

**More than words: Using qualitative video-recall
procedures to contextualize queer couples'
communication and partnered gay men's sexual
communication**

**by
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Abstract

This thesis contains two manuscripts related to the study of queer couples' communication. In the first manuscript, I discuss qualitative video-recall procedures as valuable tools for generating contextualized and queer-affirmative understandings of queer couples' communication. I argue that these procedures address limitations of dominant approaches to couples' communication research, enabling researchers to attend to important social and political factors that shape how queer couples communicate. In the second manuscript, I use these innovative research procedures to explore partnered gay men's sexual communication. In this study, three diverse gay male couples had video-recorded conversations about their sexual relationships, followed by separate video-recall interviews. Findings explore how gay male couples collaboratively navigate complex sociopolitical contexts by resisting, creatively modifying, and negotiating dominant sexual scripts. I explore how dominant sexual discourses and interpersonal power dynamics shape these dyadic processes.

Keywords: queer relationships; qualitative methods; video-recall; communication

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Chapter 1. In their own words: The value of qualitative video-recall procedures in queer couples' communication research

Abstract

Queer couples' communication is commonly studied using decontextualized and heteronormative research methods. As queer relationships are meaningfully shaped by systems of power and hetero/cisnormativity, it is imperative that partnered communication be explored through methods that attend to couples' sociopolitical contexts. I argue that qualitative video-recall procedures offer promise as an underutilized tool for generating queer-affirmative couples' communication research. Through these procedures, couples engage in video-recorded conversations and then separately review their conversations during video-recall interviews. Participants are asked open-ended questions about their experiences during their conversations, producing rich subjective reflections that centre queer voices in the construction of empirical knowledge. I begin this paper with a brief review of dominant approaches to couples' communication research. I then discuss qualitative video-recall procedures and their epistemological and ontological foundations. I conclude by discussing findings and reflections from a preliminary study that uses qualitative video-recall procedures to explore partnered gay men's sexual communication.

Keywords: qualitative methods; video-recall; queer couples' communication

Introduction

The longevity and quality of same-sex relationships, like all intimate relationships, relies heavily on effective communication between partners (Connolly & Sicola, 2005; Riggle, Rothblum, Rostosky, Clark, & Balsam, 2016). Despite the tight association between communication and relationship quality (e.g., Gottman et al., 2003; Julien, Chartrand, Simard, Bouthillier, & Bégin, 2003), there is a dearth of empirical research on how same-sex couples communicate. Most studies use research methods that inadequately address how couples' complex and changing sociopolitical contexts affect their partnered communication (e.g., Kurdek, 2005). In the era of marriage equality, same-sex couples in North America have experienced significant shifts in how their relationships are recognized by dominant political systems. Although queer relationships benefit from increasingly inclusive same-sex legislation (Riggle, Wickham, Rostosky, Rothblum, & Balsam, 2017; Rostosky, Riggle, Rothblum, & Balsam, 2016), they also continue to be impacted by experienced or anticipated discrimination on the basis of their sexual orientation (Meyer, 2003; for review, see Rostosky & Riggle, 2017). Contextualized research is needed to fully understand how queer couples communicate within these paradoxical systems of acceptance and marginalization.

Qualitative video-recall procedures have the potential to produce robust, contextualized understandings of queer couples' communication processes. These innovative procedures enable researchers to explore how couples collaboratively make meaning through partnered communication (Domene & Young, 2008). Grounded in interpretivist philosophies, these procedures honour participants as valued agents in the co-construction of knowledge (Ponterotto, 2005). When used with queer participants, these interpretive procedures help construct queer-centred knowledge that deepens empirical understanding and challenges heteronormative theories of partnered communication (LaSala, 2007).

I begin this paper by reviewing commonly used heteronormative approaches to the study of queer couples' communication, highlighting the need for queer-affirmative procedures. Next, I introduce quantitative video-recall procedures as the dominant approach to video-recall in relationship research. I then discuss qualitative video-recall procedures as underutilized, but valuable research tools. Finally, I discuss my research that explores partnered gay men's sexual communication through qualitative video-recall

procedures. I discuss my study's design, briefly explore notable findings, and provide personal reflections to demonstrate how these procedures add meaningful depth to the study of queer couples' communication.

The Need for Queer-Affirmative Research Procedures

Most of the extant literature on queer couples' communication uses restrictive and notably heteronormative research methods. This includes assessing the processes and outcomes of partnered communication using quantitative measures that have been developed for research with heterosexual couples (Julien et al., 2003; Kurdek, 2005). For example, the Marital Adjustment Test (MAT; Locke & Wallace, 1959), Communication Patterns Questionnaire (CPQ; Christensen & Sullaway, 1984), and Dyadic Adjustment Scale (DAS; Spanier, 1976) are widely used in queer couples' communication research, despite being developed to study cisgender husbands and wives.

Using these heteronormative measures with queer couples is limiting for two reasons. First, aspects of these measures have questionable reliability when used to study same-sex relationships. A meta-analysis of 91 studies that used the DAS found that sexual orientation highly influenced the reliability estimates for the scale's Affective Expression subscale (Graham, Liu, & Jeziorski, 2006). Studies using the CPQ have also produced inconsistent findings about same-sex couples' communication patterns (Baucom, McFarland, & Christensen, 2010; Kurdek, 2004), suggesting that this measure might not reliably capture queer communication dynamics. Second, these widely used measures neglect to acknowledge that heterosexual couples and queer couples are dissimilarly situated in systems of power and privilege. In addition to institutional homonegativity, internalized homophobia, and inadequate social supports (Dudley et al., 2005; Otis, Rostosky, Riggle, & Hamrin, 2006; Rostosky et al., 2004; Rostosky, Riggle, Gray, & Hatton, 2007), queer relationships have also been uniquely affected by recent shifts in same-sex legislation (Riggle et al., 2017; Rostosky et al., 2016). Although these sociopolitical factors shape how queer couples communicate (Connolly & Sicola, 2005; Rostosky, Riggle, Dudley, & Wright, 2006), they are inadequately captured through quantitative measures that are commonly used to study queer couples' communication. By contrast, qualitative video-recall procedures enable researchers to explore queer couples' partnered communication as interpersonally and culturally constituted.

Video-Recall Procedures

Technological advancements of the 1980s allowed relationship researchers to study communication processes in innovative ways (Welsh & Dickson, 2005). Video-recall procedures were developed to capture partners' subjective experiences during partnered communication. Using these procedures, researchers invite partners to engage in self-directed, video-recorded conversations about a given topic. Researchers then instruct partners to separately view these video-recorded conversations and reflect on their experiences at the time of the conversation (Welsh & Dickson, 2005). The development of these innovative procedures has enabled researchers to attend to couples' subjective in vivo experiences during partnered communication.

Quantitative Video-Recall

Couples' communication research almost solely uses quantitative approaches to video-recall. Most often, partners are asked to provide continuous numerical ratings of their affective experiences while viewing video-recorded conversations that they had with their partners (e.g., Gottman et al., 2003). In their seminal study using video-recall methods, Levenson and Gottman (1983) asked participants to manipulate a dial to rate their affect on a scale that ranged from very negative to very positive. Couples were instructed to rate their affect based on how they recalled feeling at the time of the conversation, as opposed to their experience while reviewing the conversation (Gottman & Levenson, 1985; Levenson & Gottman, 1983). By having partners watch and rate their own experience, these quantitative video-recall procedures were assumed to reveal some aspect of 'truth' about what participants felt at the time of their video-recorded conversations (Powers, Welsh, & Wright, 1994). The perceived ability to have direct access to participants' subjective experiences encouraged a proliferation of studies that used quantitative video-recall procedures to study couples' communication.

Although these quantitative video-recall procedures attend to partners' subjective experiences in innovative ways, they lack the ability to generate previously unknown qualities of partnered communication. Quantitative video-recall procedures are used to test hypotheses that have been developed based on pre-existing knowledge about intimate relationships (Welsh & Dickson, 2005). Because this knowledge is largely informed by empirical understandings of heterosexual relationships (Kurdek, 2005),

these procedures restrict researchers from exploring communication qualities that are uniquely experienced by queer couples.

Qualitative Video-Recall

Guided by partners' subjective reflections, qualitative video-recall procedures enable researchers to generate novel understandings about queer couples' communication. These procedures are similar to the quantitative approaches discussed above; however, instead of numerically rating their experience on a set of predetermined measures, participants are invited to engage in reflective dialogue through open-ended video-recall interviews (Kagan, Krathwohl, & Miller, 1963). During these interviews, partners separately view their video-recorded conversations with researchers (Young, Valach, Dillabough, Dover, & Matthes, 1994). Videos are periodically paused and partners are asked open-ended questions about their experience during their partnered conversations. The semi-structured nature of these interviews enables researchers to explore areas that hold relevance for their participants, thus enabling researchers to produce novel understandings of partnered communication.

One of the most widely used forms of qualitative video-recall, interpersonal process recall (IPR) was originally developed as a clinical training tool in the field of Counselling Psychology (Kagan et al., 1963). Since its development, IPR has been used to produce rich, reflective interview data that is then analyzed through a variety of approaches (Rennie, 1992). Whereas IPR does not adhere to a single approach to qualitative data analysis, the more recently developed action-project method (APM) analyzes video-recall data through contextual action theory (Young & Valach, 2016; Young, Valach, & Domene, 2005). Consistent with this specific theory of action, the APM uses qualitative video-recall procedures to explore how dyads co-construct and achieve joint goals through communication. Although qualitative video-recall procedures have mostly been used to study clients' experiences in therapy (e.g., Rennie, 1992) and parent-child interactions (e.g., Young et al., 2001), more recent studies have used these procedures to explore partnered interactions in intimate relationships (Domene et al., 2012). Grounded in constructionist philosophies, these procedures hold particular promise for developing contextualized and queer-centred understandings of queer couples' communication.

Ontological and Epistemological Foundations

Qualitative video-recall procedures are rooted in interpretivist ontologies and epistemologies. Interpretivist researchers endorse pluralistic views of reality and emphasize that human experience is subjective and contextually-situated (Flick, 2009). These researchers reject post-positivist claims that probable facts or laws about human experience exist and can be generalized across contexts and populations (Lincoln & Guba, 2000); rather, they assert that people's subjective realities are co-constructed through their interactions with their world. Thus, interpretivists argue that subjective experience is vast and diverse and that general claims about human behaviour inadequately capture meaningful nuances of human life. In contrast to post-positivist assumptions that knowledge exists independent from participants, interpretivists assert that individuals actively co-construct knowledge through their participation in research (Ponterotto, 2005). Interpretivists argue that it is not useful, nor is it possible, to study human behaviour objectively. Because subjective understandings are viewed as relative to each individual, they must be empirically understood within the context of individuals' life perspectives. In the process of understanding participants' life-worlds (Husserl, 1970), the researcher becomes inextricable from the knowledge construction process (Bentz & Shapiro, 1998).

Interpretivist approaches to inquiry are particularly well suited for queer couples' communication research. By centring queer voices in the knowledge construction process, researchers attend to unique queer experiences that are inadequately captured through post-positive approaches that rely on heteronormative research measures. Queer theorists posit that queerness is neither innate nor stable; rather, it is continually constructed and deconstructed in politicized contexts and further adapted by the individual (Foucault, 1990; Plummer, 1996). As such, to understand how queer couples communicate, one must understand the sociopolitical contexts in which partnered dialogue occurs. Adopting interpretivist paradigms enables researchers to attend to these contextual factors and the knowledge produced contributes to the development of queer-centred theories of partnered communication.

Preliminary Qualitative Video-Recall Research with Partnered Gay Men

Despite qualitative video-recall procedures' potential as a queer-affirmative tool for relationship research, my graduate thesis is the first known study to use these procedures to explore queer couples' communication. I modified procedures from IPR and the APM to explore how partnered gay men navigate dominant sexual scripts to construct pleasurable and affirming sexual relationships (Gendron, 2018). In the following section, I will describe the study procedures, with an emphasis on considerations made to establish a queer-affirmative research environment. I will then briefly discuss key findings and how qualitative video-recall procedures brought depth to the extant understanding of partnered gay men's sexual communication.

Study Development

Due to the sensitive research topic and the highly personal nature of qualitative text, I worked to ensure participants' comfort and safety throughout the study development. To construct a safe and queer-affirmative environment, I enlisted a colleague to help conduct video-recall interviews. He and I identify as queer men and have considerable experience working with queer populations. Dr. Sharalyn Jordan also oversaw the research project and was consulted throughout the course of the study. Dr. Jordan is a queer scholar with extensive research and advocacy experience in queer communities. I believe the research team's personal and professional experiences were invaluable to establishing a respectful, affirming, and non-exploitative research environment.

After receiving institutional ethics approval, I posted recruitment materials in print, online, and through approved email listservs. I also partnered with local queer organizations that shared recruitment materials with their members and professional networks. It is worth noting that most couples that inquired about participation reported hearing about the study through these queer organizations and not through advertisements in venues that were not queer specific. Although the effectiveness of this recruiting strategy suggests that participants trust and value research that is partnered with recognizable and affirming queer organizations, it also restricts the diversity of queer experiences represented in the findings. Individuals who are connected to these

organizations likely share common features, including proximity to urban city centres and integration into local queer communities. Further efforts are required to recruit queer couples that are not connected to queer organizations to better understand the diversity of queer couples' experiences.

Potential participants responded to advertisements by email. I contacted these men by phone to tell them more about the study, to answer any questions they had, to screen for eligibility, and to collect their demographic information. Although most respondents chose to privately discuss the study with their partners, I offered to contact respondents' partners directly to discuss the study and to answer any questions that they had about participation. Eligible couples were comprised of self-identified queer men, were dating for at least one year, and were able and willing to have video-recorded conversations about their sexual relationship in English during a laboratory session. Couples were told that they would be reimbursed for their travel costs and that a \$20 donation would be made to a charity of their choice in lieu of direct compensation.

I used purposive sampling to select three couples diverse in age, relationship status, relationship length, and ethnicity. Selected participants were 20 to 46 years old and included one transgender man and five cisgender men. These men identified their partnerships as committed, ranging from two and a half years to seven years in length. The sample included one dating and monogamous couple, one engaged and non-monogamous couple, and one married couple that participated in threesomes together. The sample included ethnic diversity within and between couples, including three Caucasian men, two Indonesian men, and one Filipino man. Couples scheduled laboratory sessions at Simon Fraser University's Vancouver campus.

Laboratory Sessions

Couples were greeted upon arrival to their laboratory sessions and were introduced to the research assistant. Drinks and snacks were offered and time was taken to establish rapport with the research team. Before providing informed consent (Appendix A), couples were reminded that they would be asked to have two video-recorded conversations about their relationship, followed by separate video-recall interviews. Couples were reminded of their right to withdraw consent at any point during the study and were told that they could choose to have their video recordings destroyed

at any point in the research process. The research assistant and I identified ourselves as queer-affirmative researchers and as members of Vancouver's queer community. Sensitive to the historical mistreatment of queer communities throughout the history of psychology (Drescher, 2010), we named and addressed the stigma surrounding open conversations about gay male sexuality. We then offered space for participants to ask any questions that would make them feel more comfortable with us witnessing their stories. These efforts were made to establish a culture of trusting transparency and to destabilize power differentials inherent in participant-researcher dynamics.

We then provided couples with general instructions for their partnered conversations. We encouraged couples to follow the natural flow of conversation, but asked that they remain somewhat on topic for the duration of their conversations. We asked couples to inform us if their conversations naturally ended before the provided time limit or if they no longer felt comfortable to continue. We informed couples that their conversations would be video-recorded using two tablets that were disconnected from the Internet and explained that we would use these tablets to review their partnered conversations during video-recall interviews. We informed couples that these video-recall interviews would also be filmed using two additional tablets. Time was taken to address any questions couples had about these procedures.

Couples then engaged in five-minute self-directed conversations about how they met. These conversations were intended to get couples comfortable speaking in front of video cameras and to address any additional procedural questions that might arise through partners' engagement in conversation. Next, couples were asked to discuss something they would like to change or explore in their sexual relationship. Before engaging in these conversations, partners were separated and paired with either the research assistant or with me. In separate rooms, partners were asked to compile lists of topics that they would and would not feel comfortable discussing with their partner during their laboratory session. Once completed, I met privately with the research assistant to compare lists. All couples generated at least one topic that both partners identified as appropriate for conversation. We presented couples who had more than one overlapping approved topic with a list of their approved topics and partners collaboratively selected which topic they would discuss. This topic selection procedure was practiced to ensure that partners were not coerced into discussing topics with which they were not

comfortable. Couples then discussed their chosen topics during self-directed 15-minute conversations.

Following these conversations, partners were paired with either the research assistant or with me to separately review their video-recorded conversations. During these video-recall interviews, partners and researchers paused the video recordings at approximately one-minute intervals and partners were asked to reflect on their thoughts, feelings, or motivations at that moment in the conversation. Adapted from the APM (Young et al., 2005), this semi-structured approach to video-recall enabled participants and researchers to explore particularly salient aspects of couples' conversations (Welsh & Dickson, 2005). Given the variability of this open-ended approach, partners did not necessarily reflect on the same moments of conversation, nor were they necessarily asked to engage in the same reflective processes. Researchers guided partners' reflections using predetermined open-ended prompts informed by the APM (e.g., "How did it feel to hear your partner say that?") and with process observations (e.g., "Tell me about what was going on for you when you rolled your eyes"). Partners also initiated reflections themselves by elaborating on the conversation's content or on their experience at the time of conversation. Through this collaborative approach to video-recall, partners were empowered to take ownership of their stories and highlight moments that they deemed particularly important.

Video-recall interviews lasted approximately one hour. We then reunited both partners to jointly debrief their participation. We collected couples' contact information (Appendix B) to ensure that they could be reached throughout the data analysis process. Couples also reviewed and signed video release forms (Appendix C); couples could select to have their videos destroyed, to have them used only for the purposes of the study, or for other identified research and educational purposes (e.g., in post-secondary lectures, at academic conferences, or during relationship workshops). We left the room while couples reviewed this form to help minimize pressure to consent to release. We reimbursed partners for their travel costs and asked couples to identify a charity they wished to make a donation to in lieu of direct compensation. We also invited partners to provide pseudonyms to represent their participation in the study.

Data Analysis

Informed by Saldaña's (2013) eclectic coding method, I conducted three separate readings of couples' transcripts. During my first reading, I generated open-ended initial codes that succinctly captured the content of couples' sexual conversations and separate video-recall interviews (Saldaña, 2013). While generating these codes, I noticed that couples discussed their sexual relationships with reference to dominant discourses about sex and sexuality. This encouraged a second, discursive reading of couples' sexual conversations, informed by sexual script theory (Frith & Kitzinger, 2001; Simon & Gagnon, 1986). Through this second level of coding, I made note of dominant sexual scripts that couples referenced, either directly or indirectly, and concisely described how couples dialogically navigated these sexual scripts. For example, codes generated during this reading described how couples collaboratively innovated unique counter-scripts through their partnered communication. During my third and final reading, I coded couples' affective processes. I generated open-ended codes to capture couples' verbal and non-verbal affect during their sexual conversations (Saldaña, 2013). Using short phrases, I succinctly described notable affective qualities, including changes in partners' tone of voice, use of gestures, and conversational pacing.

I synthesized and organized these codes into superordinate categories and subcategories. Once organized, I consulted with my research supervisors to discuss and modify these tentative analyses. Approximately nine months after couples' laboratory sessions, I invited participants to provide feedback and to contribute to these analyses. After explaining the review process by phone, I individually emailed partners excerpts of my writing that referenced their participation. Participants were prompted to provide open-ended feedback about my interpretations. If participants believed that they would be identifiable to readers, they were prompted to offer changes that would further protect their anonymity. Participants were also prompted to report whether they were comfortable with the quotes that I selected. Finally, participants were prompted to note any potential factual errors in my writing (e.g., if I misreported their relationship status). Participants were invited to provide feedback and discuss analyses by phone, by email, or by Skype.

All participants opted to provide feedback via email. Participants expressed that the interpretations were reflective of their experiences during their laboratory sessions.

No participants expressed any concerns about my analyses, nor did any partners offer alternative interpretations. One participant offered additional demographic information that I added to my analyses. Partners from one couple noted that they did feel identifiable in my writing but emphasized that they did not want any information altered. Most partners expressed appreciation for the study and one partner noted that it was enjoyable to review his partnered conversation several months after his laboratory session.

Findings

The couples in this study all explored non-dominant sexual desires during their sexual conversations. Couples discussed experimenting with sexual non-monogamy, viewing pornography as a couple, having sex in public spaces, and practicing dominant/submissive sexual dynamics. Through partnered communication, these couples resisted, creatively modified, and negotiated dominant sexual scripts, in an effort to carve out affirming sexual space within systems of normativity and hetero/cissexism (Gendron, 2018). For two couples, partners' joint motivations to disrupt dominant sexual scripts provided a sense of unity and safety that encouraged partnered sexual exploration. These couples communicated with positive affect and reported feeling close to and understood by their partners. For another couple, partners' dissimilar motivations towards disrupting normativity encouraged partnered negotiation strategies aimed at finding compromise. Partners' distinct sexual values constructed barriers to partnered negotiation and power differentials informed by partners' age difference further impacted this couple's pursuit towards shared understanding. For all couples, positions to normativity appeared to meaningfully shape both the content and process of their dyadic communication (for elaboration of findings, see Gendron, 2018).

This study further illustrates the importance of attending to queer couples' contexts when studying partnered communication. Couples' sexual communication was not merely interpersonally constituted; rather, couples dialogically constructed sexual relationships with reference to dominant sexual scripts. Despite their influence on queer couples' communication, these dominant discourses are largely unacknowledged in post-positive approaches to communication research. In contrast to quantitative research measures that largely adopt decontextualized approaches to inquiry, qualitative video-recall procedures enabled the couples in my study to explore the influence of

power and normativity in depth. Couples referenced dominant sexual scripts during their sexual conversations and partners provided further elaboration on their experience with normativity during open-ended video-recall interviews. By synthesizing observational and open-ended interview data through qualitative analyses, the complexity of couples' meaning-making processes was retained. These qualitative video-recall procedures generated novel insights into queer couples' communication that were inaccessible through dominant approaches to relationship research.

Personal Experience Using Qualitative Video-Recall Procedures

As a novice qualitative researcher, I appreciated how qualitative video-recall procedures helped me attend to and honour diverse expressions of queerness in committed relationships. Through contextually situated analyses, these procedures enabled me to centre queer experiences that might have been silenced or erased through other approaches to inquiry. In the following section, I will share two personal reflections that highlight the value of using qualitative video-recall procedures when working with queer couples.

Observing Partners in Context

Qualitative video-recall procedures provide unique opportunities to observe partners in varying contexts. Through observing partnered conversations and separate video-recall interviews, I could readily explore how interpersonal contexts shape what partners discuss and how they discuss it. Some men in my study communicated certain relationship values when in conversation with their partner and slightly modified values when speaking with a member of the research team during video-recall (Gendron, 2018).

Consider the following two excerpts from Greg. During their sexual conversation, Greg discussed the potential of exploring extradyadic sex with his partner, Ryan. Throughout the conversation, Ryan was vocal in his support for exploring non-monogamy, whereas Greg adopted varying states of opposition.

Sometimes there is this occasional feeling where, yeah, sure let's try and work out a way and branch out and see if we can bring someone in and

join us, or try something new and include someone else in our sexual experiences. Uhh, but more so I'm leaning towards, like I am really comfortable and really content with if it were just to be us.

Greg, sexual conversation with partner

I want to tell him that...I don't really mind if that happens or not... Whereas it's him that is really encouraging this for us. Umm, I...kinda just wanna say that I don't really care if anything happens with anyone.

Greg, video-recall interview with researcher

Although Greg expressed some hesitation about exploring non-monogamy during his sexual conversation and during his video-recall interview, he expressed greater motivation for sexual exploration when in conversation with his partner. Greg, along with other men in this study, was motivated to attend to his identity as a partner and his identity as an individual. His partnered identity was motivated towards dyadic cohesion, whereas his individual identity was motivated to affirm personally held morals, values, and desires. When in conversation with his partner, Greg's self-presentation served the interests of his partnered identity; he tempered his individual preferences to appear more aligned with his partner's desires. Conversely, when engaged in video-recall, Greg was not monitoring his partner's perceptions and his self-presentation reflected individual motivations and desires. By observing how partners' self-presentations varied based on who they are in conversation with, I developed deeper understandings of these men as partners and as individuals. Observing these nuanced presentations also enriched my understanding of the dialogical process of sexual communication.

Using Video-Recall to Bracket Personal Assumptions

The collaborative and participatory nature of qualitative video-recall procedures helped me to honour participants' unique experiences as distinct from my own. Working from an interpretive approach, I acknowledge that I analyze qualitative text through my uniquely-informed discursive lens and that the knowledge produced is shaped by my own personal experiences (Holloway & Biley, 2011). However, as a queer man conducting research with queer men, I am particularly susceptible to imposing my own experience in a way that silences these men's unique perspectives (Dwyer & Buckle, 2009). As such, I must work to bracket my own assumptions and remain open to the

multiplicity of queer men's subjective experiences (Husserl, 1970). Qualitative video-recall procedures facilitated this reflective process by enabling me to explore partners' subjective experiences in depth during video-recall interviews.

Consider the following excerpt from a conversation between O and K, a married Indonesian gay couple. These men reflected on introducing threesomes into their sexual relationship during their sexual conversation. In the excerpt that follows, O attempted to normalize their partnered threesome exploration by drawing from the experiences of partnered gay men more broadly.

O: But again, since...I think it happens in most of gay men, I think, like...

K: I don't know. I haven't read any research about that, so I'm not going to jump to conclusion...

O: You have read a research...

K: I only read...I don't know if like, most of gay men doing this.

O and K, sexual conversation between partners

I initially read this section of conversation as K rejecting O's desire to understand their experience by situating it in dominant, homonormative understandings. I believed that he was disinterested in whether "most" gay men were engaging in threesomes, instead preferring that the couple attend to their own unique experience. However, after reviewing the couple's video-recall data, I came to appreciate how my own perspective distorted my understanding of K's protest.

We always have this argument. I am a person who always reads something first, see the facts, read the numbers, statistics. And I can say, 'okay, this is the majority of gay men is doing this'. So even though that there's an article saying that a lot of gay people doing threesome, I still don't believe that. I need to see the facts, what's the number. Meanwhile, for me, [O] tend to say a lot of gay men right away, without saying the numbers. Like, assuming something. Like, just by seeing only three gay couple doing threesome, and he will say all of the gay people doing it.

K, video-recall interview with researcher

K's frustration was not rooted in O's comparison to dominant gay experiences. Contrarily, what I had initially read as K mocking O's objective approach to understanding their subjective experience was K critiquing the credibility of O's "facts."

For K, adherence to “facts” was highly valued, perhaps even more so than for his partner.

Bracketing Cultural Assumptions

Video-recall also helped me bracket my cultural assumptions about affect and interpersonal communication dynamics. Socialized in a Canadian context, I initially experienced several of O and K’s communication dynamics and utterances as contemptuous. Their sexual conversation was characterized by crosstalk, exacerbated sighs, eye rolls, and forceful non-verbal gestures. They would often tell each other to “shut up” and were seemingly in constant battle over control of the conversation. Despite initially reading this emotional intensity as hostility, I also experienced their conversation as highly affectionate. They verbally expressed their love for one another and offered affectionate gestures, including a kiss. Given the couple’s tempestuous dynamic, I reconsidered partners’ behaviours as playful teasing, instead of malicious. I explored this hunch further during video-recall. In the following excerpt, I inquire about how K experienced his partner seemingly dismissing him in conversation.

- PI: O responded with, ‘yeah, whatever’. I’m wondering how that felt for you to get that response.
- K: Totally, sincerely, truthfully saying, nothing.
- PI: Nothing.
- K: It’s because like, me and O open all the boundaries and there’s no boundaries at all, so let it in, bring it on... we respect each other, reciprocally in the relationship... I know that if I’m opening myself to him, he will give me love. And if he opens himself to me, I will give him love too.
- PI: So you can say things like, ‘yeah, whatever’.
- K: Yeah, whatever, yeah.
- PI: Because that’s authentic and true.
- K: Exactly. And I can say to him, like, shut up.

K, video-recall interview with researcher

K discussed how behaviours that might be viewed as contemptuous in dominant Canadian societies are highly valued in this couple’s relationship. He explained how expressing genuine and unfiltered emotion, regardless of its valence, facilitates closeness and trust in their relationship. K connected his blunt communication dynamic to his Indigenous Sumatran heritage and to his immersion in French culture and explained that his partner’s impassioned affect has been shaped by his involvement in

queer advocacy in Indonesia. By exploring how partners experienced demonstrations of affect, I could more easily identify when my own learned assumptions unjustly coloured how I perceived couples' communication dynamics. This helped me to remain open to a variety of experiences, allowing me to more adequately showcase the rich diversity in queer relationships.

Closing Remarks

In this paper, I have outlined qualitative video-recall procedures that assist in the study of queer couples' communication. Grounded in interpretive epistemologies and ontologies, these innovative procedures enable researchers to explicate communication processes that have been largely neglected through heteronormative research approaches (Lincoln & Guba, 2000; Ponterotto, 2005). Whereas post-positivist approaches have commonly used heterosexual relationships as a lens through which to understand queer relationships, qualitative video-recall procedures centre queer voices as valued sources of knowledge. They honour and affirm unique experiences, attending to the complex sociopolitical contexts in which queer relationships are situated. These contextualized analyses generate novel, queer-centred knowledge that disrupts heteronormative understandings of queer relationships.

Despite their affirming potential, these qualitative video-recall procedures are underutilized in queer relationship research. Through my own research, I have come to not only appreciate these procedures for their theory-building potential, but also because they efficiently highlight qualitative researchers' implicit assumptions. These robust procedures enable researchers to add nuance to an incomplete understanding of queer relationships in the psychological literature. As such, researchers should consider using qualitative video-recall procedures as an affirmative approach to the study of queer couples' communication.

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Chapter 2. Navigating dominant sexual scripts: Observing partnered gay men's sexual communication

Abstract

Partnered gay men are exposed to contradictory social messages that celebrate and marginalize gay male sex. Little is known about how gay male couples navigate this paradoxical terrain through sexual communication. In this study, I aim to develop a contextualized understanding of how partnered gay men construct pleasurable sexual relationships by exploring the following broad research questions: (1) How do partnered gay men communicate about sex? and (2) How do partnered gay men use sexual communication to establish or to maintain pleasure and intimacy in their relationships? Three diverse gay male couples had video-recorded conversations about aspects of their sexual relationships that they wished to change or explore. Partners then individually watched and reflected on their partnered conversations during open-ended video-recall interviews. Using three levels of qualitative coding, I explored how these gay male couples resisted, creatively modified, and negotiated dominant sexual scripts to construct pleasurable and affirming sexual relationships. Using a variety of dyadic communication strategies, these men adopted and adapted dominant hetero/cisnormative scripts and emerging homonormative scripts in their partnered conversations. These findings contribute a contextualized, processual understanding of gay male couples' sexual communication to the literature.

Keywords: gay male relationships; sexual communication; sexual scripts; qualitative methods; video-recall

Introduction

Gay men are at a unique juncture in social history. Queer Americans marry under the laws of a nation whose top leaders oppose the protection of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) people from discrimination in the workplace. Similarly, Canada experienced a 24.8% increase in sexual orientation-motivated hate crimes between 2015 and 2016 (Statistics Canada, n.d.), while also reporting the highest number of same-sex marriages on record (Statistics Canada, 2017). LGBT affection is celebrated during pride festivities, but is met with disapproving glares on the same streets the next day. Gay men are faced with contradictory messages about how to interact as sexual beings, raising the question of how gay male couples navigate this paradoxical terrain. This study used qualitative video-recall procedures to explore how gay male couples co-construct pleasurable sexual relationships and collaboratively navigate dominant sexual scripts through sexual communication.

Heteronormative Research: Silencing Gay Communication

There is a paucity of research on same-sex couples' communication. Most of the limited available research assesses how same-sex couples' communication differs from heterosexual couples' communication. Some studies suggest that mixed and same-sex couples do not significantly differ in terms of content (Kurdek, 1994), quality (Roisman, Clausell, Holland, Fortuna, & Elieff, 2008), or process of communication (Baucom, McFarland, & Christensen, 2010), whereas others report that same-sex couples resolve conflict more effectively and value equality more than heterosexual couples (Gottman, Levenson, Swanson, et al., 2003; Kurdek, 2004).

Because the objective of these comparative studies is to quantitatively compare heterosexual and same-sex couples on predetermined communication qualities, potentially important qualitative differences are insufficiently captured. These studies use measures that have been developed for use with heterosexual couples (Julien et al., 2003; Kurdek, 2005), which do not attend to gay couples' formative social contexts. Same-sex partnerships are meaningfully shaped by sociopolitical factors, including same-sex marriage legislation (Riggle, Wickham, Rostosky, Rothblum, & Balsam, 2017; Rostosky, Riggle, Rothblum, & Balsam, 2016) and sexual orientation-based minority stress (Meyer, 2003; for review, see Rostosky & Riggle, 2017). Exposure to relationship

stigma from friends and the public is also associated with lower quality of sexual communication in same-sex relationships (Rosenthal & Starks, 2015). Because same-sex couples' communication skills are uniquely shaped by systems of normativity and oppression (Connolly & Sicola, 2005; Rostosky, Riggle, Dudley, & Wright, 2006), it is imperative that researchers acknowledge the sociopolitical contexts in which same-sex partnered communication is situated. Comparative studies' apolitical and transhistorical approaches to couples' communication research inadequately attends to these important contextual factors.

Partnered Gay Men's Sexual Communication: More Than HIV

Researchers have also explored partnered gay men's communication from sexual health and risk prevention frameworks. This literature narrowly observes sexual communication as a means to minimize the risk of HIV transmission and focuses almost exclusively on partnered gay men with non-monogamy agreements (e.g., Gomez et al., 2012). This available HIV-risk research suggests that partnered gay men who are committed to their relationships, communicative, and securely attached are more likely to engage in behaviours that mitigate HIV transmission (Gomez et al., 2012; Mitchell, 2014; Starks & Parsons, 2014). Conversely, couples who avoid communication and have difficulties discussing sex and HIV serostatus are more likely to break their sexual agreements and are more likely to have unprotected anal sex with an outside sex partner (Gomez et al., 2012; Prestage et al., 2006).

This focus on risk prevention restricts empirical understanding of the diverse topics and processes involved in partnered gay men's sexual communication. Select qualitative studies within this narrow body of research demonstrate that partnered gay men discuss sex for reasons beyond HIV prevention. For some gay male couples, communicating about monogamy structures facilitates partnered sexual pleasure, fosters trust, affirms relationship identities, and bolsters relationship satisfaction (Hoff & Beougher, 2010). For other partnered gay men, sexual communication encourages boundary setting and facilitates sexual exploration (LaSala, 2005). Further, qualitative research with gay male couples managing sexual dysfunction suggests that sexual communication fosters empathy, addresses feelings of isolation, and helps maintain a sense of connectedness in the absence of sex (Hartman et al., 2014).

Clearly, sexual communication serves gay men's relationships beyond HIV prevention. Talking about sex appears to not only benefit gay male couples' sex lives, but their relationships more generally. Although this qualitative work importantly expands beyond an HIV-risk approach to sexual communication, little is known about how partnered gay men communicate about sex. Further, the extant literature explores partnered gay men's sexual communication through either self-report data or through open-ended interviewing. Removed from the process of dyadic sexual communication, these retrospective reflections likely differ from men's in vivo experiences of partnered sexual communication. Although some studies have observed gay male couples' dyadic communication (e.g., Gottman, Levenson, Gross, et al., 2003), no known studies have observed partnered gay men's sexual communication. Contextualized observational research is needed to better understand how partnered gay men talk about sex.

Research Questions

This study aimed to produce a contextualized and processual view of partnered gay men's sexual communication and was guided by the following broad research questions: (1) How do partnered gay men communicate about sex? and (2) How do partnered gay men use sexual communication to establish and to maintain pleasure and intimacy in their relationships?

Method

Qualitative methods were chosen due to the exploratory nature of the research questions. These interpretive methods attend to important sociopolitical factors that shape how same-sex couples communicate (Rostosky, Riggle, Gray, & Hatton, 2007). It is imperative that preliminary research with same-sex couples attend to these social and political factors because, as queer theorists argue, queerness cannot be understood independent from the power-laden systems in which it is constructed (Foucault, 1990; Plummer, 1996). The collaborative nature of interpretive inquiry enables researchers and participants to co-construct knowledge that can challenge existing theories that have been established through heteronormative research practices (LaSala, 2007).

Couples

Three gay male couples responded to recruitment materials posted online, in print, and through partnerships with queer organizations. I used purposive sampling to select couples diverse in age, relationship status, relationship length, and ethnicity. Selected participants were 20 to 46 years old and included one transgender man and five cisgender men. All selected couples identified their partnerships as committed, ranging from two and a half years to seven years in length. The sample included one dating and monogamous couple, one engaged and non-monogamous couple, and one married couple that participated in threesomes together. The sample included ethnic diversity within and between couples, including three Caucasian men, two Indonesian men, and one Filipino man.

Procedures

I explored the research questions using modified procedures from the action-project method (Young, Valach, & Domene, 2005) and interpersonal process recall (Kagan, Krathwohl, & Miller, 1963; Rennie, 1992). Following a warm-up conversation about how they met, couples had 15-minute video-recorded conversations about something they would like to change or explore in their sexual relationships. Partners then watched their video-recorded conversations during separate video-recall interviews with either the research assistant or with me. Partners and researchers paused the videos at roughly one-minute intervals and partners were asked open-ended questions about their thoughts, feelings, and motivations during that particular in moment in the conversation. Couples were compensated for travel costs and a \$20 donation was made to charities of the couples' choosing (for more information about this study's procedures, see Gendron, 2018).

Analysis

I analyzed couples' transcripts three times, coding different features with each reading. During my first reading, I generated codes to capture the content of couples' sexual conversations and separate video-recall interviews (Saldaña, 2013). During this open coding process, it became apparent that couples frequently referenced dominant sexual discourses in their partnered talk. I explored this process further through a

second, discursive reading of couples' sexual conversations. Informed by sexual script theory (Frith & Kitzinger, 2001; Simon & Gagnon, 1986), I concisely described how couples navigated dominant sexual scripts in conversation. For example, coding at this level detailed how couples referenced and creatively modified dominant hetero/cisnormative sexual scripts to better serve their sexual relationships. I then conducted a third and final reading to code couples' affective processes. I generated codes to capture couples' verbal and non-verbal affect, including changes in partners' tone of voice, use of gestures, and conversational pacing (Saldaña, 2013). These multiple levels of codes were then synthesized and organized into superordinate categories and subcategories.

Research supervisors with experience conducting research with queer populations and with couples provided input to inform these tentative analyses. I then presented analyses to partners for review and contribution approximately nine months after their laboratory sessions. Partners noted that the analyses captured their experiences during their laboratory sessions and no partners provided alternative analyses. One partner provided additional information about how his approach to partnered communication has been informed by his cultural milieu and this information was added to the analyses. All partners approved the presented analyses and the selected quotes.

Meta Reflections

Beyond the purposes of the study, partners reported relationship-enhancing benefits of engaging in the research procedures. These men expressed appreciation for the opportunity to momentarily prioritize their partnered sex lives during their laboratory sessions and while reviewing their conversations nine months later. Some partners noted that talking about sex served their sexual relationships by breaking sexual monotony and encouraging sexual exploration. These men also reported that engaging in partnered sexual communication facilitated intimacy and instilled trust and safety in their relationships.

Partners indicated that reviewing their conversations during video-recall interviews provided unique opportunities to observe their communication processes in new ways. Upon reviewing their conversations, most partners expressed comforting

affirmation that they understand their partner and that they communicate effectively as a couple. These reflections elicited feelings of affection, trust, and love. For other partners, reviewing their conversations highlighted problematic communication dynamics. Some partners expressed that they observed being silenced and noted behaviours that signalled feelings of mistrust. These reflections motivated some men to establish more preferred communication dynamics with their partners; for other men, reflecting on these problematic communication dynamics did not appear to have clear actionable benefit.

Navigating Dominant Sexual Scripts

The couples in this study all encountered tensions associated with navigating dominant hetero/cisnormative sexual scripts and competing counter-scripts. Sexual script theory (Simon & Gagnon, 1986) posits that sexual behaviour is scripted on cultural, interpersonal, and intrapsychic levels. Constructed in systems of power and privilege, sexual scripts at the cultural level guide sexual actors to perform socially dominant sexual roles and practices. Dominant hetero/cisnormative sexual scripts endorse sexual monogamy in committed relationships, closely associate sex with love, and prioritize sex for procreation over pleasure or recreation (Mutchler, 2000; Sakaluk, Todd, Milhausen, Lachowsky, & URGiS, 2014). I use the term 'dominant sexual scripts' in this paper to refer to these sexual expectations.

Unlike heterosexual couples, partnered gay men cannot easily adopt these highly gendered sexual scripts. These men are tasked with navigating dominant sexual scripts to construct relevant interpersonal sexual scripts (Mutchler, 2000). Because their intrapsychic scripts commonly conflict with hetero/cisnormative cultural scripts, gay men often innovate unique counter-scripts (Adam, 2006). Organized in localized queer cultures, these counter-scripts include partnered negotiation of sexual pleasure (Kattari, 2015) and exploring consensual non-monogamy structures in committed relationships (Adam, 2006).

Partnered gay men navigate these dominant sexual scripts and competing counter-scripts in diverse ways. When applied to sexual script theory, queer theory details the fluidity with which individuals adopt, innovate, and use various sexual scripts to structure sexual behaviour (Mutchler, 2000). Sexual actors are not passive recipients of culturally constructed sexual scripts; rather, these individuals actively interact with

sexual scripts in ways that uniquely serve their sexual relationships. Because sexual goals and desires vary greatly between individuals and between couples, interactions with sexual scripts are diverse. The couples in this study resisted, creatively modified, and negotiated dominant sexual scripts in the pursuit of constructing pleasurable and affirming sexual relationships.

Resisting Dominant Sexual Scripts

In some instances, couples resisted dominant sexual scripts to resolve a perceived disjuncture between interpersonal sexual scripts and dominant scripts at the cultural level (Masters, Casey, Wells, & Morrison, 2013). For some men in this study, dominant sexual scripts were incompatible with personal and partnered sexual desires, encouraging joint resistance. These men acknowledged dominant scripts as limiting and collaboratively resisted aspects of these scripts that constrained their partnered pleasure.

Resisting Hetero/Cisnormative Prizing of Orgasm

Winchester, a transgender man, and his cisgender partner Russell collaboratively challenged hetero/cisnormative assumptions that orgasm is synonymous with pleasure. Dominant sexual scripts informed by hegemonic masculinity discourses uphold the male orgasm as the ultimate goal of sexual activity (Dune & Shuttleworth, 2009; Sakaluk et al., 2014; Simon & Gagnon, 1986). Reinforced by orgasm-centric depictions in pornography (Escoffier, 2007), this script suggests that sex in the absence of orgasm is not enjoyable or is otherwise incomplete (Sakaluk et al., 2014). Winchester and Russell subverted this dominant sexual script by sharing their unique experiences of orgasm and pleasure.

- R: I'm getting used to, and more comfortable with like, accepting-, accepting? I guess believing? Umm, that like you said, that it's as much of a turn on for you to be used and that you don't necessarily have to cum or have an orgasm. 'Cause my wiring is like, you're only satisfied if you have an orgasm. And so I'm sort of working on the reprogram of that.
- W: I mean like, I do like to orgasm. And there's also like, three different types of orgasm as well? And I'm perfectly happy with the sort of kind of orgasm that I get when I jerk off myself. And that's good. And then there's the one when you fist me, which is

- like, way up here. Which is good, but that wouldn't work every day.
- R: That's intense and you don't want to go through that every day.
- W: Yeah, not every day. But it's amazing, and you do very well at it so...
- R: Thank you.
- W: But as I say, and then there's this cool mental getting off, like when you use me and possibly different kink play we can try, which is very, very rewarding and I value a lot, possibly even more than just the orgasm I get when I jerk myself off, or when we have good sex.

Winchester and Russell, sexual conversation

Learning how Winchester experiences sexual pleasure as a transgender man helped Russell appreciate his learned assumptions about men's sexual arousal and allowed the couple to collaboratively challenge hetero/cisnormative scripts of orgasm and sexual pleasure.

We don't have to always have an orgasm or cum...and that doesn't mean we're not having a good time. And so, that's important for me to remember, because I'm wired that way. I'm wired like, you know, you're only getting off if you get off physically. So like, having sex but not necessarily having an orgasm can still be fun, can still be hot and enjoyable for both.

Russell, video-recall with researcher

Winchester and Russell's candid and specific discussion about their dissimilar experiences of sexual pleasure helped to draw out implicit norms that affect how they experience pleasure as a couple. Winchester's alternative perspective challenged Russell to consider dominant orgasm-centric sexual scripts as restrictive social constructions as opposed to universal 'truths.' This more nuanced and personal conversation of orgasm and pleasure better enabled partners to resist these restrictive sexual scripts.

Resisting Shame Surrounding Pornography

Winchester and Russell also used shared experiences to resist dominant sexual scripts that encourage romantic partners to hide their pornography consumption (Rasmussen, 2016). While exploring the possibility of viewing pornography together,

both partners expressed shame and embarrassment regarding the type of pornography they watch and the amount that they consume.

R: I don't know, I'm self-conscious with the kind of porn that I watch, and like, will you like it, or will I be judged.

W: Yeah, totally, me too, me too. Just like, will I be judged, and yeah, totally.

R: But I know we wouldn't. And it's funny because I always clear the browsing history, 'cause I'm like, self-conscious. Well, not so much about the type of porn I'm watching, it's just like, 'oh my God what if he sees how many sites that I've looked at', or whatever.

W: (laughs)

R: I know, I know it's silly. But now that I've said it, I probably will be less inclined to feel like I need to do it. And I think watching porn together will help too, because it's more that sort of internalized like, that sort of shame around porn.

W: Well like, I had a lot of those thoughts when we were looking at whatever site, that anime furry site thing? I was like, 'oh my God, he's gonna feel disgusted by what I'm looking at', or whatever.

Winchester and Russell, sexual conversation

Beyond embarrassment, both partners expressed fear that their partner would view their relationship to pornography as immoral and reject them as a result.

We have the same fears that the other person will be like, disgusted, that we'll be rejected, that I'm a bad person, or that they will think I'm a bad person. And that is the scariest thing I can think of, is for Russell to think I'm a bad person.

Winchester, video-recall with researcher

Partners' self-disclosures about pornography-related shame normalized an otherwise isolating and stigmatized experience. By bringing their private fears into a public space, partners acknowledged how their experiences of shame have been shaped by normative relationship expectations. Partners agreed to resist dominant sexual scripts that discourage partnered conversations about pornography, instead committing to sharing pornographic interests with one another. Partners' desire to have a more transparent, enjoyable, and intimate sex life motivated this resistance.

R: We can just kind of like, introduce each other to the stuff that turns us on and, you know, likely some of it won't, and maybe some that might be a surprise, but-

- W: And then the other person could be like, 'well you know, that's cool, I'm not into that, but that's totally wonderful that you enjoy that', sort of thing.
- R: Yeah, and I think it sort of like, would deepen our relationship and our intimacy...just to share that stuff with each other, you know?

Winchester and Russell, sexual conversation

Calling attention to the presence and influence of dominant sexual scripts served these men in their pursuits towards resistance. Dominant norms thrive, in part, because they are implicitly woven into the fabric of society (Johnson, 2006). The ubiquity of dominant pornography scripts, for example, fortifies their power by suggesting that pornography is inherently shameful, rather than acknowledging that shame has been socially ascribed to pornography consumption. By addressing the discourses that uphold dominant sexual scripts, Winchester and Russell better understood these norms and acknowledged their agency in resisting them. This couple's partnered resistance created novel possibilities for shared pleasure.

Modifying Dominant Sexual Scripts

In some instances, couples creatively modified dominant sexual scripts to accommodate their sexual desires. Some couples' sexual values and desires did not neatly align with dominant sexual expectations, nor were they in stark opposition. The ambiguity of these couples' positions to dominant sexual scripts favoured modification over resistance or assimilation. Through modification, couples retained aspects of these scripts that served their sexual relationships, while distancing from aspects that constrained them.

Modifying Monogamy and Masculinity Scripts

O and K discussed their difficulties reconciling competing sexual monogamy scripts during their partnered conversation. These men identified with masculinity scripts that encourage frequent sex with multiple partners and with dominant relationship scripts that suggest same-sex couples with non-monogamy agreements are weaker or less legitimate than those that are heterosexual or monogamous (Mutchler, 2000; Rostosky et al., 2007; Sakaluk et al., 2014). This couple demonstrates how partnered gay men

simultaneously face contrasting sexual scripts rooted in different axes of identity (Mutchler, 2000).

- O: I love you, I find [you] attractive.
K: I love you too, yeah.
O: But again, we are men, *men*. (O flexes his bicep)
K: Okay, that's inappropriate. Okay, then...
O: We like sex.
K: Right.
O: But we want other ways for sex.

O and K, sexual conversation

- O: We kept reading and hearing that gay couples that have...threesome or foursome or open relationship is not a real relationship. Remember?
K: Uh huh.
O: Like, we have that stigma within the gay community that gay couples should be monogamous to each other. And that if we try to go other way, an open relationship, whatever it's labeled, it's not a real relationship.

O and K, sexual conversation

O and K creatively accommodated these polarizing norms by exploring threesomes as a couple. Situated in queer cultures and uniquely constituted between partners, gay male couples engage in this sexual innovation to reconcile competing sexual scripts (Adam, 2006). For O and K, engaging in threesomes satisfied their desire for sexual exploration, while exploring as a couple also protected their partnership from perceived threats to their commitment. By modifying dominant monogamy scripts, O and K came to understand sex and love as separate, such that partnered sexual exploration did not affect the highly valued emotional domain of their relationship.

- O: Apparently we are strong. I mean, it's just sex. That's what I'm telling you, it's just sex. You cannot find love anywhere, but you can find sex everywhere, right? On the computer, with other people, or whatever, so love and feelings cannot change, but sex, we can always umm, what was the word? Umm, what was the word?
K: I don't know. What was the word? What are you trying to imply?
O: Sex is interchangeable, but love is constant. Love is that. You cannot change love. Right? But sex, you can change the value of sex.

O and K, sexual conversation

Non-monogamy agreements often contain negotiated structure to protect couples' romantic intimacy (Adam, 2006; Hoff & Beougher, 2010; LaSala, 2005). For O and K, this involved clearly articulated rules regarding their sexual relations with casual sex partners. This separation of love and sex was apparent in how O and K discussed their threesome experiences. These men invested their love and affection in one another and dehumanized extradyadic sex partners in conversation. This differential allocation of affection prevented casual sex partners from having the power to negatively affect the partnership.

- K: I even forgot who did we invite for first threesome. Because for me, wait-
- O: He was the third.
- K: Wait, because for me, threesome is only a threesome. So that's why I don't remember who did we invite for the threesome.
- O: I don't remember the names, I remember the face and the physique, that's it.
- K: Seriously, I even didn't remember what's the name. I didn't remember at all.

O and K, sexual conversation

In contrast to their initial fears that extradyadic sex would delegitimize their partnership, O and K found sexual exploration brought depth to their relationship. They discussed how exploring this new venture together elicited feelings of bonding and unity.

When you share something that is very joyful...you feel the togetherness. That's what I felt when I had the first threesome with O. It's just like, when you're having a family dinner and just sharing a food and we feel the togetherness, because we share that food. We share that turkey.

K, video-recall with researcher

Modifying Consent in Kink

Winchester and Russell discussed further exploring a dominant/submissive sexual kink in which Russell initiates sex when he desires, whereas Winchester is positioned as available for sex at Russell's choosing. Their partnered conversation highlighted how kink play can disrupt dominant sexual consent scripts, emphasizing the importance of communication to instill sexual safety while practicing kink (Kattari, 2015).

- R: I also like the idea that you're accessible, or you're ready to be used whenever. And you make that known to me.

W: How do I make that known to you?
R: You tell me.
W: Oh okay, yeah.
R: Yeah, you tell me often that that's what you like and that that makes you hot. And like, not that I didn't believe it, but I'm like, acting on that more? And I will act on that more. Because like, I guess there's part of me...that's like, I would never want to do something that, you know...that you weren't interested in or you weren't in the mood [for].

Winchester and Russell, sexual conversation

Although both partners expressed desire to explore this dominant/submissive kink further, Russell shared reservations. A significant appeal of the kink is that sexual initiation is seemingly not negotiated between partners, creating tension between dominant sexual consent scripts and sexual pleasure. By fully stepping into the dominant sexual role, Russell expressed concern that he would violate his responsibility to attain consent from his partner, potentially pressuring Winchester into engaging in unwanted sex.

I would never want to do something to hurt somebody, or that they weren't interested in, or that they weren't in the mood for. And I wouldn't want him to go through the motions just to please me.

Russell, video-recall with researcher

Winchester and Russell creatively modified dominant sexual consent scripts to ensure that their dominant/submissive sex was consensual and mutually pleasurable, without completely dismantling the power dynamic that makes the kink enjoyable. Instead of attaining verbal consent prior to sexual initiation, the couple agreed that consent is implied unless Winchester states otherwise. This restores a more balanced power dynamic in this kink; although when in play, Russell appears to have control over sexual initiation, both partners understand that Winchester is able and encouraged to revoke consent at his choosing.

Revoked Consent and Rejection

This modified consent script thus requires Winchester to interrupt and decline sexual advances at his choosing. Winchester and Russell explored complex personal processes that make declining sex challenging.

- R: Yeah, like I would like you to please be able to tell me, and vice versa
- W: Yeah, absolutely.
- R: You know, but that's not sort of the most comfortable thing, because to initiate something, or like, if one person's turned on and the other person isn't into it-
- W: Yeah, then that's sort of awkward.
- R: Then that's sort of like, I don't know, it's sort of I guess a fear of rejection thing or something.
- W: Yeah, or fear of the other person being upset that they've been rejected.
- R: Yeah, or 'why don't you want me', or, you know how we can get into our heads. I mean, well I can get into my head.
- W: Oh yeah, absolutely, me too.
- R: So permission to be like, 'yeah, you know like, not right now', or 'you know, wait a little while', or anything is absolutely okay. That's actually, that's fine with me. 'Cause I would rather, than going through the motions with something-
- W: And I really, really, really appreciated the couple times that I've sort of like, indicated to suck you off or whatever, and you've said like, 'not right now'. And I've super appreciated that and been very happy that you felt comfortable saying that. Because I wouldn't want to go through the motions, likewise. 'Cause I want both of us to enjoy it. And I didn't feel rejected.
- R: Good. Good, good, good. 'Cause I wouldn't want you to feel rejected and-, I don't think I'll feel rejected either, because I mean, I don't anticipate that it would happen that often because we're both pretty eager.

Winchester and Russell, sexual conversation

Upon reflecting on this conversation during video-recall, Winchester discussed how his shame-laden self-perceptions have historically led him to prioritize others' desires over his own sense of safety. He expressed great appreciation for how his current partnership's culture of self-disclosure has encouraged a personal shift to prioritize his own needs in relationships.

The place that I come from is one of very low self worth. And so the belief that if someone was interested in me, in any way, that I didn't have the right to reject them...because then they would leave, basically. They wouldn't be interested in me...because I wasn't inherently worthy, in that sense. So just the fact that we're able to sit here and talk about that feeling of rejection and reassure one another that like, that's okay? That's huge...to have this discussion and have it be true...it's not just me saying it, it's actually like, this feeling of safety...to say no. And that's okay. And to have Russell say no, and that's okay.

Winchester's process towards acknowledging his self-worth suggests that his current partnership provides a sense of security uncharacteristic of his prior relationships. Consistent with models of adult attachment (Mikulincer, Shaver, & Pereg, 2003), Winchester sacrificed his own needs in past relationships to maintain closeness and to avoid loss. Whereas these past self-sacrificing attachment strategies were motivated by fear of loss, Winchester exhibits less attachment anxiety in his current partnership. Through ongoing partnered negotiations, he and Russell jointly established a culture of relational trust that encourages partners to openly voice their sexual needs. This trusting dynamic has created a sense of safety that has empowered Winchester and Russell to practice their modified consent script with less fear of rejection or hurt. This couple's ability to construct and use this mutually enjoyable consent script created new and exciting opportunities for partnered sexual pleasure.

Negotiating Dominant Sexual Scripts

At times, partners were not aligned in their views towards dominant sexual scripts. These couples encountered interpersonal tensions, as one partner largely adopted dominant sexual scripts and the other resisted normativity. Same-sex couples reconcile differences through acceptance or partnered negotiation (Rostosky et al., 2007), and the men in this study engaged in similar processes, attempting to negotiate differences to bridge the divide between seemingly disparate sexual values.

Negotiating Consensual Non-Monogamy

Greg and Ryan discussed the potential of introducing extradyadic sex into their sexual relationship. These partners differentially endorsed dominant sexual monogamy scripts, resulting in attempted negotiations to reach a compromise that satisfied both partners.

- G: Sometimes there is occasional feeling where, yeah, sure let's try and like, work out a way and branch out and see if we can bring someone in and join us, or try something new and include someone else in our sexual experiences. Uhh, but more so I'm leaning towards, like I am really comfortable and really content with if it were just to be us.

R: I think for me, like, I would be comfortable and content if it was just as well, but for me, that's like saying I'm comfortable and content with living in just Vancouver and not exploring the rest of the world. Like, I don't want to go live anywhere else, but I would like to go travel and see and experience other places. Whereas I'm obviously very comfortable with you, and like, I'm satisfied with our relationship, sexually and otherwise, but I just think it would be fun...to go on a vacation.

Ryan and Greg, sexual conversation

Greg approached the conversation expressing a general disinterest in exploring extradyadic sex. His position is aligned with dominant sexual monogamy scripts that closely associate physical intimacy with emotional affection and commitment (Adam, 2006). This dominant script suggests that one's partner should satisfy these relationship needs.

I'm not really okay with him making out with someone else. I just feel like that's-, can be emotional and I'm a very emotional and passionate person, and that's just how I see and feel when I do things with him. And [I am] trying to understand how one can separate...passionate emotional feeling with just pleasure.

Greg, video-recall with researcher

Greg discussed how his preference for sexual and emotional monogamy has been shaped by the traditional values of his social milieu.

I grew up in a very strict Catholic family...the way I think is that a couple comes together and you're monogamous...It's what we see in society, like...traditionally people get married...not many people were as open before.

Greg, video-recall with researcher

By contrast, Greg's partner Ryan supported exploring extradyadic sex. He frequently referenced sex as a fun and playful activity that does not necessarily involve emotion.

For me, it is just an activity that you might do with somebody. And there definitely can be emotion attached to it, but doesn't *have* to be.

Ryan, video-recall with researcher

Ryan's endorsement of extradyadic sexual exploration resists dominant monogamy scripts and is consistent with sexual innovation commonly observed amongst partnered gay men (Adam, 2006; LaSala, 2005). Ryan explained how his views towards non-monogamy have been shaped by age, sexual experience, and integration in a gay male culture.

I think because I have more sexual experience...I'm more inclined to be like, hey, monogamy's sweet, but like, let's separate feelings and emotions with the physical act. And let's just have some fun.

Ryan, sexual conversation with Greg

I have a bank of really good friends...that I didn't meet until like, after my early twenties basically. After I was like, fully out and fully comfortable with myself, and was exploring around that a little bit more? Whereas Greg is still kind of getting to that?

Ryan, video-recall with researcher

Ryan and Greg engaged in numerous negotiation strategies to reconcile their contrasting views towards monogamy. They attempted to better understand their partner's perspective and modified how they presented in conversation, in an effort to become more aligned on this topic.

Negotiating Values through Perspective-Taking

Both partners expressed the importance of understanding and honouring one another's perspective when negotiating partnered sexual practices. By exploring their partner's position with open curiosity, these men became more informed and better equipped to find compromise in their discrepant opinions.

We've just straight up told each other we need to communicate properly in order to understand what each person wants. And once we figure out what each person wants we can try to find out some sort of medium to the both.

Greg, video-recall with researcher

Ryan described how cultural difference has created opportunities for partners to attend to one another's perspective.

We've spent a very significant amount of time trying to understand the other person's perspective...we both have very, very different backgrounds. Greg's from the Philippines, he moved here when he was six. And my family's like the eleventh generation Canadian, so...there has been a lot of requirements for us to sit down and try and understand the other person's side...because his family's background is very different than my family's background.

Ryan, video-recall with researcher

This demonstrates how within-couple difference can create barriers and bridges to partnered negotiations. Although Ryan and Greg's contrasting culturally-informed values regarding monogamy created barriers in the couple's sexual exploration, their differing cultural locations also helped foster communication skills that can help bridge the divide. Qualitative research with long-term lesbian couples suggests that respectful acknowledgement and understanding of culturally-informed difference facilitates respectful partnered communication (Connolly & Sicola, 2005). Ryan and Greg honoured one another's position towards monogamy, allowing the couple to engage in non-contemptuous dialogue.

Modifying Self-Presentation for Unity

Motivated towards cohesion, Ryan and Greg also presented more agreeable versions of themselves during their sexual conversation. Ryan emphasized that extradyadic sex would be meaningless fun, whereas Greg expressed potential interest in sexual exploration, should certain conditions be met. Speaking to one another's interests served to establish commonality in a conversation characterized by difference.

G: I personally would have some limitations and boundaries, if we were to join another couple, or if someone were to join us.

R: I know you have limitations and boundaries. Like, you wouldn't-

G: Like, I don't feel comfortable...with like, kissing other guys? Which you-

R: And that's not something I'm interested in at all. Like, those are reserved for you. But like, I don't know, 'cause [mutual friend] and his boyfriend have like...made it very clear that if we did ever want to do anything with them...it doesn't have to be...necessarily us all going crazy, it could just be getting off in the same room? It doesn't even have to [be] sexual, but like...does *that*...if we were the two couples in the same room?

G: Yeah, that would-

- R: Like, that's something you're totally comfortable with. But if-, yeah, I shouldn't put words in your mouth, but it's something you're comfortable with.
- G: No, definitely that is.

Ryan and Greg, sexual conversation

Although well-intentioned, Ryan and Greg questioned whether their partner's self-presentation during their conversation was constructed to serve the couple's interest at the expense of the individual.

He'd be like, 'yeah, sure' [referring to engaging in extradyadic sex while on vacation]. Assuming, to my understanding anyways, that it would just never happen. So it's very easy to say, 'yeah, I'll agree with you. I'll be very agreeable.'

Ryan, video-recall with researcher

I think that he's afraid if he were to say what he actually felt about the situation or wanted, that it might hurt me. But I don't know, he can say whatever he wants. Like, if you want something, you can share that. Just be honest.

Greg, video-recall with researcher

Aware of their partner's modified self-presentations, Ryan and Greg worked to discern whether their partner was withholding their personal desires during the couple's conversation. Through questions and compassionate confrontation, partners invited one another to share alternative presentations that prioritized personal desires over partnered cohesion. Despite potentially highlighting the divide between their views towards monogamy, Ryan and Greg expressed that honesty is paramount to successful negotiation.

Call a spade a spade, you know? Like, there are differences. That's kind of what it is, and we've both called each other out on those differences before... there was a lot of beating around the bush the first time we talked about it. Like, 'here's what I want to talk about, but here's what we're actually going to talk about.'

Ryan, video-recall with researcher

I can tell that he's modifying it in a way that I would like to hear, which is considerate of him. He doesn't want to hurt me, and I understand that. But I would like for him to just tell me what he wants, so we can figure out what's best for us.

And this couple is not alone; most men in this study highly valued transparency in their partnered communication. Despite this desire for candid dialogue, Ryan and Greg's conversation demonstrates how sharing personal desires becomes difficult when partners endorse competing sexual scripts. Although these men note that perceived secrecy creates barriers to effective partnered communication, they also acknowledge that sharing personal desires might compromise their partnered cohesion. This balance of individual and partnered interests created tensions in Ryan and Greg's conversation and elicited feelings of mistrust and disconnection.

The Role of Interpersonal Power in Navigating Dominant Sexual Scripts

Couples demonstrated and used interpersonal power while navigating dominant sexual scripts (Tannen, 1986, 1990). Sociolinguistic theories of gendered communication suggest that men are encouraged to attain power in interpersonal relationships and are socialized to achieve status through talk. Given that the couples in this study were comprised solely of men, these theories might predict that couples' conversations would prominently feature interpersonal struggles for power. Conversely, some relationship researchers have suggested that same-sex couples' communication benefits from gender-based equality (Gottman, Levenson, Swanson, et al., 2003). Couples' complex demonstrations of power outlined in the following sections indicate that intersectional approaches are needed to fully understand the role of power in partnered gay men's sexual communication.

Asserting Power through Conversation Dynamics

Some partners' affect and pacing served to assert dominance and to retain control while discussing sexual exploration. Through frequent interruption and crosstalk, some men attempted to silence their partners' voice while amplifying their own.

- O: Because we set some boundaries.
K: Yes, exactly-
O: We set some rules for-
K: I belong to you. Let me just finish.

O: (sigh)
 K: I belong to you. Okay, and after that- No, you keep on talking and keep on talking.
 O: (laughs)
 K: See this is actually that we need to like, work on.
 O: Go on!
 K: You need to give me a time to speak.
 O: I gave you!
 K: There you go! And now stop doing this, okay?
 O: I, I didn't talk...(laughs)

O and K, sexual conversation

When their partner did have the floor, these men's affect conveyed disinterest and minimized their partner's contributions. Through sighing, eye rolling, and mimicry, these men maintained a powerful presence while their partner was speaking.

Asserting Power through Self-Presentation

Partners further portrayed dominance by posturing in the relationship. One couple's age difference constructed power differentials during their partnered conversation. In the dialogue that follows, Greg, a 20-year old man, requests specific information about what to expect during potential threesomes with Ryan, his 29-year old partner. Poised as having more sexual experience, Ryan notes that it is not possible to know what will happen during spontaneous and non-linear sexual encounters.

G: It's just that when we start planning things, and then you don't say... Like, I want specifics. Like, I want to know-
 R: You can't have specifics.
 G: Okay, well it's-
 R: That's the hard thing.
 G: I know, but just like, having specifics would make me feel more comfortable.
 R: I know, I know, and I understand that.

Ryan and Greg, sexual conversation

Upon reviewing this section of dialogue, Greg noted feeling overpowered in the couple's conversation. Power-laden roles informed by age and sexual experience left Greg with a less assertive voice during the conversation. He expressed regret for not

further advocating for his desire to be as informed as possible before exploring threesomes.

I think with the age difference we have, sometimes he feels, I don't know if he feels like he can take control on certain things, but sometimes I think I let him have that power over me...I kind of like, backed away a little when I shouldn't have.

Greg, video-recall with researcher

Partners also positioned themselves as knowledgeable to convey dominance in their conversations. These men would correct one another about details of their relationship and would challenge one another's claims. Through confrontational questioning, some men undermined their partners' intelligence, positioning themselves as more knowledgeable and dominant.

- O: So, since we are on our seventh year, almost eighth.
K: Oh my God, okay.
O: Wow, this [is] like the longest...
K: Seven years living together, in which three years marriage.
O: Excuse me, six years.
K: No, seven.
O: We've been 11...we've been living together since 2011.

O and K, sexual conversation

We are both full of ego, we don't like to be corrected. We don't like to be incorrect about anything, so either one of us trying to correct each other.

O, video-recall with researcher

Power Sharing in Conversation

In addition to these power differentials, couples also demonstrated power sharing while jointly navigating sexual scripts. Some men elaborated on their partners' contributions through cooperative and overlapping dialogue. Through this collaborative talk, couples co-constructed partnered understandings of sexual excitement and pleasure.

- R: So certain kinds of outdoor sex, definitely, but-
W: Yeah, like if we go up to like, Lynn Valley or something, in a nice little isolated pathway.

- R: With a calculated-
W: Yeah.
R: With calculated risk.
W: Yeah, exactly. Like, pretend risk.
R: Yeah, pretend risk. Where it's just like, the likelihood of us being caught is-
W: Is miniscule.
R: So low.

Winchester and Russell, sexual conversation

Reluctant to overpower their partners' voices, some men also created space for their partners to share their own, occasionally dissenting perspectives.

- R: I don't mean that you and I go off on our own and find somebody else or go join another couple. Like, I would rather you and I bring somebody into the bedroom with us. Or a few people into the bedroom with us. I don't know, what are your thoughts on it?
G: Umm, to be honest, I think like right now, in the next little while, I think I would be pretty like, very satisfied if it would just to be us.

Ryan and Greg, sexual conversation

Need for Intersectional Understandings of Power

Couples' demonstrations of power-laden talk and intentional power sharing highlight the complexity of gay male couples' partnered communication. Whereas gendered theories of talk posit that men prioritize power and dominance in conversation (Tannen, 1990), some relationship researchers suggest that same-sex couples' communication benefits from the relative absence of gendered power dynamics (Gottman, Levenson, Swanson, et al., 2003). Neither of these dichotomous understandings of gender-based power fully capture the demonstrations of power asserting and power sharing observed in couples' conversations. In addition to gender, the men in this study discussed how their approach to communication has been shaped by other power-laden axes of identity, such as age, ethnicity, and queerness (Gendron, 2018). These couples demonstrate that power cannot be understood by attending to gender alone. Complex intersections of power and identity must be considered to understand gay male couples' communication dynamics more fully.

Discussion

Partnered gay men's sexual relationships are situated in complex and contradictory sociopolitical systems. The men in this study discussed their sexual relationships with reference to hetero/cisnormativity, acknowledging points of convergence and departure from dominant sexual scripts. Similar to same-sex couples in other studies (Dudley et al., 2005; Rostosky et al., 2006), partners in this study used other relationships as exemplars to better understand their own partnerships. In acknowledging others' experiences while storying their own, these men positioned themselves as connected to and distinct from dominant sexual values and norms.

Given the dominance of the hetero/cis hegemony, many gay male couples construct sexual relationships with reference to socially dominant sexual scripts (Mutchler, 2000). Gay men adopt these dominant scripts to varying extents, often innovating modified scripts that better serve their relationships (Adam, 2006; Mutchler, 2000). Past research that has explored gay men's interactions with hetero/cisnormative scripts has been conducted in contexts that excluded same-sex couples from dominant demonstrations of partnered commitment, including legal marriage (Adam, 2006; Mutchler, 2000; Reczek, Elliott, & Umberson, 2009). Given these studies' exclusionary sociopolitical contexts, it remained unclear whether partnered gay men viewed dominant scripts as inaccessible and innovated sexual scripts out of necessity, or whether these men capitalized on their exclusion from dominant relationship portrayals and willingly constructed sexual scripts that were unfettered by normative expectations.

Unlike participants in prior research on this topic, the men in this study could legally marry, adopt children, and construct relationships that more closely resemble those of the hetero/cis hegemony. This increased accessibility begs the question: Would partnered gay men abandon sexual innovation and adopt dominant scripts, or would they retain their freedom to uniquely construct relationships that challenge normative relationship expectations? For the couples in this study, the answer is complex. Despite their subscription and aspiration towards traditional unions of marriage, parenthood, and joint home ownership, these men's stories do not culminate at the white picket fence. A legally married couple interested in joint parenthood also actively explored threesomes. Another couple who was pursuing legal marriage practiced polyamory and kink play. Couples' continued sexual innovation suggests they perceive socially dominant

relationship scripts as desirable, but insufficient. Further, by simultaneously challenging dominant sexual scripts and adopting other dominant relationship scripts, these men demonstrate that partnered sexual scripts are distinct from the relationship scripts in which they are commonly embedded. Further research is needed to explore whether same-sex couples' historical exclusion from dominant demonstrations of commitment contributes to a culture that permits sexual innovation and exploration in committed relationships.

Facilitators and Constraints to Navigating Dominant Sexual Scripts

The couples in this study demonstrated factors that facilitated and constrained partnered navigation of dominant sexual scripts. Whereas couples who were unified in their rejection or modification of dominant scripts experienced empowered partnered navigation, those who were divided in their positions to normativity experienced an impasse in their joint pursuit towards navigating sexual scripts.

The Power of Unity

Challenging dominant sexual scripts is an onerous task; social systems confer privileges upon those who uphold normative expectations and marginalize those who defy (Johnson, 2006). These social costs discourage individuals from disturbing normativity, thereby strengthening dominant scripts. However, confronting these scripts is easier when one has an ally in their resistance. In his seminal study on conformity, Asch (1951) found participants were significantly less likely to conform to ill-informed group consensus if they had one ally who also resisted. Similarly, couples that were aligned in their rejection of dominant sexual scripts took concerted joint action, highlighting the power of unity in navigating socially dominant discourses.

Beyond action, this unity also elicited positive, relationship affirming feelings between partners who jointly challenged dominant sexual scripts. These men felt understood by their partners and expressed appreciation for their joint approach to navigating dominant discourses. These partners legitimized and honoured each other's sexual desires, instilling safety and comfort in their partnerships. Whereas these men might anticipate facing social opposition for their non-dominant sexual desires, their partners' acceptance and joint understanding elicited feelings of trust, warmth, and affection.

The Constraints of Division

Not all couples were aligned in their endorsement of sexual scripts. Ryan and Greg favoured contrasting monogamy scripts and remained unaligned in their stances towards exploring non-monogamy. This couple's conversation adds to existing research that explores the importance of perceived similarity in same-sex relationships. Some long-term same-sex couples report that their relationships have endured because partners share similar values (Riggle, Rothblum, Rostosky, Clark, & Balsam, 2016). Further, in a cross-sectional study with 274 lesbian and 187 gay male couples, perceived identity similarity was associated with relationship quality, regardless of whether partners viewed these identities as positive (Mohr & Fassinger, 2006). These studies suggest that same-sex couples value similarity and benefit from feeling aligned to one another. Ryan and Greg's attempts at negotiation illustrate how couples use partnered talk to reconcile perceived discrepancies between partners' sexual values and preferences.

The persistence of Ryan and Greg's dissimilar views towards monogamy also demonstrates how sexual scripts are entrenched in personal values and morals. Unlike the division of household labour or deciding what to have for dinner, challenging dominant sexual scripts often involves disrupting highly personal beliefs about relationships. As Ryan and Greg discussed, their views towards monogamy are situated in rich and distinct cultural contexts; peer groups and religious teachings have shaped and fortified these men's divergent views towards monogamy in committed relationships. The impasse that this couple experienced indicates how culture-laden sexual scripts evoke personal sensitivities that represent challenges to partnered negotiations.

Strengths and Limitations

This study provides a contextualized exploration of partnered gay men's sexual communication. This research adds to the extant literature, which is largely comprised of self-report and interview data. The innovative qualitative video-recall procedures used in this study generated in vivo understandings of partnered communication and provided rich insights into partners' subjective experiences during partnered dialogue. Partners' video-recall reflections contributed to interpretive analyses and participants provided further input through consultation with the primary investigator. These collaborative

procedures centred partnered gay men's voices, producing analyses reflective of participants' diverse experiences.

In addition to these strengths, important limitations should be considered. Although the selected sample represented diverse axes of identity, all couples resided either within or near a large, socially progressive urban city. As sexual scripts are uniquely constructed in specific sociopolitical contexts (Simon & Gagnon, 1986), it is unclear how these findings apply to gay male couples in rural or socially conservative environments. This study also only explored three couples' processes of navigating sexual scripts. Further research is required to uncover additional communication processes that were unexplored in the study's sample.

Concluding Remarks: Implications and Future Directions

Partnered gay men's sexual relationships are inextricable from systems of power and normativity. Gay male couples are tasked with constructing pleasurable sexual relationships in ambivalent and paradoxical sociopolitical contexts. Although systemic legislation has become increasingly inclusive of LGBT relationships (Riggle et al., 2017; Rostosky et al., 2016), same-sex couples continue to face marginalization (Rostosky & Riggle, 2017). Through resisting, modifying, and negotiating dominant sexual scripts, the men in this study navigated this complex sociopolitical terrain to carve out legitimate and relationship-affirming sexual space.

Helping professionals are encouraged to attend to how gay male couples are aligned to systems of normativity and to one another. Couples in this study endorsed dominant sexual scripts to varying extents; some integrated aspects of normativity into their relationships, whereas others problematized these dominant scripts. These varying states of alignment occurred not only between couples, but also within couples. When couples were aligned, they jointly modified and resisted dominant sexual scripts; when partners were differently positioned to normativity, couples experienced an impasse. By attending to both axes of alignment, helping professionals working with partnered gay men can develop situated understandings about how their clients navigate dominant scripts.

Further research is needed to more fully understand how gay male couples construct sexual relationships in complex and contradictory sociopolitical contexts. Although most of the men in this study suggest that gay male couples continue to challenge and modify dominant sexual scripts in the era of marriage equality, it is unclear whether this endures in younger cohorts (Adam, 2006). Perhaps as younger gay men are socialized into cultures that are increasingly accepting of same-sex relationships, they are less allured by sexual practices on the fringes of normativity. Continued culturally and historically situated research is needed to understand how partnered gay men shape, and are shaped by, shifting social and political contexts.

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Appendix A.

Informed Consent Form



Queer Men's Sexual Communication Study
Page 1 of 3

Informed Consent
A Qualitative Exploration of Partnered Queer Men's Sexual Communication
Simon Fraser University

This document will outline your involvement in this study. Please feel free to ask any questions that may come up for you while reviewing this document. Your participation is voluntary and you can choose to end your participation at any point during the study.

Study Team

Principal Investigator: Mathew Gendron, Faculty of Education, mgendron@sfu.ca
Faculty Supervisor: Dr. Sharalyn Jordan, PhD, Faculty of Education, sjordan@sfu.ca
Secondary Supervisor: Dr. Rebecca Cobb, PhD, Department of Psychology
Research Assistant: Marcus Sanzi, Faculty of Education

This study will contribute to the completion of a graduate thesis. Accordingly, the research will be made publicly available upon completion. Findings may be disseminated through academic channels (e.g. scholarly journals and conferences) and media outlets (e.g. news print and online media).

Purpose of the Study

This study aims to explore how queer male couples communicate about sex. You are being invited to take part in this research study to help our research team explore this topic.

Your Participation is Voluntary

You have the right to refuse to participate in this study. If you decide to participate, you may still choose to withdraw from the study at any time without any negative consequences.

What to Expect During the Study

Should you decide to participate in this study, you will be asked to:

- Have two video-recorded conversations about your relationship with your partner.
- View one of your video-recorded conversations with a member of the research team. The video will be paused and you will be asked questions about your thoughts, feelings, and intentions during the conversation. This interview will also be video-recorded.

Your participation should take approximately 3 to 4 hours. You will also be contacted in the coming months and asked follow-up questions regarding your participation today.

Potential Risks of Participation

This study asks you to talk about your partnered sexual relationship. This may involve some personal and sensitive topics that may cause feelings of discomfort. Remember that you can end your participation at any time during the study.

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Potential Benefits of Participation

You will not experience any direct benefits from your participation in this study. However, your involvement may help inform future research and clinical practices, which may benefit the broader queer community.

Donation and Travel Reimbursement

For participating in this study, a \$20 donation will be made to a charity of your choice. Please let us know which charity you would like your donation to be made to. We will also reimburse the travel and parking costs associated with attending your lab session.

Measures to Maintain Confidentiality

Ensuring that your privacy is protected is of the utmost concern to our research team. All of your personal information is kept confidential amongst the members of the research team. Identifiable information will only be released with your permission, or if required by law. Although every effort is taken to ensure that your information is kept confidential, the confidentiality of any telephone or email correspondence cannot be guaranteed.

Your names will not be associated with the data we collect today. Pseudonyms will be used to help conceal your identity. If you have any other identifiable personal information (e.g. occupation, ethnicity) that you would like to be excluded from published findings, please let us know.

All videos will be recorded using iPads that have been disconnected from the Internet. The video files will then be saved onto a password-protected USB and the original video files will be deleted. All documents created during the data analysis process will be stored on a password-protected USB. Your data will be kept separate from all documents containing your personal information. All information will be stored until analyses are completed, at which time they will be securely stored indefinitely by the study's Faculty Supervisor, Dr. Sharalyn Jordan. You will be asked whether you consent to have your videos used for other research or educational purposes following your video-recorded discussions and interviews.

Withdrawal

Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. You may withdraw from this study at any time and for any reason. You also have the right to refuse to answer any questions that you may be asked during your participation in the study. You may also request the destruction of any of the videos that are recorded today.

Study Results

The results of this study will be reported in a graduate thesis and may also be published in academic journals, through media outlets, and/or at academic conferences.

Who can you contact if you have questions about the study?

If you have any questions or concerns, please feel free to contact the study's Principal Investigator, Mathew Gendron, at mgendron@sfu.ca

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Who can you contact if you have complaints or concerns about the study?

If you have any concerns about your rights as a research participant and/or your experiences while participating in this study, you may contact Dr. Jeffrey Toward, Director, Office of Research Ethics jtoward@sfu.ca or 778-782-6593.

Future Contact

We would like to contact you in the following months for feedback on our initial analyses, and to ensure that you consent to what is reported in the research findings.

_____ "I consent to being contacted via telephone or email."

_____ "I do not consent to any further contact."

Taking part in this study is entirely up to you. You have the right to refuse to participate in this study. If you decide to take part, you may choose to pull out of the study at any time without giving a reason and without any negative impact.

- Your signature below indicates that you have received a copy of this consent form for your own records.
- Your signature indicates that you consent to participate in this study.
- You do not waive any of your legal rights by participating in this study.

Participant Signature _____ Date (yyyy/mm/dd) _____

Printed Name of the Participant signing above _____

Participant Signature _____ Date (yyyy/mm/dd) _____

Printed Name of the Participant signing above _____

Version 3, Prepared on: 6/2/2017

Appendix B.

Contact Information Form



A Qualitative Exploration of Partnered Queer Men's Sexual Communication Contact Information

We are strongly committed to ensuring that your data is kept confidential. This is one of the few forms that requests your name and other identifying information. Please use your current contact information, or notify us if you will have a change of address or phone number. We request this information so we can contact you for feedback on our initial analyses in the coming months. Please note that we are unable to guarantee the confidentiality of telephone or email correspondence.

Full Name: _____

Pronouns: _____ Sexual orientation: _____

Current Address: _____

Telephone Number: _____ *Is it okay to leave a message?* Y N

E-mail Address: _____ Preferred mode of contact: _____

Please list someone (other than your partner) who is likely to know how to get in contact with you, should all of your contact information change. By providing this information, you agree to allow us to contact this person to ask for your new contact information or to ask them to notify you that we are trying to get in touch with you. We will inform this person that you are part of a research study and we are trying to locate you for the purposes of the project.

Name	Relation to you	Telephone Number	Email address or phone number

Would you be willing to be contacted for any future relationship studies? Y N

Appendix C.

Video Release Form



A Qualitative Exploration of Partnered Queer Men’s Sexual Communication Consent to Release Video Recordings

The purpose of this form is to review the possible educational and scientific uses for the video recordings that are collected as part of the study and, if you so desire, to give the research team permission to use the video recordings for these purposes.

You have the option to restrict use of the recorded videos only to the research team conducting the study without any penalty whatsoever. You may also ask us to destroy the videos.

We would appreciate it if you could review the following list and indicate your preference for further educational and scientific use of the video recordings, if any. Though your names and identifying information will never be associated with the materials, please note that videos are, by nature, identifying. If you choose to consent to these additional uses, your faces, voices, and the content of discussions will not be distorted. Please also note that once videos are released to the public, it is not possible to retract or destroy them completely.

We give our permission for the video recordings to be used in the following ways **(PLEASE CHECK ALL THE APPROPRIATE BOXES)**:

“How We Met” Conversation	Sexual Conversation	Video-Recall Interviews	
			Excerpts of our recordings can be presented in lectures given to undergraduate students.
			Excerpts of our recordings can be presented in lectures given to graduate students.
			Excerpts of our recordings can be presented to scientists and professionals who are interested in couples’ research.
			Excerpts of our recordings can be presented in lectures and presentations given to the general public.
			Excerpts of our recordings can be presented in workshops given to groups of couples.
			Our recordings can be uploaded to SFU Radar, an online research depository, for future research analyses.
			None of the above. We want to restrict the use of our video recordings only to the research purposes of this study.
			None. We request that the indicated video recordings be destroyed.

Prepared on: 3/22/2017



Your signature below indicates that you consent to having your videos used for the educational and/or scientific purposes selected above.

Name (Print)

Name (Print)

Signature Date

Signature Date

Prepared on: 3/22/2017