sex behaviors, but the legal union of such couples, as well.

Northern Ireland is the only country within the United Kingdom that has not legalized same-sex marriage, although some civil partnerships and unions are recognized. According to the Democratic Unionist Party (DUP), religion plays an important role in their decision to ban the practice. Same-sex marriage has been legal in the United States since 2015, but is still criticized by religious and/or political groups, especially in the American South, where bills have been proposed to overturn the same-sex marriage ban or impose other laws that discriminate against the LGBTQ+ community.

This project employs both qualitative and quantitative research methods to explore the experiences of those potentially affected by discriminatory political policies. Participants who have at some point lived in the area of Coleraine, Northern Ireland or in Chattanooga, Tennessee assess how institutional religion and its legislation affects how they view themselves within the community. Specifically, ten key informants responded to questions through structured, online interviews using the convenience and snowball sampling methods. This project draws parallels between the two groups in order to gauge how the same-sex marriage ban in Northern Ireland affects the non-heterosexual population and how such the law's absence may alter perceived experiences in America.

### III

## **Anthropological and Historical Literature Review**

### ***a. Marriage in Anthropological Terms***

Marriage only recently entered the secular sphere in majority-Christian societies after centuries of religious affiliations. The practice “was not primarily for... individual benefit,” but for the sake of larger cultural constructions that marked “adulthood and respectability” (Coontz 2004, 977). However, there were individual motivations that played an important role in marriage, as well. For example, “the dowry that a wife brought was the biggest infusion of cash, goods, or land that [men] would ever acquire” and “for most women, finding a husband was the most important investment they could make in their economic future” (977). It was not until the 17th century that “a series of interrelated political, economic, and cultural changes began to erode the older functions of marriage...” and in the 18th century “the revolutionary new ideal of the love match triumphed in most of Western Europe and North America,” which asserts there is a perfect partner out there for everyone (978).

It is a common misconception that love has always been marriage’s purpose, but people began marrying exclusively for intimate reasons, rather than economic or social, less than 1,000 years ago (978). Today, “marriage is no longer necessary to activate one’s property rights, legal standing, public roles, and social status” and “will never regain its monopoly over the regulation of sex, the rearing of children, the transmission of resources from the older to the younger generation, or the organization of the division of labor by gender” (Coontz 2004, 975; 978). Furthermore, some young people are

opting for non-marriage or polyamorous relationships, which are sure to alter the function and purpose of legal marriage in the future and requires further research as these trends develop.

### ***b. Institutionalism & Legalism in Marriage***

Institutionalization and legalism attempt to quell “crime” and maintain the “natural” order. In this sense, written laws act as the justification to punish those that commit certain acts that are seen as criminal offenses and against human nature. The United States uses a democratic republic, whereas the United Kingdom and Northern Ireland operate under a parliamentary system with a (virtually non-functional) monarchy. In some ways, Northern Ireland can be compared to Tennessee as a branch of a larger entity. In this analogy, Northern Ireland is equivalent to a state, whereas Westminster is the counterpart to the federal government. Westminster has not issued country-wide legislation to make same-sex marriage legal, but instead allows its provinces (i.e. Scotland, Wales, England, and Northern Ireland) to set their own policies.

In both cases, citizens are discriminated against within a decentralized state wherein the central overseer refuses (refused, in the case of the U.S.) to deliberate on the issue at hand. Furthermore, “homosexuality was seen not as the mark of a distinctive, oppressed minority group, but rather as an individual and very personal problem” until the mid-twentieth century (Solvenko 1985, 445). As a result, the LGBTQ+ community was not recognized in the political sphere until the civil rights and feminist movements of the 1960s.

No studies have been conducted specifically on the role of institutionalism and legalism between the specified areas of this research. However, a study was conducted in 2018 that compared the pathways through which Canada (also parliamentary) and the United States legalized same-sex marriage. It specifically looked at the roles of “federalism, the separation of powers versus parliamentarism, and the role of courts” and the outcome of these varying policy-based decisions (Smith 2018, 62). According to historical institutionalists, “the state [is not] a unitary actor, but [a] complex set of political institutions that facilitated and impeded the actions of political actors operating within the structure... [which has] unfolded over historical time” (63). Although some scholars have approached LGBTQ+ rights from a position of “morality politics” wherein “the public has different moral beliefs and values,” other scholars suggest this sphere should be treated the same as other political topics (64). However, “activist actors on both sides of the same-sex marriage debate have drawn on specific dimensions of law and social policy in seeking ideational resources for their positions...” (72). Specifically, proponents of the LGBTQ+ will cite equality under both the U.K. and U.S. Constitutions for moral support, while opponents may refer to the Bible to justify the ban.

The scope of this research paper does not delve too far into the complexities of institutionalism and legalism, however it is important to take into account the unique histories of both locations and how these overarching forces affect not only legislation, but social conditions, as well.

### ***c. Modern History of Same-Sex Marriage***

Sodomy and anti-homosexuality laws are difficult to enforce, however the mere existence of such legislation suggests criminalization for sexuality and has certain psychological and social effects. The history of homosexual relationships in Christian-based society is complex and further complicated by modern political discourse. The Buggery Act of 1533 “made sexual relations between men a criminal offense punishable by death” and “sodomy remained a capital offense punishable by hanging until 1861” (Levy 1998/2015, par. 3). Homosexuality was decriminalized in 1967 in England and Wales (Office of Public Sector Information), but was not legalized in Northern Ireland until 1982 (Northern Ireland Orders in Council). There are cases of homosexual marriages being annulled as far back as the 17th century, but in 1973 the Matrimonial Causes Act explicitly outlawed the union of same-sex couples (Office of Public Sector Information). Same-sex marriages were validated in England, Wales, and Scotland in 2014, with the Republic of Ireland following suit soon after in 2015; however, Northern Ireland has made the conscious effort to keep this ban in place. In 2004, the Civil Partnership Act was passed which “enables same-sex couples to get legal recognition of their relationship” (“Guidance on Civil Partnerships”). Although partnered couples do have some of the same rights as those that are married, such as employment benefits and access to fatal accident compensation (“Find Out Your Rights”), their unique classification still bars them from reaching full equality.

In comparison, “legal codes in the American colonies set death as the penalty for sodomy,” which was rarely enacted and never towards women (Slovenko 1985, 446).

However, this means it was not legally or governmentally enforced. It is possible, and indeed likely, it was socially enforced through fear of retaliation from peers.

Tennessee's sodomy laws were deemed unconstitutional in 1996 (*Campbell v. Sundquist*, 01A01-9507-CV-00321 (Ten. 1995)) and in the rest of the country in 2003 (*Lawrence v. Texas*, 539 U.S. (Tex. 2003)). Due to its relatively recent foundation, the history of the United States' laws on this topic are slightly less complex in the legal sense, but can be similarly tied in with greater Europe's social history due to close cultural connections established during the Colonial Period. Even though there is evidence of the refusal of gay marriages earlier, it was not officially banned in Tennessee until 1996 (National Gay and Lesbian Task Force 2013), which was later overturned by the Supreme Court in 2015.

It is important to acknowledge that although discrimination certainly exists, "the majority of American adults now affirm the right of gays and lesbians to marry" and the "vocal minority" that continues to oppose the practice "virtually always include some measure(s) of religious life" (Perry 2015, 792-793). Furthermore, "conservative religious identity is the strongest predictor of [the lack of] same-sex marriage support" and coincides with "theological beliefs, specifically adherence to a literalistic interpretation of the creation account in Genesis" (810 - 811).

A 2018 study performed by researchers at Queen's University Belfast and Ulster University revealed approximately 59% of the Northern Irish population supports same-sex marriage, a number that has been on the rise for the past decade (Devine et. al 2018, 19). However, "Northern Ireland remains more conservative than its nearest

neighbors - the Republic of Ireland and Britain" (19). A poll from 2015 in the Republic of Ireland found that 72% of respondents "would vote yes in the Same-Sex Marriage Referendum with 20% opposed to the proposal and 8% undecided" ("Poll Suggests Drop" 2015, par. 10). According to a study from 2012, approximately "73% of British adults think gay people should be allowed to get married to each other while a quarter (24%) do not want to allow gay marriage" ("Poll on Gay Marriage" 2012, par. 1).

In 2014, prior to legalization, 55% of Americans supported same-sex marriage, a majority of which were young adults (McCarthy 2014). On the other hand, a poll by Middle Tennessee State University showed that in February of 2015, 55% of Tennessee voters *opposed* same-sex marriage (Tamburin 2015, par. 6). It was not until 2016 that the tides began to turn and 46% of respondents favored same-sex marriage, whereas 45% opposed and 9% were undecided" ("The American Values Atlas - LGBT" 2016). In this sense, Tennessee and Northern Ireland are autonomous entities within a larger, centralized one that tend to swerve away from the general trends of the nation, or at least are slower to adopt such ideas. Therefore, it is important to compare the two locations to understand how localized discrimination and centralized anti-discrimination policies interact with one another, affect the oppressed community, and alter culturally acceptable views.

#### ***d. Social and Cognitive Effects***

Homosexuality has been studied across the sociological and psychological fields, yet very few anthropological studies have highlighted personal experiences in queer communities in the specified areas of this paper. Dirk Schubotz has led the effort to document the non-heterosexual community in Northern Ireland. In 2009, Schubotz and Helen McNamee conducted sociological interviews with 20 young, non-heterosexual males, concluding that “the fostering of homophobic attitudes counteracts official government strategies in Northern Ireland in relation to tackling poor mental health and reducing suicide rates... Northern Ireland, for now, remains a conservative heteronormative society that fails a significant proportion of its population” (Schubotz & McNamee 2009, 206). Schubotz also conducted a study with Malachi O’Hara among a similar group of males from a mental health perspective which yielded similar results -- “LGB [TQ+] 16-year olds in Northern Ireland are more likely to be bullied in school, report worse school experiences overall, suffer from poorer mental health..., greater social pressures to engage in health-adverse behaviors, and in fact, do so more than their heterosexual counterparts” (Schubotz & O’Hara 2011, 502). While the literature here provides very valuable information, the way in which it is analyzed fails to include an anthropological standpoint. This research does, however, provide a base for a humanistic study that highlights individuals and identifies common patterns described within Schubotz’s research.

According to a study conducted in 1988, non-heterosexual youth faced three types of isolation: cognitive, social, and emotional. The study defines cognitive isolation

as the “almost total lack of accurate information available,” while social isolation is a “negative self-view enforced by the denial of accurate information” which has both “intra-psychic and social effects” (Martin and Hetrick 1988, 165 - 167). Emotional isolation includes “feelings of being alone, of being the only one who feels this way, [and] of having no one to share feelings with...” (171).

Harassment of the LGBTQ+ community is not uncommon, with one study concluding “55% - 72% of gay or lesbian students on college campuses had experienced verbal or physical abuse” (Savin-Williams 1994, 262). Furthermore, individuals that have been harrassed by peers or as adults are prone to come across school-related problems, running away or homelessness, conflict with the law, substance abuse, prostitution, and suicide (264 - 265). These past findings can be verified through studies conducted prior to legalization in the United States, as research shows that “...during this time of anti-[LGBTQ+] legislation, the participants [in this study] experienced an almost daily balancing act -- walking a tightrope between political engagement and self-care by disengaging” (Levitt, et al. 2009, 79). Overall, systemic discrimination exists in both the legal and social spheres and has serious effects on mental and physical health.

On a larger scale, studies have shown that discriminatory legislation infringes not only on the rights taken away in the law itself, but may cause unintended consequences that strip the oppressed group of other legal rights. For example, Ohio passed an amendment in 2004 that “[had] the dual purpose of restricting marriage to heterosexual couples and prohibiting the state from recognizing other types of unmarried

relationships similar to marriage” (Lorden 2006, 3). Although the legislation may not have intended to harm same-sex, unmarried couples, it has made it nearly impossible for them to seek legal action in domestic abuse cases. Similarly, “quasi-marital relationships fail because they are not recognized outside the borders of the state and they do not entitle the couple to the 1,138 federal laws and policies available to married couples” (7).

Even though same-sex couples currently have the ability to marry in the United States, discriminatory laws still exist on the state level that continue to affect the non-hetero community. Upon further research, two females faced gendered legal issues when pursuing a divorce in the Tennessee Court of Appeals in November 2017. Sabrina and Erica Witt were married in Washington D.C. in 2014 and moved to Knoxville in 2015, prior to federal legalization of same-sex marriage. The couple had a child together through artificial insemination. Erica’s name was not written on the birth certificate because two women could not legally be married in Tennessee at the time. Due to gendered syntax in the law that stated, “a child born to a married woman as a result of artificial insemination, with consent of the married woman’s husband, is deemed to be the legitimate child of the husband and wife,” Sabrina was able to claim the child did not belong to Erica. This was overturned and deemed unconstitutional, however Erica was legally considered the “husband” and “father” of the child during their divorce due to this language, which caused further legal issues for the couple (Sabrina Renae Witt v. Erica Christine Witt 2017 Tenn. R. App. P. 3). This case proves that the

legalization of same-sex marriage is only one of the many issues within common law that discriminate on the basis of biological sex and sexuality.

However, the effort for equality in the United States has inspired dialogue across the entirety of Europe and has resulted in efforts to question the legality of such bans elsewhere. The European Union has not yet deliberated on the topic of same-sex marriage and the ban remains in place in many parts of Eastern Europe. Although there has been definite progress, “hate-motivated violence [persists]” and “remind[s] us that the achievements during past decades to suppress discrimination based on sexual orientation remain fragile” (Bribosia et. al 2014, 2). However, the situation in Europe is far more complicated due to the diversity of its inhabitants and the legal rights of independent countries and “such a decision would no doubt be controversial, especially in countries where backlash against LGBT [Q+] individuals is present and even growing” (43). Should Northern Ireland continue to ban the practice, it is possible that the European Union could step in, as the United States Federal Government did, however there could be legal and social ramifications from such actions. The legal aspects of same-sex marriage legalisation creates an even larger obstacle that the LGBTQ+ community faces aside from social and emotional isolation.

## IV

### Research Questions and Methodology

The population within this study includes non-heterosexual, adult males who have lived in Coleraine, Northern Ireland or Chattanooga, Tennessee. Ten participants were contacted, including five from each location. The research included qualitative and quantitative interview questions delivered via email to each participant. The participants were found using the convenience sampling method and the snowball sampling method as friends were able to refer me to other men in the community. Most subjects were contacted via Facebook Messenger and asked if they were interested in participating. Those that agreed were asked for their emails where I then sent the interview questions. Those that were referred to me from the 'known participants' (those I had direct contact with via social media) were contacted directly through the emails provided from other known participants. Two participants were found via the social forum Reddit on the 'subreddit' dedicated to Chattanooga ([reddit.com/r/Chattanooga](https://www.reddit.com/r/Chattanooga)). I had potential participants contact me via direct message where I then obtained their email addresses and sent the interview questions.

I decided to use these sampling methods to cultivate trust between myself and the participants. Given the nature of the study and the stigmatization of their orientations, I wanted to approach the subject sensitively, allowing the participants to openly discuss their experiences. My goal was to assess their attitudes towards religion and sexuality and to ultimately see the ways in which the ban on same-sex marriage

and the consequential social stigma has affected their lives. The interview questions were as follows (where applicable):

1. As a non-heterosexual man living in a society in which your sexual orientation is still somewhat misunderstood:
  1. What are your general experiences?
  2. What are your biggest concerns?
  3. What do you hope will be changed?
2. How would you view your religiosity?
  1. How often do you go to church?
  2. How has your participation changed over time?
3. How do you view your future family life?
  1. Do you hope to get married?
  2. Why is marriage important to you? If not, why?
  3. If Northern Ireland continues to outlaw same-sex marriage how would you get married? (NI only)

### ***a. Limitations***

There are certainly several limitations to take into account when considering the validity of this study, such as age, although all participants were at least 18 years old. My sample size is considerably small, however given the depth of the questions, I believed it was best to keep respondents to a minimum to avoid an overflow of information that would have been far too much to analyze in this setting. Similarly, I thought it would be better for respondents to have time to sit down and consider their answers thoughtfully, which is why I decided the email format would be best. However, this also may have made it difficult for respondents to completely understand the question or to add anything else they remembered at a later date. This research should

be used as a guide for further research on the subject in various academic settings, including anthropology, history, psychology, political science, and other fields.

## V

### Results and Analysis

Full responses from the participants can be found in the Appendix. All results are displayed in tables in each section to compare participants to each other and are further split up by location in subtables. Discussion for results can be found in Chapter VI.

#### ***a. General Experiences***

*Question: What are your general experiences?*

Key points from responses are outlined below. Results were coded to indicate negative or positive associations. Negative results included reports of emotional, verbal, or physical abuse, while positive ones lacked such cases.

#### **Participant 1 (NI):**

- My experiences are “parallel to the experience of a heterosexual man.”
- I am “currently in a long-term relationship with a female partner.”
- A “majority of the people I encounter... assume... I am heterosexual. I do not feel a great need to correct them... as it does not affect me... nor [my] relationships...”
- “I have revealed my sexuality... to close friends and family and they have been understanding and it has not changed the dynamic of our relationships.”

- “Among previous casual friendship groups... it was a more contentious point to make and it resulted in some ridicule but for the most part the majority of people are understanding if I choose to tell them.”

**Participant 2 (NI):**

- My experiences are “pretty basic.”
- I “rarely get asked... and don’t tend to lead with it...”

**Participant 3 (NI):**

- I was “verbally and emotionally bullied at school... and had some family trouble, but I was never physically mistreated.”

**Participant 4 (NI):**

- My experiences “haven’t been anything too out of the ordinary.”
- I “have not been physically attacked... although I have been verbally.”
- “Sometimes... where people’s actions have been influenced by alcohol I would be called names or in one instance spat on.”
- “Society has had an influence on my personality and the way [I] carry myself because I don’t want to be in people[’]s face with my sexuality.”

**Participant 5 (NI):**

- “Older generations tend to be more conservative...”
- “I’ve experienced very little homophobia from young people, besides the occasional friendly joke or teasing.”

**Participant 6 (USA):**

- My experiences include “a lot of having to explain myself.”
- I “have to explain to someone why a phrase... is somewhat offensive.”
- I have been “prevented... from doing certain tasks because people in the south are much more conservative.”

**Participant 7 (USA):**

- My experiences are “generally positive.”
- I am “comfortable with who I am and I have supportive friends.”

**Participant 8 (USA):**

- My experiences have been “relatively pleasant.”
- I have “faced insults and small minds, but never to the detriment of my health or well-being.”
- “In planning a wedding to another man... everyone was incredibly accepting.”

**Participant 9 (USA):**

- My experience has been a “positive one.”
- “Not many people outside of my wife know my sexual orientation.”

**Participant 10 (USA):**

- “People more accepting currently than... in the past.”
- I am “out at work and I don’t feel that I’m discriminated against...”

**Table 1: General Experiences (All Participants)**

	Positive	Generally Positive	Generally Negative	Negative
Participant 1 (NI)		✓		
Participant 2 (NI)	✓			
Participant 3 (NI)				✓
Participant 4 (NI)			✓	
Participant 5 (NI)		✓		
Participant 6 (USA)				✓
Participant 7 (USA)		✓		
Participant 8 (USA)		✓		
Participant 9 (USA)	✓			
Participant 10 (USA)		✓		
	2	5	2	2

**Table 1a: General Experiences (Northern Ireland vs. Tennessee)**

	Positive	Negative
Northern Ireland	3	2
Tennessee	4	1
	7	3

### ***b. Concern for the Community***

*Question: What are your biggest concerns?*

Responses are outlined by each participant and then compared in Table 2 and again separated by location in Table 2a. Responses centered around: concerns, no concerns, or concerns for others. Specific issues are discussed in Chapter VI.

#### **Participant 1 (NI):**

- “I wouldn’t say... I am concerned in any way about my sexuality personally... as this generation proceeds into the future.”
- “One... area of concern is the ban on giving blood... in Northern Ireland on men who have engaged in homosexual acts and their future partners[. U]ntil 2016 this resulted in a lifetime ban... but... now only asks for a period of one year between the sexual acts and the giving of blood.”
  - “Current law states that you must wait a year if you have had a sexual partner who is: a) (if you are a man) another man... [including anal or oral sex and] b) (if you are a woman) a man who has ever had oral or anal sex with another man...”

#### **Participant 2 (NI):**

- I am concerned about “marriage. Northern Ireland is remarkably backwards in its treatment of women and the LGBTQI+ community.”

**Participant 3 (NI):**

- The “dramatic difference in generational attitudes is a powerful wedge issue...”

**Participant 4 (NI):**

- “We’re not allowing people to grow into humans that they should be because of the pressures of the society.”
- “We’re still afraid of coming out... because we know that most people don’t agree with our way of life, especially in Northern Ireland where religion seems to have the biggest impact on people here.”

**Participant 5 (NI):**

- “My biggest concerns... are all regarding the possibility of members of my extended family finding out about my orientation...[, who] would not react well if they realized.”
- “Bisexuality in particular is oft misunderstood and I’ve heard many people say that they find it be disgusting or somewhat depraved... more so than standard homosexuality.”
- “Another concern is for my physical safety. I would not feel comfortable kissing a man in public.”

**Participant 6 (USA):**

- I am concerned with “facing daily prejudice and potentially not getting a job position because of a homophobic employer.”
- “Sexuality is not a protected class under TN’s anti-discrimination laws...”

**Participant 7 (USA):**

- I have a “fear of being judged.”
- “You don’t... come out of the closet once, you come out to every new person you meet... Culture has changed to where it’s not socially acceptable to discriminate but individual biases still exist in society...”
- “Homosexuality can still be... ostracizing... because of awkward or offensive questions that never get asked to heterosexual people (like preferred sex positions).”

**Participant 8 (USA):**

- My “concerns now are for the trans community and anyone who presents themselves differently than their anatomical body would suggest.”
- “Femininity in men and boys is still stigmatized.”

**Participant 9 (USA):**

- “I have no concerns.”

**Participant 10 (USA):**

- My “biggest concern is the slow erosion of the civil rights of the LGBTQ community by the current presidential administration.”

**Table 2: Concern for the Community (All Participants)**

	I am concerned.	I am not concerned.	I am not concerned for myself, but for others.
Participant 1 (NI)			✓
Participant 2 (NI)	✓		
Participant 3 (NI)		✓	
Participant 4 (NI)	✓		
Participant 5 (NI)	✓		
Participant 6 (USA)	✓		
Participant 7 (USA)	✓		
Participant 8 (USA)			✓
Participant 9 (USA)		✓	
Participant 10 (USA)	✓		
	6	2	2

**Table 2a: Concern for the Community (Northern Ireland vs. Tennessee)**

	Some form of concern (for self or others)	No concern
Northern Ireland	4	1
Tennessee	4	1
	8	2

**c. Social Changes**

*Question: What do you hope will be changed?*

Results are outlined below and organized to reflect trends in Tables 3 and 3a. Most responses reflected a desire for acceptance and education, however some participants mentioned legal protections, the legalization of same-sex marriage in Northern Ireland, and a change in political leadership in the United States. Noticeable trends between the participants are discussed in Chapter VI.

**Participant 1 (NI):**

- “I hope that... society will be more accepting of non-traditional sexual roles.”
- “I have heard... a common theory... in Northern Ireland is that bi-sexual women are only straight women who do it for attention, and that bi-sexual men are only gay men who do not feel confident admitting their sexuality.”

**Participant 2 (NI):**

- I want “marriage equality.”

**Participant 3 (NI):**

- “I hope for same-sex marriage to be legalised, but I do not want it to be imposed... by Westminster.”
- “I hope also that fewer people feel the need to leave Northern Ireland in order to live a comfortable life.”

**Participant 4 (NI):**

- I want “gay marriage [to be] legalised.”
- I hope “we don’t have to hide our feelings and emotions towards the ones that we love.”

**Participant 5 (NI):**

- “I hope attitudes change. They have already began to, but we are a long way from approaching anything respectable regarding orientation.”
- “Gay marriage must be made legal, as this will give it legitimacy and open the dialogue. Once this dialogue is opened, homosexuality will slowly become destigmatized.”

**Participant 6 (USA):**

- “I hope that [sexual orientation] will become a protected class under TN laws.”
- “I also hope that people will try and educate themselves on what we face... daily.”

**Participant 7 (USA):**

- I hope “the shock factor of homosexuality will decrease... and the full breadth of human sexuality can be comfortably explored by everyone without fear of being judged.”
- “I also hope gay culture will expand in an approachable way as to negate the effects of toxic masculinity.”

**Participant 8 (USA):**

- “I would hope that hyper-masculinity as a sign of strength would no longer be the norm.”

**Participant 9 (USA):**

- The “country is headed in right direction.”
- We “still have a lot of hate and bigotry..., but I firmly believe that most of this type of thinking will die with the baby boomers.”

**Participant 10 (USA):**

- I want “political leadership in the U.S. [to change.]”

**Table 3: Social Changes (All Participants)**

	Acceptance	Education	Legalization of same-sex marriage (NI)	Legal protections	Change in political leadership
Participant 1 (NI)	✓	✓			
Participant 2 (NI)			✓		
Participant 3 (NI)	✓		✓		
Participant 4 (NI)	✓		✓		
Participant 5 (NI)	✓		✓		
Participant 6 (USA)		✓		✓	
Participant 7 (USA)	✓	✓			
Participant 8 (USA)	✓	✓			
Participant 9 (USA)	✓				
Participant 10 (USA)					✓
	7	4	4	1	1

**Table 3a: Social Changes (Northern Ireland vs. Tennessee)**

	Acceptance	Education	Legalization of same-sex marriage (NI)*	Legal protections (USA)	Change in political leadership
Northern Ireland	4	1	4	N/A	0
Tennessee	4	3	N/A	1	1
	8	4	4 (out of 5)	1 (out of 5)	1

***d. Religion and Communal Participation***

*Questions: How would you view your religiosity? How often do you go to church? How has your participation changed over time?*

Results are outlined below by participant. Table 4 reflects all ten responses via religious or non-religious/spiritual beliefs and Table 4a breaks them down by location.

**Participant 1 (NI):**

- I am a “practising member of the Roman Catholic Church.”
- I “attend religious observation when I can... at least twice a month.”
- I “pray occasionally... My faith is more about living in good faith and being kind than offering prayers.”
- “In my teenage years I would do readings... during Sunday Mass... and attend church every weekend.”
  - I “now prefer to take a less active role as a simple member of the congregation... and try to go whenever I am not too busy...”

**Participant 2 (NI):**

- I “don’t go to church.”
- I “don’t consider myself an atheist... I guess I’m agnostic but religion doesn’t feature in my day to day.”
- I “don’t pray.”
- I “used to be very religious. [Presbyterian]. My mum was the head of the Sunday School and my dad was a leader in the Boys Brigade.”
  - I “stopped going when I was about 16.”

**Participant 3 (NI):**

- “Practising Christian [Anglican]”
- Attend church “at least one a week.”
- Pray “every day if I remember.”
- “I was an atheist from the age of 13 until about two years ago and I have increased my participation steadily over time.”

**Participant 4 (NI):**

- “I don’t consider myself religious but I like the thought of... a higher power and... life after death.”
- “Only been to church a handful of times/very rarely.”

**Participant 5 (NI):**

- “Born-again Christian... who clings to the message of Jesus Christ as a liberal, socialist message of acceptance, love and kindness towards everybody...”
- “Go to church once a week [Church of Ireland/Anglican]”
- “Pray at least once every two days. Provides me with a source of comfort, a chance for inner reflection and introspection, and a (albeit brief) feeling of peace.”

**Participant 6 (USA):**

- “Went to church every Sunday and Wednesday.”
- “Prayed frequently, mostly about curing my (at the time thought) disease.”
- “No longer go to church and consider myself more spiritual rather than religious.”

**Participant 7 (USA):**

- “Don't consider myself a religious person and rarely think about my life in terms of God or Heaven or Hell or Paradise or Nirvana.”
- “Grew up with religious parents so I was in church 2 or 3 times a week... until I was 18. Moving away to college saw my church attendance decline rapidly. I... could count on one hand how many times I've been church since moving out of my parent's house.”
- “The last time I remember praying was two years ago roughly when dealing with the death of a family member who was religious. I think I saw prayer as... a last

resort when medical science failed but also felt like the person would have expected me to. I haven't thought about prayer since.”

**Participant 8 (USA):**

- “Raised Baptist.”
- “Tried the Baha'i faith for a few years.”
- “In my 20s though, I came to terms with the fact that faith wasn't a gift I was granted - accepting that was honestly harder than accepting my sexuality.”
  - “Religion is important in the south. It's a social activity to go to church. Cutting out the ability to mingle with that section of society is a big decision.”

**Participant 9 (USA):**

- “Practicing progressive Catholic.”
- “[Do not go to church] as often as I should.”
- “[Prays] daily.”
- “Grew up in a non-religious family and found the Catholic church in my 20's. They are very welcoming and tolerant of all lifestyles. They may teach that a non-hetero lifestyle is a sin, but I believe they will also change in the not to[o] distant future.”

**Participant 10 (USA):**

- “Don’t attend church.”
- “I am agnostic but I don’t pray.”
- “When I attended church as a child I never really understood it.”
  - “I recall the minister telling people... about prisons being full of ‘muggers, rapists and homosexuals.’ It was all I could do to keep from walking out... This was probably over 12 years ago. I feel these beliefs are even more open with the current political climate.”

**Table 4: Religious Affiliation (All Participants)**

	Religious	Non-religious / Spiritual
Participant 1 (NI)	✓ (Roman Catholic)	
Participant 2 (NI)		✓ (Agnostic)
Participant 3 (NI)	✓ (Anglican)	
Participant 4 (NI)		✓ ("Like[s] the thought of a higher power or afterlife")
Participant 5 (NI)	✓ (Anglican Church of Ireland)	
Participant 6 (USA)		✓ (Spiritual)
Participant 7 (USA)		✓ (Non-religious)
Participant 8 (USA)		✓ (Non-religious)
Participant 9 (USA)	✓ (Progressive Catholic)	
Participant 10 (USA)		✓ (Agnostic)
	4	6

**Table 4a: Religious Affiliation (Northern Ireland vs. Tennessee)**

	Catholic	Anglican	Agnostic	Spiritual	Non-religious
Northern Ireland	1	2	1	0	1
Tennessee	1	0	1	1	2
	2	2	2	1	3

**e. Marriage**

*Questions: Do you hope to get married? Why is marriage important to you? If not, why?*

*If Northern Ireland continues to outlaw same-sex marriage how would you get married?*

*(NI only)*

Responses are outlined per participant. Tables 5 and 5a compare the religious and non-religious responses to the importance of marriage in their individual lives.

**Participant 1 (NI):**

- “Marriage is not something which I have devoted any time... to thinking about.”
- “On a spectrum I would lean more towards a preference for women so I do not worry about the option of marriage not being available to me.”
- “Marriage could be something in my future, just not something... I actively think about or work towards.”
- “Marriage is not important to me... more for political ideological reasons than... relating to my sexuality.”
- “In a scenario whereby I wished to marry a partner of the same sex I would likely have the ceremony performed in the Republic of Ireland.”

**Participant 2 (NI):**

- “I do hope to get married. Not right now... but in the future if I meet the right person...”
- “[Marriage] is very important to me. I would like to have the same rights in the eyes of the law that straight couples do...”
- If I wanted to marry a partner of the same sex “I would emigrate... even the rest of the UK recognises same-sex marriage.”

**Participant 3 (NI):**

- “Yes,” I want to get married.
- “Monogamy is the highest form of human flourishing and it is important for society to recognise it in a ritual way.”
- “I am likely to be married in England anyway, because I am likely to stay... to carry on my career.”

**Participant 4 (NI):**

- “I have no expectations or views on my future family life because I think it’s very difficult for couples of [the] same sex to start a family...”
- “Marriage does not appeal to me at this... stage... but if the right person [came] along I would probably consider it.”
- “Marriage is [not] important to me because... it’s just another label that we force upon ourselves.”

- “If Northern Ireland continues to outlaw same sex marriage... I would probably go to Las Vegas... or move to a different country...”

**Participant 5 (NI):**

- “I... hope to get married one day, if the circumstances are correct, however certainly not to another man.”
  - “If given the choice between two options... one which will make it easier and one which will make it more difficult, I’d struggle to see myself picking the harder road... Logically, I’d rather remain in heterosexual relationships.”

**Table 5: Religious Response to Importance of Marriage**

	Marriage is important.	Marriage is not important.
Participant 1 (NI)		✓
Participant 3 (NI)	✓	
Participant 5 (NI)	✓	
Participant 9 (USA)	✓	
	3	1

**Table 5a: Non-Religious Response to Importance of Marriage**

	Marriage is important.	Marriage is not important.
Participant 2 (NI)	✓	
Participant 4 (NI)		✓
Participant 6 (USA)	✓	
Participant 7 (USA)		✓
Participant 8 (USA)		✓
Participant 10 (USA)	✓	
	3	3

## VI

### Discussion & Conclusion

#### *General Experiences*

70% of participants reported positive or generally positive experiences. These results were generally associated with the support of close friends and family.

Participant 1 (NI) identified himself as a bisexual man in a long-term relationship with a female, which he believes has sheltered him from some of the effects of this social stigma. Similarly, Participant 9 (USA) is currently married to a heterosexual female and noted that many of his peers and family do not know about his orientation apart from her. Both respondents (1 & 9) claimed they did not find it important to mention their sexuality to anyone apart from those they trust. Participant 8 (USA) reported being previously married to a man, claiming his friends and family were “very accepting” of the marriage.

Negative results tended to be associated with verbal or emotional abuse. Participant 3 (NI) reported bullying, family trouble, verbal and emotional abuse, but no physical harm. In fact, no participants reported any physical retaliation except Participant 4 (NI), who claimed he was spat on by a drunk person at a club. Participants 1 (NI), 5 (NI), and 10 (USA) noted that, in their opinions, most discriminatory views had been perpetuated by older generations. Participants 1 (NI) and 8 (USA) said that although their experiences were overwhelmingly positive, sexuality may become a contentious subject with certain casual friend groups or acquaintances. Participant 4 (NI) reported verbal attacks and claims his sexuality has affected the way in which he

carries himself. Participant 6 (USA) claimed he felt like he had to “explain himself a lot,” especially to describe why certain terms or phrases may be offensive (e.g. faggot). He claimed the conservative nature of the American South has prevented him from doing certain tasks, but did not elaborate on which ones.

Seven out of the ten respondents (70%) reported positive or generally positive experiences. Positive results were reported by three Northern Irish participants and four Americans. Negative responses included two Northern Irish participants and one American.

### ***Concern for the Community***

Most participants (80%) reported being at least somewhat concerned about the state of non-heterosexuality, even when not speaking of themselves. These concerns revolved around two spheres: social and legal issues.

Participant 8 (USA) was more concerned for the transgender community than he was for the gay community, and noted that femininity among men was also still stigmatized. Participant 4 (NI) was concerned about the growth of his community due to societal pressure as many non-heterosexuals are still afraid to “come-out” to their friends and family due to religious pressure. Similarly, Participant 5 (NI) claimed in the event certain people found out about his orientation, he would be concerned about social and physical safety. He says that he does not want his extended family to hear about his orientation and would not show affection to another male in public. He and Participant 1 (NI) both noted that they had heard negative things about their sexuality

from those outside the community, describing bisexuality as “depraved,” “disgusting,” and a result of attempting to hide pure homosexuality. Similarly, Participant 7 (USA) noted that some people may ask inappropriate questions about his sexuality that they would not normally ask a heterosexual person, such as preferred sexual positions. Participant 7 (USA) described his concerns in detail and embodied many of the worries others had --

*“Being homosexual, you don’t just come out of the closet once, you come out to every new person you meet. And that process is sometimes stressful. I know culture has changed to where it’s not socially acceptable to discriminate but individual biases still exist in society and you never know how your next boss, manager, or friend will perceive you.”*

Marriage was clearly a prominent concern for Northern Irish participants on the legal side and Participant 4 attributed this partially to religion. Participant 1 (NI) claimed he was not worried for himself, but disagreed with Northern Ireland’s choice to ban blood given by: a) men who have slept with men or b) women who have slept with men who have slept with men. According to his understanding, prior to 2016, falling within this category resulted in a lifetime ban from giving blood. Participant 10 (USA) noted his concern over the current political administration and what it may hold for the future of his community, while Participant 6 (USA) noted concerns of being turned down for a job due to his sexuality. As he understands, sexuality is not protected under Tennessee’s

anti-discrimination laws, meaning no legal recourse for discriminatory hiring practices. Upon further research, this claim was validated. According to House Bill 600, “no local government shall by ordinance, resolution, or any other means impose on or make applicable to any person an anti-discrimination practice, standard, definition, or provision that shall deviate from, modify, supplement, add to, change or vary in any manner from” the state’s stance, meaning sexual orientation legally cannot be protected within Tennessee (Casada 2011). Some cities, including Chattanooga, have made discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity illegal in the public sphere, but this not apply to private businesses (Ridley 2011).

### ***Social Changes***

Most participants mentioned at least one aspect of society they wish would change regarding societal views of their orientations. On the legal end, most Northern Irish participants reported wanting same-sex marriage to be legalized. Participant 2 (NI) said he wants same-sex marriage legalized in Northern Ireland, but he does not want Westminster (the U.K. government) to impose this. Instead, he wishes for the country to take the initiative itself. Participant 6 hopes that “Tennessee will move to protect potential employees and create a protected class” and Participant 10 hopes to see new political leadership on the federal scale. On the social side, most participants noted wanting to see a shift in attitude among the population, to be more open to “non-traditional sexual roles” (Participant 1), to not force non-heterosexuals to hide their feelings and emotions (Participant 4), to educate themselves on the matter of

non-heterosexuality (Participant 6), and to expand “gay culture” in an approachable way to negate toxic and hyper-masculinity (Participants 7 & 8).

### ***Religion and Communal Participation***

Four respondents considered themselves religious (1, 3, 5, 9). All religious respondents reported being Christian with two claiming Anglicanism and two Catholicism. Non-religious respondents reported being spiritual, agnostic, and completely non-religious (Table 3) the differences in these, shown by location, are shown in 3a.

Northern Irish participants reported being more religious than those in America, with three out of five participants attending church or believing in Christianity. The participants that reported being religious differed on communal participation (i.e. attending church). Participant 1 stated he played a more active role in the church when he was younger by reading from the Bible at Sunday Mass and attending church each weekend. Now that he is older, he finds it more important to “live in good faith” and “be kind,” however he does attend church when he has time. Participant 3 plays a larger role in the church and tries to attend at least once a week. This participant claimed to have become an atheist at age 13 and only recently returned to religion. Similarly, Participant 5 only recently began attending church after having never attended regularly. Participant 9 grew up non-religious and found the Catholic Church when he was in his twenties.

On the other hand, most participants that reported being non-religious had attended church or a religious organization at some point in their life. Participant 2 was raised in the Presbyterian Church, but stopped attending at age 16. Likewise, Participants 6 and 7 used to attend church multiple times a week, but no longer attend on their own accord. Participant 7 correlated his lack of attendance with leaving his parents' house and going to college. Participant 8 was raised Baptist and tried the Baha'i faith for a short period, but claims "faith was not a gift he was granted." Participant 10 attended church as a child and felt obligated to continue participating for his mother's sake, but has ultimately stopped attending. Participant 4 has attended church only a handful of times.

Overall, religion and adherence to religious guidelines were more prominent in Northern Ireland and certainly reflected the more religious nature of the country. Northern Ireland is mostly Protestant, which is reflected in my research with two participants claiming Anglicanism and one Catholicism. On the other hand, America is also mostly Protestant, however most of the participants in this study were non-religious. While the results in America may not accurately reflect the consensus of the country, it does reveal an interesting aspect of the American non-heterosexual community that is opposite that of Northern Ireland.

**Marriage**

Participants reported several views on marriage and its importance to them. Participant 1 is not necessarily concerned about marriage and says he has not devoted much time thinking about it. Additionally, his significant other is a female, so he is not affected by the current ban. He says traditional marriage is not necessarily important to him, although he does support marriage rights for everyone. He says in the event he was to marry a man, he would most likely conduct the ceremony in the Republic of Ireland. Similarly, Participant 4 has no specific expectations for a future family life, partially due to the difficulty of starting a family as a homosexual in Northern Ireland. Adversely, marriage is not important to Participant 7 and if he were to be married, it would be for legal reasons and not religious or moral. Participant 8 had the most unique view on marriage and supports Alabama's idea to get rid of the "marriage business" entirely. He says, "marriage is one place left in civil law where religion is the mold into which the law fits" and supports secularizing the process or putting it exclusively in the church.

Participants 2, 3, 5, and 6, on the other hand, find marriage to be a more important aspect of their lives. Participant 2 believes he would like to have the same rights in the eyes of the law and feels as though the government is denying a large group their rights. Participant 3 claims that "monogamy is the highest form of human flourishing" and hopes to be married in a "ritual way." Should Participant 3 be married while the ban is still active, he claims he would get married in England, where he currently lives. Participant 5 wishes to be married to the right person under the right

circumstances, but would not consider marrying a man, as it would be too difficult to maintain where he lives; however he does believe that same-sex marriages should be allowed “if we are to believe gay people are just as important as straight [people].”

Participant 6 claims to be a hopeless romantic and wants to be married because it “validates his relationship and signifies equality between him and heterosexuals.”

Overall, the importance of marriage seemed to vary in importance between the populations. According to the Tables 5 and 5a, marriage was important to 75% of the religious population and 50% of the non-religious. Although the percentages convey that marriage is more important to the religious, the population size here was smaller than the non-religious and would require further research to relay accuracy.

Two participants are currently married - one to a man, the other to a woman. One participant was previously married to a man. Participant 9 is currently in a heterosexual marriage, so he is not visibly or legally affected by the stigma. Participant 10 married his partner in December of 2017, but claims he is still concerned about legal protections. Participant 8 was married to a man, but the relationship ended. Unfortunately, according to the respondent, Tennessee does not recognize same-sex divorce, so he is still technically married. Due to this, he does not necessarily plan on getting legally married again, but “wants all the signs of marriage without the signing.” According to Nashville lawyer Morgan Smith, same-sex divorce should be recognized in the state, however she claims there can be several legal hoops to jump through and results depend highly on the county in which the divorce is being handled (“Same Sex Divorces”).

**Conclusion**

Concerns for the LGBTQ+ community in America persisted post-legislation, however participants here tended to have better general experiences than those in Northern Ireland, which also coincided with a higher religious percentage. It seems the presence of stricter religious guidelines have contributed to less than positive experiences for some Northern Irish citizens. However, the practice of marriage remained important to both communities across the board, even if not for religious reasons. This reflects the waning importance of religion in the practice itself. Due to this decoupling of marriage and religion, from a legal standpoint it is logical to therefore open up the practice secularly. Although it is clear that the non-heterosexual communities have come a long way since the Buggery Act of the 16th century, there is still an overt stigma against same-sex marriages and non-heterosexual relationships which requires both social and legal intervention to improve the status of the LGBTQ+ community.

## VII

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## VIII

### Appendix

1. As a non-heterosexual man living in a society in which your sexual orientation is still somewhat misunderstood:
  1. What are your general experiences?
  2. What are your biggest concerns?
  3. What do you hope will be changed?
2. How would you view your religiosity?
  1. How often do you go to church?
  2. How often do you pray?
  3. How has your participation changed over time?
3. How do you view your future family life?
  1. Do you hope to get married?
  2. Why is marriage important to you? If not, why?
  3. If Northern Ireland continues to outlaw same-sex marriage how would you get married? (NI only)

#### a. Participant 1

1. My general experience with identifying as a Bi-sexual male in Northern Ireland is for the most part parallel to the experience of a heterosexual man. I am currently in a long-term relationship with a female partner and for the most part the majority of people I encounter in day to day living assume that I am heterosexual. I do not feel a great need to correct them on this assumption as it does not affect me, nor the relationships I have with most people. There have been instances where I have revealed my sexuality such as to close friends and family and they have been understanding and it has not changed the dynamic of our relationships. Among previous casual friendship groups I had whilst studying at university it was a more contentious point to make and it resulted in some ridicule

but for the most part the majority of people are understanding if I choose to tell them.

- a. I wouldn't say that I am concerned in any way about my sexuality personally. One societal area of concern is the ban on giving blood which is imposed in Northern Ireland on men who have engaged in homosexual acts and their future partners, until 2016 this resulted in a lifetime ban in Northern Ireland but has now been brought into guidance with the rest of the UK and now only asks for a period of one year between the sexual acts and the giving of blood. For clarity the current law states that you must wait a year if you have had a sexual partner who is: a) (if you are a man) another man. This includes anal and oral sex. b) (if you are a woman) a man who has ever had oral or anal sex with another man, even if they used a condom or other protective. The younger generation in Northern Ireland (Age <30 ) are for the most part very supportive of the LGBT+ movement and I do not feel concerned of my sexuality as this generation proceeds into the future.
- b. I hope that going forward that society will be more accepting of non-traditional sexual roles. I have heard from conversations that a common theory held by some people in Northern Ireland is that Bi-sexual women are only straight women who do it for attention, and that Bi-sexual men are only gay men who do not feel confident admitting their sexuality.

2. I am a practising member of the Roman Catholic Church and I do attend religious observation when I can. Due to a busy student schedule it is sometimes not always possible to attend every Sunday but I would attend at least twice a month.
  - a. I often forget to pray at the traditional times (Morning and evening) but I do pray occasionally. For me my faith is more about living in good faith and being kind than offering prayers.
  - b. My participation has changed over the years, in my teenage years I would do readings from the bible at Church during Sunday mass and I would attend church every weekend. I now prefer to take a less active role as a simple member of the congregation at church and try to go whenever I am not too busy at the weekends.
  
3. Marriage is not something which I have devoted any time really to thinking about, although I am Bi-sexual, on a spectrum I would lean more towards a preference for women so I do not worry about the option of marriage not being available to me. To answer the question, I feel that marriage could be something in my future, just not something that I actively think about or work towards.
  - a. Marriage is not that important to me, but that is more for political ideological reasons than for any reason relating to my sexuality. I support the right for people to be allowed to choose to marry whomever they want regardless of their sexuality.
  - b. In a scenario whereby I wished to marry a partner of the same sex I would likely have the ceremony performed in the Republic of Ireland.

**b. Participant 2**

1. My general experiences are pretty basic. I rarely get asked about my orientation and I don't tend to lead with it either.
  - a. My biggest concern would probably be marriage. Northern Ireland is remarkably backwards in its treatment of women and the LGBTQI+ community.
  - b. My hope would be the same. Marriage equality in my home country.
2. I don't go to church. I don't consider myself an atheist though. I guess I'm agnostic but religion doesn't feature in my day to day.
  - a. I don't pray.
  - b. I used to be very religious. Serious Presbyterian family, my mum was the head of Sunday School and my dad was a leader in the Boys Brigade. I stopped going when I was about 16.
3. I do hope to get married. Not right now, I'm 22 but in the future if I meet the right person I'd like to get married.
  - a. It's very important to me. I would like to have the same rights in the eyes of the law that straight couples do. I feel they are denying a large group of their rights.
  - b. I would emigrate. It doesn't have to be far away, even the rest of the UK recognises same-sex marriage.

**c. Participant 3**

1. I was verbally and emotionally bullied at school over my sexuality and had some family trouble, but I was never physically mistreated.
  - a. I think the dramatic difference in generational attitudes is a powerful wedge issue for parties which do not have our best interests at heart.
  - b. I hope for same-sex marriage to be legalised, but I do not want it to be imposed upon the Province by Westminster. I hope also that fewer gay people feel the need to leave Northern Ireland in order to live a comfortable life.
2. I am a practising Christian (an Anglican specifically)
  - a. At least once a week.
  - b. Every day if I remember. I hope to begin praying the Anglican rosary soon.
  - c. I was an atheist from the age of 13 until about two years ago, and I have increased my participation steadily over time
3. Yes.
  - a. I think monogamy is the highest form of human flourishing and it is important for society to recognise it in a ritual way.
  - b. I am likely to be married in England anyway, because I am likely to stay in England to carry on my career.

**d. Participant 4**

1. Surprisingly my experiences in Northern Ireland as a gay man haven't been anything too out of the ordinary. I have not been physically attacked for my sexuality although I have been verbally. Sometimes, maybe on a night out, where people's actions have been influenced by alcohol I would be called names or in one instance spat on. I think it's safe to say that the society has had an influence on my personality and the way I carry myself because I don't want to be in people's face with my sexuality.
  - a. My biggest concerns are that we're not allowing people to grow into humans that they should be because of the pressures of the society. We're still afraid of coming out to our friends and family because we know that most people don't agree with our way of life, especially in Northern Ireland where religion seems to have the biggest impact on people here.
  - b. First of all I hope that one day gay marriage is legalised and we don't have to hide our feelings and emotions towards the ones that we love.
2. Personally I don't consider myself religious but I like the thought of there being a higher power and I like the thought of life after death. I have only been to church a handful of times in my lifetime.
  - a. Very rarely.
  - b. N/A
3. I have no expectations or views on my future family life because I think it's very difficult for couples of same sex to start a family, but I might be wrong. Marriage

does not appeal to me at this current stage of my life but if the right person come along I would probably consider it.

- a. I don't think marriage is important to me because at the end of the day it's just another label that we force upon ourselves.
- b. If Northern Ireland continues to outlaw same sex marriage and I wanted to get married I would probably go to Las Vegas and get married there, or move to a different country where same sex marriage is legal.

#### **e. Participant 5**

1. Generally, in Northern Ireland, homosexuality (and bisexuality, in my case) is something that splits opinion, generally along the lines of young and old. The older generations tend to be more conservative, with less of an open mind regarding sexual orientation. However, in my generation, there's a noticeable difference. I've experienced very little homophobia from young people, besides the occasional friendly joke or teasing.
  - a. My biggest concerns, for definite, are all regarding the possibility of members of my extended family finding out about my orientation. Even members of my close family still do not know and would not react well if they realized. In this regard, using things such as Grindr which would be common and not much of an issue in most western countries is a bit of a risk here, as all it takes is one person to see me using it and that would open up a whole can of worms. Bisexuality, in particular, is oft

misunderstood and I've heard many people say that they find it to be disgusting or somewhat depraved, even more so than standard homosexuality. This is an attitude that worries me. Finally, another concern is obviously for my physical safety. I would not feel comfortable kissing a man in public.

- b. I hope attitudes change. They have already begun to, but we are a long way from approaching anything respectable regarding orientation. Firstly, the law must change. Gay marriage must be made legal, as this will give it legitimacy and open the dialogue. Once this dialogue is opened, homosexuality will slowly become destigmatized. This is something we can observe occurring when changes are made in the law to allow something to happen which previously was not allowed.
2. I consider myself a born-again Christian, however one who clings to the message of Jesus Christ as a liberal, socialist message of acceptance, love and kindness towards everybody, regardless of gender, race, sex, sexual orientation or any other characteristic which does not define them as a person.
    - a. I go to church once a week - I go to the Church of Ireland, which, as part of the Anglican church community, is much more tolerant of non-straight people than most other churches on the island.
    - b. I pray at least once every two days. I try to pray every day, however that is difficult to maintain sometimes. It provides me with a source of comfort, a

chance for inner reflection and introspection, and a (albeit brief) feeling of peace.

- c. I went from never going to church and being an ardent atheist to actually going, so this is quite a significant change in participation.
3. I do hope to get married one day, if the circumstances are correct, however certainly not to another man. This is due to the fact that, if given the choice between two options in my life, one which will make it easier and one which will make it more difficult, I'd struggle to see myself picking the harder road.

Therefore, logically, I'd rather remain in heterosexual relationships.

- a. Marriage is important as both a social and religious function. It symbolizes the coming together of two families, a merging of blood. It is a real, lengthy, often expensive and palpable commitment to the love that is shared between the couple. Therefore, if we are to believe gay people are just as important and valuable as straight people, we must allow them this basic human right of marriage. They deserve to contribute to the stability of society in the same way everybody else does.
- b. As mentioned earlier, I wouldn't get married to a man for the reasons I outlined. I'm lucky in that regard, however most are not so lucky.

#### **f. Participant 6**

- 1. My general experience as a gay man in society has been a lot of having to explain myself. Often I have to explain to someone why a phrase they normally

make is somewhat offensive. It also has prevented me from doing certain tasks because people in the south are much more conservative.

- a. My biggest concern has to do with facing daily prejudice and potentially not getting a job position because of a homophobic employer. Sexuality is not a protected class under TN's anti-discrimination laws and therefore could impact my life.
  - b. I hope that it will become a protected class under TN laws. I also hope that people will try and educate themselves on what we face on the daily.
2. Growing up I went to church every sunday and wednesday.
- a. I prayed frequently, mostly about curing my (at the time thought) disease
  - b. I no longer go to church and consider myself more spiritual rather than religious.
3. I do hope to get married! I'm truly a hopeless romantic.
- a. Marriage I believe is important simply because it shows that my relationship to external people is validated and equal to their marriages,

#### **g. Participant 7**

1. My experiences as a homosexual man are generally positive. I'm comfortable with who I am and I have supportive friends.
  - a. My biggest concerns still are fear of being judged. Being homosexual, you don't just come out of the closet once, you come out to every new person you meet. And that process is sometimes stressful. I know culture has

changed to where it's not socially acceptable to discriminate but individual biases still exist in society and you never know how your next boss, manager, or friend will perceive you. Even if these people aren't outright discriminatory, homosexuality can still be an ostracizing thing because of awkward or offensive questions that never get asked to heterosexual people (like preferred sex positions).

- b. My hope is that the shock factor of homosexuality will decrease as time goes on and that the full breadth of human sexuality can be comfortably explored by everyone without fear of being judged. I also hope gay culture will expand in an approachable way as to negate the effects of toxic masculinity
2. I don't consider myself a religious person and rarely think about my life in terms of God or Heaven or Hell or Paradise or Nirvana.
    - a. I grew up with religious parents so I was in church 2 or 3 times a week growing up until I was 18. Moving away to college saw my church attendance decline rapidly. I think i could count on one hand how many times I've been church since moving out of my parent's house.
    - b. The last time I remember praying was two years ago roughly when dealing with the death of a family member who was religious. I think I saw prayer as something of a last resort when medical science failed but also felt like the person would have expected me to. I haven't thought about prayer since

3. I really have no idea what my future family life will look like and I don't even know what I do want in a family. The traditional route of meeting someone special and then escalating the relationship to culminate in marriage is the structure that I was exposed to and could see myself pursuing but I don't see modern marriage as anything more than a way for two people to cohabit with a decreased tax burden. That's what marriage would be for me if I ever was to get married, not a special or divine ceremony.

#### **h. Participant 8**

1. Relatively pleasant. I've of course faced insults and small minds, but never to the detriment of my health or well-being. Even in planning a wedding to another man (marriage lasted 10 years then ended) everyone was incredibly accepting.
  - a. My concerns now are for the trans community and anyone who presents themselves differently than their anatomical body would suggest.  
Regardless of gender, femininity in men and boys is still stigmatized.
  - b. I would hope that hyper-masculinity as a sign of strength would no longer be the norm.
2. None.
  - a. Never.
  - b. Never.
  - c. I was raised Baptist. When I was able to seek on my own, I tried the Baha'i faith for a few years. In my 20s though, I came to terms with the

fact that faith wasn't a gift I was granted - accepting that was honestly harder than accepting my sexuality. Religion is important in the south. It's a social activity to go to church. Cutting out the ability to mingle with that section of society is a big decision. Many christians have become more accepting over the years - not just of homosexuality, but also of atheism.

3. I'm in a relationship with someone much younger - while he may be still developing his sense of what he wants family to be, I'm afraid I've passed the point that a 'family' is in the cards for me. I'm entering my mid 30s and I'm not sure at what age a person should give up on the dream of children and picket fences.
  - a. I was married for a long time. He cheated and left. I've learned that the only difference between a marriage and 'living in sin' is the paperwork. While I don't think I will ever get married again (that's assuming that gay divorce will even allow it - longer story - but TN doesn't handle same-sex divorce at ALL, so I'm still legally married), I definitely want the monogamy, etc. I tell people that I want all the signs of marriage without any of the signing.
  - b. No. See above. It's only paperwork. I'm all for Alabama getting out of the marriage business entirely - I think other states should follow suit. Marriage is one place left in civil law where religion is absolutely the mold into which the laws fit. Either secularize the process, or take it out of the state and put it in church.

**i. Participant 9**

1. My experience has been a positive one. Not many people outside of my wife know of my sexual orientation.
  - a. I have no concerns.
  - b. I think the country is headed in the right direction. We still have a lot of hate and bigotry in this country, but I firmly believe that most of this type of thinking will die with the baby boomers.
2. I am a practicing progressive Catholic.
  - a. Not as often as I should.
  - b. Daily
  - c. I grew up in a non-religious family and found the Catholic church in my 20's. They are very welcoming and tolerant of all life styles. They may teach that a non-hetero lifestyle is a sin, but I believe that they will also change in the not to distance future. They also teach to be welcoming and kind to anyone no matter what.
3. I view it in a very positive light. We are a generally happy bunch with a positive outlook on life.
  - a. I am married.
  - b. Marriage is very important to me. Finding someone to share your life with is one of the greatest things a human being can achieve.

**j. Participant 10**

1. Generally I find people more accepting currently than they were in the past. I'm out at work and I don't feel that I'm discriminated against as a result.
  - a. My biggest concern is the slow erosion of the civil rights of the LGBTQ community by the current presidential administration.
  - b. Political leadership in the U.S.
2. I don't attend church.
  - a. I am agnostic but I don't pray. Even when I attended church as a child I never really understood it. I suppose it is a good coping mechanism for some people, just not me.
  - b. I never really like organized religion even as a child and teenager. As I've gotten older I like it even less. When I did attend church with my parents I recall the minister telling people who they should vote for in the upcoming elections and he even made a statement about prisons being full of "muggers, rapists and homosexuals" it was all I could do to keep from walking out. If it hadn't been for my mother being there with me I would have. This was probably over 12 years ago. I feel that these beliefs are even more open with the current political climate.
3. I married my husband last December.
  - a. The legal protections that are afforded with marriage are what are important to me. I was very glad when SCOTUS ruled on same sex

marriages. I felt that this was a national issue and should be addressed there, not at the state level.