

The Discourse of Same-Sex Marriage and Those Who Support It: A Corpus-based Investigation

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## **Abstract**

Same-sex marriage has become one of today's leading social issues in the United States, and has created a social movement that some claim is akin to the civil rights era of the 1960s and 1970s. Perhaps the largest single catalyst for this movement's development in recent times was California's Proposition 8, which in November 2008 repealed the right of same-sex couples to legally wed in California. Using on-line survey response data collected from Marriage Equality, USA from May 2008 to the present from same-sex couples and other supporters of same-sex marriage, a corpus of data was created to analyze patterns of discourse among supporters of same-sex marriage in hopes of informing future public policy decisions in California and beyond. Using a Critical Discourse Analysis paradigm and Corpus Linguistics techniques, this paper investigates three areas of interest within the discourse: Straight versus gay responses as they pertain to sexual identity and community membership; The meaning of marriage in terms of legal, social, and romantic concepts, comparing responses from wedded couples before Proposition 8's passing with responses from the general community after Prop 8; and the use and importance of relationship terms, especially 'husband/wife' as compared with 'partner'. Preliminary results and analysis show striking revelations in the data, and social justice implications as well as future research suggestions are included.

*Key Words: same-sex marriage, social justice, Critical Discourse Analysis, marriage equality, corpus linguistics, Proposition 8.*

## 1. Introduction

Same-sex marriage has become one of today's leading social issues in the United States, and has created a social movement that some claim is akin to the civil rights era of the 1960s and 1970s. Progress has been sporadic, though more frequent in recent years. America's first same-sex marriages were performed in San Francisco in February 2004, only to be annulled months later by the State Supreme Court. Later that year, Massachusetts became the first state in the nation to legalize same-sex marriages, and now 4 other states (Connecticut, Iowa, New Hampshire, Vermont) as well as Washington, D.C have followed suit. In addition, New York, Rhode Island and Maryland recognize same-sex marriage from other states, but do not perform them.<sup>1</sup>

The fight for same-sex marriage had its beginning long before the 1990's, but didn't gain momentum until the Clinton administration, when the Defense of Marriage Act (known as DOMA) was enacted in 1996. It narrowed the definition of marriage as that between one man and one woman, and the provision provides that "states need not recognize a marriage from another state if it is between persons of the same sex"<sup>2</sup> Because federal law does not recognize same-sex marriage, individual states are left alone to make decisions on this issue.

California's story of same-sex marriage has been the most complex and controversial yet. In 2000, the voters of California passed the California Defense of Marriage Act, known as Proposition 22, which prohibited the state from recognizing same-sex marriage. Prop 22 was passed by a 61-39 percent margin.<sup>3</sup> In protest to the law, San Francisco Mayor Gavin Newsom allowed same-sex marriage in February 2004, but the marriages were later annulled because they were in opposition to the law. In a brief victory for equal rights activists, the California Supreme Court deemed the law unconstitutional, and between June 16, 2008 and November 4, 2008, same-sex marriages were legally conducted throughout California. As a backlash, a voter initiative was placed on the November, 2008 ballot which would alter the state Constitution to read "Only marriage between a man and a woman is legal and recognized in California."<sup>4</sup> On

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1 Source: NCSL National Conference of State Legislatures: <http://www.ncsl.org/IssuesResearch/HumanServices/SameSexMarriage/tabid/16430/Default.aspx>

2 Source: DOMA Watch: <http://www.domawatch.org/index.php>.

3 Source: *California rejects gay marriage*. BBC News. March 8, 2000.

4 Source: California Secretary of State Website: [www.sos.ca.gov](http://www.sos.ca.gov).

the same day that victory was declared by Democratic Presidential candidate Barack Obama, the first African-American in U.S. history to become president, California's Proposition 8 passed by a 52- 48 percent vote<sup>5</sup>, which repealed the right of same-sex couples to legally wed in California, and "for the first time in state history, (a majority) had voted to eliminate a set of established rights for a minority of the population" (VanderStouwe 2009). This created a social and political setback to the entire queer community as well as the marriage equality movement, and left the estimated 18,000 same-sex couples who had gotten married temporarily uncertain of the legal status of their marriages. The Supreme Court ruled that those marriages legally performed between June 16 and November 4, 2008 would be recognized as marriages, creating a new class of citizens, and separating the queer community into two groups, those who receive marriage benefits under state but not federal law, and those who receive no marriage benefits at all. In late 2009, a lawsuit was filed in the 9<sup>th</sup> Circuit Court "to determine if California's same-sex marriage ban violates the Constitution"<sup>6</sup>, which went to trial in January and February of 2010. In June of this year, Judge Vaughn Walker will determine the constitutionality of California's marriage ban under the U.S. Constitution through his ruling of this lawsuit.<sup>7</sup>

A strong presence in the movement for same-sex marriage rights is Marriage Equality, USA. Marriage Equality, USA (MEUSA) is a non-profit grassroots organization working to legalize same-sex marriage in several states and at the federal level. Based in the San Francisco Bay Area, MEUSA has been actively involved in California's efforts to legalize same-sex marriage for many years, including working on the No on Prop 8 campaign, and the subsequent legal battles that continue today. One aspect of their operation includes getting feedback from members of the community by collecting stories, opinions, and responses to various questions pertaining to same-sex marriage and related issues through on-line survey campaigns. Taking these survey responses as a data source, with express permission from Marriage Equality USA to do so, we have compiled a corpus of many of these responses, and this corpus will continue to expand as new data is collected. Our motivation behind this corpus is to look at patterns of language use among respondents that are in favor of same-sex marriage both to inform the movement and its leaders, as well as to inform future public policy and campaign decisions.

The survey responses included in this corpus come from survey campaigns dating from

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5 Source: CNN Political Ticker. Exit Polls: Gay Marriage in CA. Nov. 5, 2008.

6 Source: New York Times. *Date Set for Proposition 8 Trial Final Arguments*. April 29, 2010.

7 Ibid.

May 2008 to the present. Included are two campaigns from before the passage of Proposition 8, with responses exclusively from couples that did marry in California between June and November of 2008, and one expansive campaign from after Proposition 8 gathering information from the community about the campaign, discrimination, ideas for future action, and more.

This paper aims to analyze patterns of language use by same-sex marriage supporters with a goal of informing future public policy decisions and campaigns in California and potentially beyond. We will use a Critical Discourse Analysis paradigm and Corpus Linguistics techniques to analyze this data. In doing so, we will investigate patterns of discourse related to concepts of marriage, the language of partnership, and the reference to sexual identity of respondents by analyzing frequencies, collocations and phraseologies.

## **2. Background**

The field of corpus linguistics focuses on the use rather than the structure of language (Biber, Conrad, and Rippen, 1998). A corpus is not only “a collection of texts”, but also a representation of elements of a language (p. 246). While designing a corpus, one must consider issues of size, content, balance and representativeness (Hunston, 2002). A corpus of data must be large enough to find patterns, contain relevant data for the purposes of the intended analysis, be balanced between the registers of language use that are determined to be relevant, and be representative enough of the larger community to apply patterns of use to a larger audience. To access a created corpus, concordancing software such as AntConc (which was used for this research) are commonly used to apply the tools that Corpus Linguistics provides. These tools, which were all utilized in this research, include the generation of frequency lists, searches for collocations and phraseologies, and the analysis of concordance lines. These fundamental tools of corpus linguistics are useful in many ways. Frequency lists show how often an individual word token appears in a corpus of data, highlighting common patterns in specific lexemes and concepts within the data. Collocations, or words that occur near other words, are useful for finding common phrases, or concepts that frequently appear near a specific word (or words) of interest. Concordance lines, or the contextual environment that a word or words is found in, is useful to find larger discourse patterns and common phraseologies – syntactic or semantic structures commonly found when looking at specific words. Each of these tools builds upon the

other, and creates a way to analyze larger quantities of texts and data.

As we gathered frequency data, find collocations, look at concordance lines, and notice phraseologies, we also applied a Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) framework to analyze and understand our findings. We chose to use Critical Discourse Analysis in order to frame our investigation in the political arena of social inequality, and provide a background for looking critically at the ways discourse is informing our policy and personal decision about the issue of same-sex marriage. CDA takes many tenants of critical theory and applies it to discourse analysis. It is a method of investigation which challenges researchers to place discourse into social, historical and political context (McGregor 2003). This is an important tenant of CDA, as researchers cannot remove themselves from their views and values, and thus there cannot exist a “value-free science” (van Dijk 1993). The foundational ideas of CDA are built on the assumption that “our words are never neutral” (Fiske 1994 as cited in McGregor 2003) and connect the use of language with the exercise of power.

A fundamental tenant that CDA uses to look at these power dynamics involve a “we” versus “them” dichotomy. According to van Dijk (1993), “The justification of inequality involves two complementary strategies, namely the positive representation of the own group, and the negative representation of the Others” (p. 263). As a minority group often considered the Others by mainstream representation, we hope to see how the queer and ally communities represent themselves within a queer-friendly setting. Indeed, one of our searches involves the pronouns of inclusion and distance to examine a ‘we’ vs. ‘them’ dichotomy, as a way to discover who is included in the pronouns, and who is excluded.

In order to contextually position our research, we reviewed other studies grounded in critical discourse analysis focusing on identity construction. One such study examined the stereotyping of Latinos in the Mission District in San Francisco using CDA. This study (Koch 2010) focused on the way in which media characterizes different areas of this neighborhood, and reinforces prejudices discursively of who is clean, safe, hip, and trendy. Koch observed the ways in which “racism is perpetuated through text and talk” (p. 26).

Similarly, we looked at Chris VanderStouwe’s (2009) study examining the role of media surrounding the passing of California’s Proposition 8, a voter-initiative which took away the right of same-sex couples to marry in that state. Using the mentioned tenants of CDA, he analyzed The San Francisco Chronicle’s coverage of the proposition before and after it passed. He argues that “the media's discursive control over the issue of same-sex marriage perpetuates

the current social norm of 'traditional marriage', thus creating a de-legitimization of same-sex marriage and its supporters” (p.1).

Another relevant research study examined media discourse surrounding Arizona’s Proposition 203. This proposition allowed voters to “restrict the educational services offered to the language minority community” by limiting bilingual education and encouraging “English for the children” (Johnson, 2005, p. 69-70). In his study, Eric Johnson sought to “illustrate how language is used as a tool for political ends” (2005, p. 69).

Lastly, we looked at a study which used lexical semantics and pragmatics to analyze media use of same-sex relationship terms. In her study, Rachelle Waksler examines the terms husband, wife and partner. She suggests that these terms are “undergoing change in stylistic meaning” and asserts that the terms husband and wife are “now used in LGBT-friendly identity” (Waksler, 2009, p. 12). This study in particular is relevant to our own research on same-sex relationship terms.

One way that we intend to use CDA is to investigate how identity is being constructed within the queer and allied communities by analyzing data from discussions of same-sex marriage in California both before and after the passing of Proposition 8 in November 2008. CDA is being used as a practical and theoretical tool for deconstructing the social rules of identity, and highlighting contrasting patterns of language use. Systems of social power have been linked historically to concepts of identity, and in order to de-center dominance and power, one must first have an awareness of their use out in the world. In this paper, we examine the language of those individuals not in power, i.e. the same-sex couples who wed as well as other members of the queer community, their supporters and allies. We will look at the different ways in which members in and out of the queer community position themselves within the movement of marriage equality and society as a whole. We are using CDA as a philosophical tool to encourage a more complex understanding of social construction, and corpus linguistic techniques as a practical one with which to examine such a large body of data.

### **3. Methodology and Corpus Design**

This corpus represents feelings, opinions, and reactions to the social issue of same-sex marriage, especially as it relates to California's Proposition 8, which repealed the right of same-sex couples to marry in California. There are also responses and reactions to same-sex marriage

as a federal issue, though this is a minority of responses. All data was collected via on-line surveys through the non-profit Marriage Equality USA from May 2008 to the present, and express permission has been given to use the collected survey responses as our data source for the building of this corpus.

Several thousand responses were collected by Marriage Equality USA as a result of these surveys, though not all responses were included. To be included in this corpus, responses needed to contain at least one complete clause (e.g. bullet lists and single word/phrase responses were omitted), and needed to be from a supporter of same-sex marriage, as the corpus is crucially designed to reflect the views of same-sex couples and their supporters. The three campaigns making up this corpus so far each feature some important differences in target-respondent and campaign goal. The first two, “Wedding Bios” and “Couples Across CA”, are nearly identical in that the questions were asked only to couples who had already or were planning to legally wed in California directly after the Supreme Court's 2008 decision to allow same-sex marriages. Each of the questions was positive-leading, with questions such as “Why does marriage matter to you?” and “Please share a special story from your wedding day”. The third included campaign, however, was a very expansive one conducted shortly after the passage of Proposition 8, and features responses from several thousand participants across California, the country, and around the world. Featuring nearly two-dozen open ended survey questions, four are currently included in our corpus. Each of these questions was negative-leading, and focused on harm, discrimination, or what local or federal repercussions Proposition 8 and similar amendments had/could have on respondents. These distinctions will become salient as we look at several of our research questions in Section 4.

The corpus, for the purposes of this analysis, consists of 2,494 responses totalling 172,230 words and 8,588 word types. Using a CDA paradigm and corpus linguistics techniques the data will be looked at for frequencies of words/phrases used, collocates of important concepts, such as marriage, and analyzed based on concordance line results of relevant words.

To do these analyses, we used AntConc, a free concordancing program that provided us with our frequency lists, concordance lines, and collocate results. For each of our three research questions, all of these methods were utilized to provide as complete as possible a picture of preliminary patterns found within the data by highlighting patterns of frequency as well as common collocates and phraseologies.

Using the created corpus, and employing the mentioned CDA paradigm and Corpus

Linguistics techniques, we have conducted a preliminary investigation of three topics of interest in the data:

1. Sexual and Community Identity in Straight and LGBT respondents;
2. The Importance of Marriage as it relates to legal, social, and romantic concepts; and
3. The use of relationship terms, especially partner, spouse, and husband/wife.

Each of these were investigated separately using AntConc, and each feature a comparison of responses. In question 1, we compared the responses from straight-identifying participants with those of LGBT-identifying participants in the data responses collected after the passing of Proposition 8. In questions 2 and 3, we separated responses based on which MEUSA campaign they were collected from, to highlight important differences and patterns between same-sex couples who were married during the summer of 2008 before Proposition 8's passage with the general responses from the larger community of same-sex marriage proponents that were collected after the November 2008 election. Our reasons for these distinctions come from the nature of the questions being investigated, as well as the differing aims of each individual campaign. Each of these will be discussed in turn below, with results and discussion of the patterns and their importance both for linguistic patterns and future public policy decisions.

#### **4. Data Analysis**

This section will illustrate the searches we performed, along with results and analysis, and will be broken up by section based on the three investigations mentioned above: Sexual and Community Identity, The Importance of Marriage, and Relationship Terms.

##### **4.1. Sexual and Community Identity**

The first of our three investigations involves a look at frequency and concordance lines of straight and LGBT responses for patterns of identity relating to sexuality and membership in the marriage equality community. The desire to investigate this topic came from noticing patterns of responses by many straight-identifying participants, where it appeared that many were qualifying their responses with a mention of their sexual identity, or their connection to

the marriage equality community.

Looking only at data collected after the passage of Proposition 8, we separated all responses by their given demographic information on sexual identity (their survey options were Heterosexual or LGBT), as seen below in Table 1.

Table 1. Details of each data subset.

Demographic Category	Number of Responses	% of Total Responses	Total Words
Heterosexual	468	20.8%	24150
LGBT	1777	79.2%	98323
Total	2245	100.0%	122473

We then conducted searches on each body of data separately. Although we did begin with a raw frequency count of all words contained in each data set, we quickly decided the easiest way to discover patterns of identity between these two groups was through a “we” vs. “them” investigation, especially given the CDA assumption that a crucial distinction of dominating/dominated groups often features this dichotomy. As a result, we took the plural first and third person pronouns “we” and “they”, as well as the highly frequent first person singular “I”. The use of all three pronouns was intentionally chosen, as an investigation of identity within a group can reveal differences in identity formation and salience individually versus collectively (VanderStouwe 2010).

To look at these pronouns, we created a list of all concordance lines featuring these three pronouns in both data sets, and then narrowed each down to only include concordance lines of these pronouns in a copular verb construction with main verb 'be' in both the present and past tenses. A look at these lines, however, showed many differences between present and past tense, namely that past tense examples were used almost exclusively to relay specific past events, with few mentions of any identity or community features. Thus, we narrowed one step further, and only included present tense copular examples in both full and contracted form.

This left us with a search of concordance lines with the features listed below<sup>8</sup>:

Table 2. Straight/Gay concordance line searches.

	Heterosexual	(468 responses)	LGBT	(1777 responses)
Copular	Frequency	%/Responses	Frequency	%/Responses
I am/ I'm	141	30.1%	496	27.9%
We are/ We're	27	5.8%	252	14.2%
They are/ They're	40	8.5%	52	2.9%

We took these concordance lines, and looked at each pronoun individually in comparison between the two data sets, finding striking patterns in each of the sets. First of all, there is a noticeable we vs they scenario in the frequencies themselves, with a frequency nearly three times greater of the LGBT responses using “we are” over the Heterosexual responses. Further, the use of “they are” is similarly almost three times as frequent in Heterosexual responses as compared to those who identify as LGBT.

A closer look reveals other patterns, as well. Among responses of the first person singular “I”, perhaps the most striking difference between the Heterosexual vs the LGBT responses is the frequency of overt mentions of one's sexuality<sup>9</sup>, as seen in Table 3 below:

Table 3. Mentions of Sexuality in 1sg copulars.

Category	Mentions of Sexuality	Total # 1sg. copulars	% of Copulars	# of Responses	% of Responses
Heterosexual	64	141	45.4%	468	13.7%
LGBT	53	496	10.7%	1777	3.0%

8 These totals include examples of sentences where the subject and copular are not adjacent, for example in the construction “I also am...”, though they did comprise a very small subset of the total.

9 Overt mentions of one's sexuality were chosen based on an explicit mention of being straight, gay, lesbian, bisexual, or explicit mention of not being part of one of these categories. See Table 4 for representative examples.

Heterosexual respondents were highly more likely to make explicit mention of their sexuality or their relation to someone in the gay community in their responses. In fact, while nearly half of the responses include an overt mention of the respondent's sexuality, many others make indirect references either to their sexuality, or to give their connection to the LGBT and pro-same-sex-marriage communities. Table 4 below lists a few examples of concordance lines of both overt mentions of sexuality and qualifying statements used to connect the respondent to the community they are claiming to belong to through participation in the marriage equality surveys.

Table 4. Concordance Line Examples

4a. Overt Mentions of Sexuality

1. I am a straight male.
2. I am a straight ally.
3. While I am not gay myself, my favorite aunt is.
4. I'm a heterosexual married 35 yo female.
5. I'm not gay but I have a lot of gay friends.

4b. Access to Community

1. My gay cousin is deeply hurt, and I am furious.
2. LGBTI brothers and sisters are vulnerable to it.
3. I'm straight, but I uphold equal rights for everyone.
4. Having friends and family who are gay, I am very aware of the unfairness...
5. I work at a LGBT Pride Center at a University.

This is in stark contrast to LGBT responses, which highlight other aspects of their identity as relevant. More important to the LGBT community were mentions of one's relationship status, profession, or ethnic/regional/national identity. Table 5 below shows common collocate pattern groups and their frequencies in the 1sg copular responses.

Table 5. Collocate/Phraseological Patterns in LGBT Responses:

Category	Frequency	/Total	% of 1sg Cop	Example Phraseology
Sexual Identity	53	496	10.7%	I am a very out and proud gay man.
Relationship Term	153	496	30.8%	I am married to my wife.
Geographical Term <sup>10</sup>	32	496	6.5%	I am a Chinese immigrant who's now a US citizen.
Profession	27	496	5.4%	I am a closeted firefighter.
Social/Political Term	57	496	11.5%	I can't believe I am denied my rights.
Emotional Term	93	496	18.8%	I am outraged that Prop 8 passed.

Table 5 illustrates that for the LGBT respondents, their identity as part of the community is commonly a given, as it is only the fourth most common collocate category given in these constructions. Instead of mentioning sexuality, many are instead using this construction to highlight other salient aspects of their personal identity, such as marriage status, or to give a personal evaluation of the situation, such as an expression of anger, hurt or outrage. Conversely, the Heterosexual respondents, here seen as the “they” group in a gay/straight setting centered around same-sex marriage, appear to feel the need to confirm their sexuality or justify their presence and belonging in the community.

Looking at “we” and “they”, we found similar patterns of belonging based on their usage in the same copular constructions, though this time largely in terms of their referents (i.e. who these pronouns are referring to). Interestingly, there appears to be a lack of the traditional “we” versus “them” dichotomy as would be expected between two different groups, but in a lop-sided way. For example, “they” in Heterosexual responses was most commonly in reference to the gay community, as would be expected. However, “we” was almost always used as an inclusive we, containing the respondent as well as the gay community. Conversely, the LGBT responses highlighted the preferred use of a dual “we”, being the respondent and one other person, typically a partner or spouse. Relatively few uses of the inclusive we were

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<sup>10</sup> “Geographical” here refers both to physical and cultural identities, such as “I am in California”, “I am American”, “I am a Chinese Immigrant”, etc.

found in the LGBT responses, as seen below in Table 6.

Table 6. Inclusive vs Dual “we”

	Inclusive “we”	% of Total	Dual “we”	% of Total	Other	% of Total
Heterosexual (27 tokens)	17	63.0%	4	14.8%	6	22.2%
LGBT (252 tokens)	48	19.0%	193	76.6%	11	4.4%

Not only is there a striking difference between the percentage of inclusive versus dual we in these responses, but the times that Inclusive “we” is found in LGBT responses, it is often found in phraseologies with negative semantic prosody, or in ideological challenges to reality, as seen in the below examples:

Table 7. Phraseologies of LGBT Inclusive “we”

1. We are all devastated in our community. (Negative semantic prosody)
2. We are still feared. (Negative semantic prosody)
3. It's about living in a country where we are all equal. (Ideological challenge to reality)
4. We are suppose to be one of the most modern civilizations (Ideological challenge)
5. Who we are is not “gross” and “unnormal” (sic) (both)

In addition, while Heterosexual responses including “they are” followed the expected “We” vs “Them” dichotomy, LGBT responses did not, with the majority of “they are” still being in reference to members of the gay community. This can be seen below in Table 8, which gives frequencies of the referents of “they” in these responses.

Table 8. LGBT vs Heterosexual “they”

	LGBT Referent	% of Total	Heterosexual Referent	% of Total	Other	% of Total
Heterosexual (40 tokens)	31	77.5%	1 (“straight ally”)	2.5%	8	20.0%
LGBT (52 tokens)	30	57.7%	13	25.0%	9	17.3%

This was interesting, as while heterosexual responses did feature a clear exclusive “they”, perhaps due to the fact that they were less directly affected by Prop 8's legislation, the LGBT respondents did not make as clear of a we vs them distinction, even among questions that feature leads such as “During this campaign period, did you personally experience any homophobia, hate speech, threats, or violence?<sup>11</sup>” One explanation could have been our search and analysis only for present tense copular constructions in a survey that asked for things that occurred in the past, though this problem did not present itself in the first person pronoun examples previously discussed. In addition, this still would not account for why members of the LGBT community are referring to other members of their community as “they”. Section 5 will discuss outcomes of each of these three research questions as a whole, and give suggestions for future research directions.

#### 4.2. The Importance of Marriage

Our second investigation looked at patterns of what marriage means to respondents, especially as it relates to legal, social, and romantic concepts. Looking at responses to survey questions from married couples before the passing of Prop 8, as well as responses from the queer community soon after Prop 8 passed, we analyzed the way that the idea of marriage is expressed. According to Badgett (2009), “Marriage is a complex, multilayered institution that is deeply imbedded in legal, psychological, social and economic layers of life.” (p. 117). Couples consider marriage for a variety of reasons, which may be romantic and/or practical. Some choose to marry because it seems like the next logical step in their commitment to one-

<sup>11</sup> Source: MEUSA Prop 8 survey; December 2008.

another, while others choose to marry to gain social acceptance or to receive legal rights and benefits (Badgett 2009). We will investigate which reasons “play (a more) important role” in the discussion of marriage and the decision to marry within the queer community (Badgett 2009, p. 43).

To research this question, we separated our searches into two sub-groups: the responses from the first two campaigns, featuring responses only from married couples before Prop 8, which featured positive-leading questions in the surveys; and compared these with the responses from the third, post-Prop 8 campaign, featuring responses from the general same-sex marriage community and featuring negative-leading questions. This was important to distinguish, as the latter group featured fewer highly frequent terms that could be considered for the romantic category, while the former group of married same-sex couples featured more highly frequent romantic and familial terms, and fewer legal/social terms. This can be seen in the initial frequency search in Table 9 below, highlighting some of the differences between the two subsets of respondents.

Table 9. Frequencies of Legal, Social, and Romantic Words

Married Couples (249 texts; 49937 word tokens)			Prop 8 Campaign (2245 texts; 122473 tokens)		
Legal	Social	Romantic	Legal	Social	Romantic
license 82	wedding 175	love 191	rights 480	benefits* 225	love 211
state 66	ceremony 130	couple 176	right 291	community 161	couples 158
legal 64	community 57	together 140	benefits* 225	equal 129	together 153
rights 60		couples 123	state 214	social 109	relationship 151
right 59		relationship 85	legal 197		couple 114
clerk 50			federal 156		
court 49			election 129		
civil 46			taxes 110		
legally 45			legally 106		

Looking at these frequencies, we can see that although there are nine times the

responses from the Prop 8 campaign, and 2.5 times the word tokens, that words in the romantic category are roughly equal in frequency with those in the subset of data from the married couples, suggesting a lack of discussion of these concepts. Further, the married couples frequency list shows a lack of socially oriented words, and a focused set of legal words that refer largely to the legal process of getting a marriage (court, license, etc.), as opposed to the Prop 8 campaign data, which includes other words (federal, taxes), that highlight legal aspects of being married (rights at a federal level, different tax brackets, etc.), and not just to the marriage itself.

After looking at the above frequency list, we chose three words (one from each semantic category) that were both highly frequent and general in scope. The three words chosen were “love” from the romantic category, and “right(s)” and “benefit(s)” from the legal/social categories, as they were the highest frequency words in each category in the Prop 8 data. Once each of these words was searched, and concordance lines were taken from the data, we removed all examples of these words that did not fit with the semantic meaning most relevant and most prevalent in the data. That is, the word “right” is multiply ambiguous in English, and all references such as “right now”, “right away”, “in the right”, “the religious right”, “right to my ear”, etc. were omitted, as they did not refer to a legal or social “right”. This was done with benefit as well, though it was only minimally needed for examples such as “attending a benefit”. Our data for “love” underwent a similar process, removing any non-human referents, such as “I love California”, or “I love to travel”. The resulting frequencies are below in Table 10.

Table 10. Marriage word frequencies.

Category (# responses)	Right(s)	% Total	Benefit(s)	% Total	Love	% Total
Married Couples (249 texts)	98	39.4%	27	10.8%	182	73.1%
Post-Prop 8 (2245 texts)	682	30.4%	244	10.9%	191	8.5%

The frequency count highlights the important distinction specifically among the discussion of love. While the frequency of “rights” and “benefits” do not vary significantly in their prevalence between the two subsets of data, “love” appears almost equally as frequent between the two sets despite there being nine times as many responses in the post-Prop 8 data.

This exponential difference between these two subsets of the same-sex marriage community highlights a clear lack of focus on the romantic aspects of same-sex marriages among the community in general as compared to the subset of the community who is already married.

In addition, phraseologies and uses of these terms differ between the two data sets. Table 11 below shows common phraseologies from both subsets of data for the word “love” with their frequencies and a representative concordance line example.

Table 11. Phraseologies of “love”

11a. Married Couples (249 texts; 182 tokens for “love”)

	Phraseology	Freq.	% of tokens	% of texts	Example Concordance Line
1	our ___	31	17.0%	12.5%	It is a way for us to express <i>our love</i> and dedication.
2	in ___	24	13.2%	9.6%	...we were both glowing and completely <i>in love</i> with each other.
	(fall) in ___ <sup>12</sup>	11	6.0%	4.4%	...we had <i>fallen in love</i> with each other.
3	to ___	13	7.1%	5.2%	Yes I was born <i>to love</i> you.
4	N + of ___	13	7.1%	5.2%	Marriage is not only a title, it's a binding <i>of love</i> .
5	I ___	11	6.0%	4.4%	
	I ___ (pro.)	8	4.4%	3.2%	I want to marry her because <i>I love her</i> .
	(person) I ___	3	1.6%	1.2%	I want to share a life with <i>the person I love</i> .

12 When there is a frequent phraseological pattern within one of the most common phraseologies, it is listed in an indented line. The frequency and % given for these are subtotals from within the entire phraseology. Thus, (fall) in love's frequency of 8 is included within the total of 11 for the frequency of the phrase in love.

11b. Post-Prop 8 Responses (2245 texts; 191 tokens for “love”)

	Phraseology	Freq.	% of tokens	% of texts	Example of Concordance Line
1	I ___	28	14.7%	1.1%	
	(person) I __	22	11.5%	1.0%	and now I cannot marry <i>the person I love</i> .
	I ___ (pro.)	5	2.6%	< 1%	...to have the same rights simply because <i>I love someone</i> of the same sex.
2	in ___	19	9.9%	< 1%	We are madly <i>in love</i>
	(fall) in ___	12	6.3%	< 1%	...but if I had <i>fallen in love</i> with a woman, ...
3	they ___	13	6.8%	< 1%	...why hurt people because of who <i>they love</i> .
4	(*) and __	12	6.3%	< 1%	Let my family <i>live and love</i> .
5	our ___	12	6.3%	< 1%	We know <i>our love</i> and commitment aren't affected.
6	to ___	12	6.3%	< 1%	loving who I am made <i>to love</i> is not a sin.

The phraseological differences show that the married couples use more active constructions, and feature more usages of “love” as a verb than the responses that come after the passage of Proposition 8, which tend to have love appearing in passive constructions, or accompanied by another concept, removing some of its importance by placing it at the end of a conjoined phrase.

A look at the concordance lines of “benefit(s)” revealed some initial patterns as well. While each subset of data featured a nearly identical percentage of respondents using it, there appeared to be notable distinctions in its usage. While clear phraseology and collocate patterns were seen in concordance lines of the post-Prop 8 respondents, highlighting many specific benefits that were affected, married couples' use of “benefit(s)” was highly generalized, with only a few mentions of a specific set of benefits, such as “Medi-cal benefits”, which occurred twice in the data, as opposed to the more common examples of things like “equal benefits”, “same benefits”, or “rights and benefits”, expressing a more generalized idea that marriage comes with benefits, and is a beneficial institution, but without highlighting the specifics of

what benefits are included in that.

A crucial snag in this analysis arose, however, when thinking about the design of each campaign. As previously mentioned, the campaigns were each designed much differently, with positive-leading questions for the married couples, and negative-leading questions after Prop 8. In fact, one of the four questions included in the corpus from the Prop 8 survey campaign featured a question that included the phrase “e.g. social security survival benefits,” which could explain both the frequency of its use in the corpus, as well as the fact that collocates of “benefits” were so much more specific among respondents in the post-Prop 8 survey.

To test this, we looked at the responses for that question of the campaign in isolation from the whole. Of the 2245 responses, 487 of these texts were in response to that question (21.7%), while 180 of the 244 tokens for “benefit(s)” (73.7%) came from those 487 texts. Although the remaining examples of “benefit(s)” did still feature many specific benefits in the collocates, we chose to end analysis at this point, as it was suspected that many of the examples were due to prompting from the framing of the question itself<sup>13</sup>.

In contrast, however, looking at our final word “right(s)”, which also appears in the same question as “benefits”, we do not see any hint of the wording of the question serving to prompt responses. In fact, of the 682 tokens of “right(s)” found in the data, only 153 are from the question that uses the word “rights”, making up 22.4% of the tokens, a statistically insignificant difference from the 21.7% of texts relative to the whole that this question contains.

Looking then at the phraseologies of “right(s)” between the two subsets of data, there is a different focus of what rights are important to the two groups of respondents. Table 12 below shows some of the common collocates and phraseologies between the two groups.

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13 Upon this realization, we also looked at the potential prompting of other words we are using in this analysis.

“Right(s)” is discussed directly in the data section, and no prompting was found for the word “love” based on the wording of the questions asked. For a complete list of all questions asked in each survey, see Appendix B.

Table 12. Phraseology Patterns of “right(s)”

12a. Married Couples Responses (249 texts; 98 tokens for “right(s)”)

	Phraseology	Freq.	% of tokens	% of texts	Example Concordance Line
1	(the) __ to	19	19.4%	7.6%	They should have <i>the right</i> to do what they want to do.
	__ to (marry)	14	14.3%	5.6%	We are in love and we deserve <i>the right to marry</i> .
2	civil ____	15	15.3%	6.0%	It is a fundamental <i>civil right</i> that is guaranteed by our constitution.
3	same __	15	15.3%	6.0%	We deserve the <i>same rights</i> as any straight married couple.
4	equal ____	10	10.2%	4.0%	<i>Equal rights</i> matter first and foremost.
5	this/those __	9	9.2%	3.6%	I became a strong advocate for <i>those rights</i> .

12b. Prop 8 Campaign Responses (2245 texts; 682 tokens for “right(s)”)

	Phraseology	Freq.	% of tokens	% of texts	Example Concordance Line
1	(the) __ to	89	13.0%	4.0%	Why should I have to earn <i>the right</i> to be treated respectfully...
	__ to (marry)	47	6.9%	2.1%	We only had <i>the right to marry</i> for 6 months.
2	same __	56	8.2%	2.5%	If we had the <i>same rights</i> everywhere this would not be an issue.
	same __ (comp. to others)	45	6.6%	2.0%	They deserve the <i>same rights as any citizen</i> .
3	civil ____	49	7.2%	2.2%	I believe this is a national <i>civil rights</i> issue.
4	my ____	43	6.3%	1.9%	They voted to take away <i>my rights</i> and won.
5	equal ____	41	6.0%	1.8%	It is a right that should be an <i>equal right</i> .
6	their ____	36	5.3%	1.6%	How can <i>their rights</i> , once granted, be taken away?

Interestingly, although we see a roughly similar proportional frequency of usage for “right(s)” in the two subsets of data, the phraseologies from the married couples is much less varied than that of the Prop 8 campaign, and tends to focus more clearly on the act of marriage, and the equal access to marriage they now have. Of the various phraseological patterns found in the data, the top five patterns account for a total of 68 of the 98 tokens, or 69.3% of the tokens found in that subset of data. In contrast, the top five patterns from the Prop 8 campaign data accounts for a total of only 278 of the 682 tokens, or 40.7% of the tokens found, suggesting a wider variety of phraseological patterns in the data, and less consistency in how rights are being discussed. Further, while most of the examples of having “the right(s) to X” among married couples were specifically about “the right to marry”, the respondents in the Prop 8 campaign only showed about half of the examples of “the right to X” to be about the right to marry. Instead of centering solely on marriage as a right, these patterns instead show the Prop 8 respondents viewing marriage as a means to other rights. This disconnect between the discourse patterns of married couples and those of the general same-sex marriage community suggest that changes to the discursive framing of these issues may benefit future policy decisions, and gives insight into what marriage means to the public as opposed to those who have had the chance to experience marriage for themselves.

### **4.3. Relationship Terms**

We also investigated relationship terms as they are used in the data, specifically looking at partner, spouse, and husband/wife, exploring the use of these terms in relation to queer identity. Recent discussions of the use of these terms in discourse (Waksler 2009) showed distinctions of usage of partner versus husband/wife in both mainstream and queer media outlets, highlighting a clear distinction between the usages of these terms. According to Waksler, a spouse is an unambiguous term referring to a member of a married couple, and husband and wife are unambiguous terms referring to a married man or woman; however, the term partner is multiply ambiguous, fraught with eight different meanings. Waksler concludes that partner is not equated with spouse, and that partner as a relationship terms means either someone in a same-sex couple, or one in a different-sex or same-sex couple who make the choice not to marry.

We aimed to look for patterns of natural use of these terms, as opposed to media use, as

media reports are often designed to create a specific perception of locations and populations with an ideal reader in mind (Talbot 1995 as cited in Koch 2010). This is important given that minority or oppressed groups often use language as a means to subvert the power structure, whether consciously or not (Van Dijk 1993). As media sources inherently possess linguistic power over its audience, our investigation hopes to reveal actual patterns of usage in these terms, and seeks to find ways to explain the patterns found.

Our investigation, much like that from Waksler 2009, looks at the relationship terms of husband/wife and partner\*<sup>14</sup>. Unlike Waksler's look at these terms, however, we omitted the investigation of spouse, as its frequency was minimal in some data sets, and often appeared as an overlapping term, listed simultaneously with one of the other investigated terms.

In this investigation, much like the previous one concerned with discussions about what marriage means, we separated responses to compare the first two campaigns featuring married same-sex couples with those of the Prop 8 campaign. To begin our investigation, we first found frequency counts of each term being looked at for the two subsets of data, as seen in Table 13 below.

Table 13. Relationship Term frequencies.

	Husband	Wife	Partner*
Married Couples	9	22	126
Prop 8 Campaign	102	150	541
Total	111	172	667

Strikingly, there was a noticeable lack of usage of husband and wife among the married couples, and an overall higher usage of partner among both groups. To search for reasons to account for this, we next looked at concordance lines of husband/wife. As there were so few tokens of husband/wife among the married couples data set, we looked at these lines as a whole instead of separating them into the subsets of data.

In looking at these concordance lines, several patterns emerged. First, there was

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14 Our search for “partner” was conducted by searching “partner\*” to get the lemma including “partners” and “partnership”. Frequencies and Concordance Line results included all three of these word types.

evidence of a high level of linguistic awareness in the use of husband and wife as relationship terms. Table 14 below shows some of the examples of concordance lines highlighting the linguistic awareness of the use of husband and wife.

Table 14. Concordance Lines: Linguistic Awareness

1. It was unarguable that they were wife and wife, no matter the beliefs of any individual.
2. ...to say we are married, it means that she is my wife.
3. One of my friends was upset that he could no longer call his husband his husband and be politically correct to do so.
4. Although my marriage to my husband is still legally valid, others say it shouldn't be when I introduce him as my husband.

In addition, there was a lot of anxiety about marital and partnership status in the usage of these words, especially in the responses after the passage of Proposition 8. Coupled with the linguistic awareness of the use of husband or wife, which can be seen in some of the lines in Table 14, respondents also shared views such as “Do I call my significant other my wife or my partner?” and “If I could just say, 'She's my wife', it would go a little faster...” Even more common, however, was the use of husband or wife to mention the lack of legal or social resources available to same-sex married couples that are available to different-sex couples. Table 15 below highlights some of the examples of these fears and anxieties.

Table 15. Concordance Lines: Marital Anxiety

1. It is extremely unfair that myself or my husband will never be able to collect one another's social security.
2. My husband and I pay thousands of dollars a year more in taxes
3. My husband is a veteran and I have no right to his pension.
4. It has left the legal standing of my wife and I in limbo.
5. I am legally bound to my wife within the state but our ties evaporate at the federal level.

One other factor that appeared was the usage of husband or wife to refer to different-sex

relationships. With more than 20% of the respondents self-identified as heterosexual (see section 4.1), and other comparisons to different-sex relationships present, several of the uses of husband or wife were found in phrases such as “his wife” or “her husband”, making it clear that it was not a same-sex relationship being referenced. In contrast, there is only one mention of “partner” being used to reference anything besides a same-sex relationship in the entire data set, revealing a nearly exclusive use of “partner” to refer to same-sex relationships.

Looking at partner, there were differences in usage between the two subsets of data, and these two groups were looked at in comparison to one another as well as holistically. In terms of frequency of collocates, the two most frequent collocates directly to the left of “partner\*” were “domestic” and “my”, and show an interesting inverse usage between the two groups. Table 16 below shows a comparison of these frequencies as seen between the two subsets of data.

Table 16. Collocate Frequencies of “domestic” and “my”

Data Subset	Total tokens of “partner*”	Collocate: domestic	% of tokens	Collocate: my	% of tokens
Married Couples	126	71	56.3%	15	11.9%
Prop 8 Campaign	541	91	16.8%	294	54.3%

These results show a relative lack of usage of “partner” as a term of reference among the married couples in the data, while still being a clearly productive term within the general respondents in the Prop 8 campaign. Importantly, the phraseologies inform these frequencies even further. Not only was there a marked lack of usage of “my partner” among married couples, the high frequency of the use of “domestic partner\*” comes in constructions that are largely in the past tense, such as “We applied for our domestic partnership 2 ½ years ago...” or “We registered as domestic partners in January 2000.” Also common is a reference both to the past experience of a domestic partnership coupled with a present tense reference to marriage. This heavy use of past tense constructions in reference to domestic partnerships is somewhat expected among couples that now have a legal marriage license, but also serves to highlight the fact that for many married couples, the term “partner” and the idea of domestic partnership was

part of a logical progression of events in their life narratives (Duranti 2006). Conversely, the predominant usage of “domestic” in the Prop 8 campaign data features a high use of present tense constructions, or a general reference to the institution of domestic partnership, which has been offered in California since 1998.

Similarly important, the concordance line data from the Prop 8 campaign show a very high usage of “partner” being used to reference someone whom one has already married. While only one distinct mention of partner references individuals already married in the Married Couples data, 53 of the 541 tokens of “partner”(9.8% of tokens) are in constructions that make reference of one's partner even after marriage. In fact, many of these concordance lines were found in the construction that featured the collocate “my” directly in front of partner, with responses such as “my partner and I married on August 11<sup>th</sup>.” These concordance lines are useful in showing that even when marriage is a past event, the use of partner remains as a term of reference for the individual that the respondent is married to.

Looking then at the differences between the usage of husband/wife and partner, there appears to be a disconnect between the linguistic awareness and community ideal of using terms such as husband/wife, and the actual usage of these terms, as there is still a clear preference for the usage of partner over husband or wife even among same-sex married couples. This can be seen both in the prevalence of partner even in discussions of being married, the much higher frequency of using partner versus using husband or wife, and also the anxiety surrounding husband/wife that is not apparent in the usage of partner.

## **5. Discussion**

It should be highlighted that all three of these investigations are preliminary in nature, and can be strengthened by adding depth and further insight, including searches of other collocates, phraseologies, and concordance lines in addition to those presented here. However, there are still some clear interpretations and implications that can inform our understanding of the usage of these terms and structures.

Our analysis of identity formation and community participation between heterosexual and LGBT responses revealed what appears to be an LGBT community without a group-oriented sense of identity. This is seen in the lack of discussion of an inclusive “we” (instead focusing on a dual “we” in a highly individualized manner focusing on one's relationship), as

well as a lack of an exclusive “they”. In terms of Critical Discourse Analysis, this paucity of an inclusive “we” creates less of a “they” to compare to, which presents an interesting challenge to the assumed power dynamics of dominant versus subversive discourses and communities. A discourse of individuality could be seen as dangerous to the goal of the movement, which is to be “equal” and to be inclusive of all. It should be noted, though, that this individualistic discourse could be a result of all of the data and discussion coming solely from a community of proponents of same-sex marriage without examples of any clear opposition to the community. In addition, this lack of exclusive “they” in the LGBT responses also suggests that while heterosexual respondents clearly have a view of a “we” versus “them” situation – placing themselves on the periphery of the community – the larger community did not create this exclusionary setting toward the heterosexual “allies” that are participating in the same-sex marriage movement.

A crucial aspect of this data and the community of individuals seeking same-sex marriage involves the ideologies surrounding this goal. Yep et al (2003) define and discuss varying sexual ideologies within the LGBT community, especially as they relate to same-sex marriage issues. Though the discussion of same-sex marriage frequently focuses on the issue as a “gay rights issue” or beneficial to all members of the queer community, many factions of the larger queer community do not hold sexual ideologies that require or even endorse marriage as a social institution. Yep et al.'s discussion of these ideologies points to the difference between assimilationist and radical viewpoints, the former seeking to be no different than their heterosexual counterparts (p.49) and the latter rejecting this notion completely. They also discuss the general idea from the assimilationist viewpoint that same-sex marriage will finally bring the LGBT community to “full equality”, and therefore presents a notion that their views are inherently “superior” to the radical viewpoint (p. 51). Our analysis highlights the prominence of the assimilationist discourse of “full equality” and the importance of same-sex marriage for all members of the same-sex community, despite many differing and even opposing viewpoints existing within the larger queer community.

The discourse as it is seen in our analysis should be scrutinized and considered in future decision making processes so as to avoid any potential alienation of the rest of the LGBT community who may not be as assimilationist, who may not feel that marriage is a step for their own personal life, or who may find that the same-sex marriage movement is profoundly against their notions of what participation in the larger queer community entails, as it highlights

the ideal of equality with the heterosexual members and heteronormative ways of our current society.

This analysis also showed ways that the importance and meaning of marriage as an institution differ between already married couples as compared to the community in general. This may be due in part to the ways that the leaders of the movement began framing our discussion and understanding of the passage of Proposition 8 after the November election, as terms like “second-class citizen” and the analogy of the same-sex marriage movement to the civil rights movement of the 1960s began in the aftermath of the election. However, the idea of marriage bringing both legal and social benefits was not absent before the passage of Proposition 8; instead, it was accompanied by an acknowledgement that these rights and benefits were not the sole reason that individuals choose to get married – that it's also about love. This important distinction could play a useful role in future discussions and framings of the issue of same-sex marriage in both gay and mainstream media, policy decisions, and other forms of public discourse.

Within the framework of same-sex marriage, we also analyzed and discussed the relationship terms husband/wife and partner. Although Waksler (2009) found the multiply ambiguous nature of the word “partner” in English, our results found that even despite this, “partner” is still a useful term in the gay community, regardless of its semantic ambiguity. Importantly, it was used almost exclusively in reference of same-sex relationships, despite the ideological discussion present that a “partner” is not the same as a “husband” or “wife”, and the mentions of being in a committed relationship, not a business endeavor. Further, the use of partner is clearly seen as a productive descriptor of one's other in the relationship even after marriage, suggesting its widespread acceptance in the gay community.

Comparing that to the usage of husband and wife, we see that despite the social “ideal” of using husband or wife to refer to same-sex married spouses, or other long-term committed same-sex relationships, that the actual usage of these terms shows a high level of linguistic and social anxiety to use them. This becomes interesting in that, despite the same-sex marriage movement having dominant discourses in favor of assimilationist viewpoints, there appears to be a retained preference for maintaining distance and distinction in the ways the community views their relationships in comparison to the institution of marriage as it exists in a heteronormative world.

## 6. Conclusions

These data, analysis, and results highlight important patterns of language use within the same-sex marriage movement. Further research, including more in-depth analysis, are planned not only on these topics, but a variety of other directions as well, including identity development in the wake of discrimination. The data and findings presented here will also be used to create policy reports and press releases through Marriage Equality, USA in hopes of informing policy makers and political action organizations on future public policy decisions, as well as to guide leaders of the same-sex marriage movement in their decisions of ways to frame discourse, create advertisements and PSAs, and share experiences with other members of the community and beyond. As language is never found in isolation, and is crucial for subverting dominant discourses and societal norms, it is our hope that this research can be useful in motivating positive social change and allowing others in positions of linguistic power to use and learn from the patterns of language use and the beliefs that are revealed through actual discourse.

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## **Appendix B – Survey Questions by Campaign**

Wedding Bios and Couples Across CA Campaigns (3 questions):

1. Share a short bio on you and your family (e.g. children, occupation, how you first met)
2. Tell us why marriage matters to you.
3. Any special stories about your wedding day?

Prop 8 Campaign (4 questions from this campaign currently in the corpus):

1. During this campaign period, did you personally experience any homophobia, hate speech, threats or violence?
2. Please share your story on how the passage of these anti-gay amendments has harmed you, your family and/or friends.
3. If applicable, please share a story of how being denied the right to marry has harmed you, your family and/or friends.
4. Turning to the national level, please share your story on how being denied access to the federal rights and protections associated with marriage (e.g., social security survivor benefits, veterans programs, immigration policies) has harmed you, your family, and/or friends.