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Telling Our Stories: Narrative and Framing in the Movement for Same-Sex Marriage

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ABSTRACT *Although framing and narrative are both well-documented discursive features of social movements, the difference between them is often overstated; where frames are treated as logical, authoritative, and abstract, the usefulness of narratives is frequently documented in relation to pre-mobilization phases of movement development such as identity and community building. Drawing on an analysis of Connecticut's Judiciary Committee hearings on same-sex marriage, I challenge this distinction and elucidate the relationship between storytelling and framing, showing how narrative is used to make packages of frames cohesive and compelling. In demonstrating how proponents of the legislation deployed narratives and frames simultaneously, this research contributes to scholarship on the function and configuration of discursive strategies for social movements.*

KEY WORDS: Framing, narrative, opposing movements, same-sex marriage, public hearing

Shortly after Massachusetts' historic legalization of same-sex marriage, in 2005, Connecticut saw a same-sex marriage bill introduced to the state's legislature. Proponents hoped that Connecticut would make history for same-sex couples by becoming the first state in the country to pass such a measure legislatively. Two state-based, non-profit organizations with lobbyists quickly mobilized around the issue and launched state-wide campaigns aimed at shaping popular opinion and influencing lawmakers. Love Makes a Family (LMF) supported the bill, while the opponent organization the Family Institute of Connecticut (FIC) opposed the bill, and along with it any form of legal recognition for same-sex couples, including civil union and domestic partnership. The group also endorsed a 'defense of marriage' constitutional amendment or 'DOMA' that would, if passed, limit marriage in the state of Connecticut to 'the union of one man and one woman'.

Connecticut's Judiciary Committee hearings on same-sex marriage provided an opportunity for members of the community to present their views on the controversial legislation. Prior to the commencement of the hearings, both LMF and FIC recruited constituents and residents willing to present their arguments before public officials. Numerous social movement scholars have analyzed the ways that movements and countermovements frame and counterframe arguments, vying for public support (Dugan, 2004; Maney, Coy, & Woehrle, 2009), media attention (Rohlinger, 2002), and the vote of

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public officials. The Judiciary Committee hearings on same-sex marriage solicited both the strategic construction of the problem and a prescribed course of action, structural characteristics of social movement frames (Benford & Snow, 2000; Snow & Benford, 1998). However, noticeably, while opponents of the legislation stuck strictly to a framing strategy, many proponents' testimonies combined frames with personal stories or narratives. Gays and lesbians told stories about their loving families and their accomplished, well-adjusted children. They recounted instances of discrimination that they faced while dealing with a partner's long-term illness, or of the challenges they faced while visiting a state that did not legally recognize their union. They spoke of the overwhelming similarities between gay and straight couples and families, and the inherent dignity and worth of both.

Both framing and narrative are well-documented discursive strategies used by social movement organizations to persuade an audience. What is the relationship between them? In this paper, I show how narrative and frame may be deployed simultaneously. Narratives provide examples of contradictory circumstances and instances of discriminatory treatment suffered by members of a disadvantaged group, soliciting sympathy and support from power holders, and linking individual experience to common conditions faced by a broader status-based group. While frames make narratives coherent by linking personal accounts to dominant political and legal discourses, narratives substantiate frames by using personal experiences of injustice to draw empathy and stress similarities between a marginal group and authorities.

Framing and Narrative as Social Movement Strategies

The framing perspective developed as a way to understand how activists both construct and interpret value-laden messages. Borrowing from the influential work of Goffman (1974), early formulations focused on the 'frame alignment' processes necessary to link individual cognitive schemas and organizational interests (Snow, Rochford, Worden, & Benford, 1986). The focus of early work on framing was largely cognitive and action-oriented, treating frames as 'schemata of interpretation' that allow individuals to 'locate, perceive, identify, and label' events, as Goffman (1974:21) put it, and were used primarily to explain recruitment and mobilization. This work seeks to explain how otherwise unassociated individuals with similar values are drawn to participate in social movements. In achieving this end, frames perform several key tasks. First, they identify an injustice and appropriate blame in a causal fashion. Second, they specify an appropriate course of action meant to alleviate the injustice. And third, frames provide the 'call to action' that translates the experience of injustice into action (Benford & Snow, 2000, p. 613; Snow & Benford, 1988).

The recognition of narrative or storytelling as a characteristic of the politics of disadvantaged groups has shed new light on the types of strategies that social movements utilize. Feminist scholars and activists alike have upheld narrative as a form of persuasive communication embraced by those who lack access to technical, scientific, or expert discourses (Polletta, 1998a, 1998b), or by those who are otherwise marginalized or silenced within mainstream channels of political participation (Naples, 2003). In the hands of disadvantaged groups, storytelling is unique and specific in that it conveys personal experience that is, as a result, resistant to negation (Nepstad, 2002; Polletta, 1998a). In allowing the speaker to position himself or herself as a member of a legitimately aggrieved

group, narrative translates feelings of shame or individual responsibility into feelings of empowerment, efficacy, and even entitlement, features of concepts such as cognitive liberation (McAdam, 1982) and processes such as collective identity construction (Taylor & Whittier, 1992).

In conveying personal accounts of injustice, narratives seek to establish a personal connection with audience members by stressing the similarities between authorities and claimants. As Bernstein (1997) found, when the gay and lesbian rights movement has sought legal change through existing institutional channels, it has used a strategy that emphasizes sameness to the straight majority. In the case involving litigation, one reason gays and lesbians tell stories is to counter the negative understandings of non-gay society. According to Fajer (1992, p. 528), 'persuasive storytelling' is a way of selectively crafting a story to forge a bond between the storyteller and listener by convincing the listener that she is like the subject of the story, based on their 'common ground in human experience', thus impacting her feelings about the subject, and ultimately, her decision-making (p. 528). Similarly, Polletta (2006, p. 9) argues that narrative can be used to get audience members to 'experience the moral of the story through the characters' fates'. It is seeing through the eyes of the other that makes narrative so uniquely effective.

Work on narrative in social movements parallels, but also diverges from work on framing. Although framing scholars have sometimes subsumed narrative under the broader category of frame (see, for example, Hunt & Benford, 1994), others have argued that narrative contains unique rhetorical features that warrant conceptual autonomy (Nepstad, 2002; Polletta, 1998a, 1998b, 2006). First, while frames specify a diagnosis and prognosis of a problem, narrative draws the audience in with the features of emplotment and temporality, which require the interpretive participation of listeners as they are engaged in an unfolding sequence of events that contains moral or practical consequences. Like frames, narratives are also action-oriented in that they are used to incite and sustain mobilization. Related concepts such as 'identity talk' (Hunt & Benford, 1994) and 'vocabularies of motive' (Benford, 1993b) show how participant motivation hinges on what are often carefully crafted, publically pronounced tales of injustice, persecution, and oppression. Narrative is also central in the literature on collective memory, or the mutually produced and shared history of a given movement (Gongaware, 2003; Davidson Hunter & Yates, 2002).

Like framing, narrative is useful both directed internally to movement members, and to external targets. Internally, narrative is used both at the social psychological level to stimulate cognitive liberation (Brown, 2002), and at the level of collective identity to bridge the gap between the individual and the group, building a shared movement community through the construction and reproduction of common beliefs, values, and commitments to change (Davis, 2002; Fine, 1995; Loseke, 2007; Nepstad, 2002; Polletta, 1998a, 1998b, 2002, 2006; Polletta & Jasper, 2001; Rice, 2002; Rothenberg, 2002; Taylor & Whittier, 1992). While scholars writing in these areas agree that narrative can be both internally and externally deployed in order to achieve different sorts of movement tasks, the number of empirical studies focused in the internal use of narrative (for instance, Benford, 1993a, 1993b, 2002; Brown, 2002; Davis, 2002; Fine, 1995; Hunt & Benford, 1994; Loseke, 2007; Polletta, 1998a, 1998b, 2002, 2006; Yates & Davidson Hunter, 2002) far exceeds the number concentrating on narrative as an externally deployed persuasive device (for instance, Nolan, 2002; Rothenberg, 2002; Tatum, 2002).

The focus on the use of narrative in pre-mobilization is limiting. Mature social movement organizations, this work seems to suggest, are less likely to use a narrative strategy. According to Polletta (2006, p. 423), in contrast to finely-tuned, clearly-articulated and authoritative frames, narrative is best used in helping activists to make sense of ambiguous or unfamiliar situations and contexts. For so-called 'fledgling movements', or those movements in pre-mobilization stages, storytelling is crucial to the experience-sharing that promotes common understanding and contributes to the development of networks and social movement communities. The identity work processes to which numerous social movement scholars refer demonstrate how activists' story telling facilitates different phases of movement involvement, including awareness, action, and commitment (Hunt & Benford, 1994; Reger, Myers, & Einwohner, 2008). Likewise, narrative is often shown to bridge differences between activists, such as those based on race/ethnicity, class, language, nationality, and religion (e.g. Nepstad, 2002).

According to frame analysts, the success of both frames and narratives is based on the extent to which they resonate with broader value systems and conform to specific institutional conventions (Davis, 2002; Snow, 2004; Snow & Benford, 1988). Unlike narratives, frames are most often deployed by those with expertise backed by institutional authority. According to Snow and Benford (1988), frame resonance consists of two interrelated factors, credibility, including the consistency of the frame and the believability of empirical evidence provided by the claimsmaker, and salience, or the extent to which the content of the frame aligns with the beliefs and values of a given audience. Frame analysts have suggested that when it comes to the relative success of framing, resonance depends upon the marshalling of empirical evidence, and thus a relatively high degree of scientific, technical, or specialist knowledge (Benford & Snow, 2000; Coy & Woehrlé, 1996). In their review of scholarship on framing, Benford and Snow (2000, p. 621) state this plainly when they write, 'the greater the status and/or perceived expertise of the frame articulator [...] the more plausible and resonant the framings or claims'. This assertion leaves discursive forms that do not possess authority at a marked disadvantage in the sort of venue that privileges the authority of the speaker.

Some scholars caution about the range of usefulness of narrative. Polletta (2006, p. 87) warns that while narrative may help an aggrieved group to express its frustration, because it lacks authority, it may do little in the way of altering the status quo. In fact, narrative could weaken rather than strengthen the claimant's case. Storytelling has been associated with direct action, which has been construed as non-strategic, and even non-political (Polletta, 2006, p. 47). Frames are said to be privileged because they are 'passionless, coolly-logical, and abstract' (Polletta, 2006, pp. 82–83). Nepstad (2002, p. 136) contends that, in comparison to narrative, framing is best-suited to debate-style format that calls for a great deal of 'ideological maneuvering' on the part of claimsmakers and respondents, rather than the presentation of specialist or expert knowledge. Critics warn that narrative may give the storyteller the therapeutic satisfaction of 'getting it off your chest', but warn that it may do little in the end to alter the status quo, due in part to the fact that it is less authoritative than other discursive forms (Polletta, 2006, p. 87).

Others argue that narrative has distinct advantages as a persuasive device. Narrative works quickly to incite outrage, defiance, or compassion (Tatum, 2002, p. 253); it is well-suited for conveying emotion. Survivor's movements such as the battered women's movement, incest survivor's movement, and movement against childhood sexual abuse rely on strategically placed emotion both to solicit sympathy and to embolden victims to

take their stories to the public (Dunn, 2010; Rothenberg, 2002; Whittier, 2001). Narratives may also perform discursive tasks that frames cannot, since they are focused more on emotion than cognition. For instance, narratives have been shown to more effectively resolve competing concerns or contradictions because they draw together diverse dramatic elements and make them coherent (Tatum, 2002, p. 192).

Talking about a shared past has been central to the gay and lesbian rights movement in the USA. The evolution of modern gay identities is predicated on the telling of stories to substantiate a gay subculture (Plummer, 1995). It is this subculture that has allowed for the transformation of the personal into the political, as in the process of coming out, where the individual asserts and publicizes an authentic gay self free from stigmatization (D'Emilio, 1998). Scholarship on victimization shows that claiming a victim identity is a relatively recent strategy used by social movements. The prevalence of victim culture, which coincides with the rise of identity politics and new social movements, provides an opportunity for activists to position themselves as victims deserving of special protections. As a minority group, gays and lesbians have appropriated these discourses, and have historically appealed to authorities for protection from discrimination. Activists who are members of a disadvantaged group draw on emotional discourse (Dunn, 2010) in order to absolve themselves of blame, and to generate concern from an audience over the harm that they have suffered. In constructing victims, activists must 'narrativize the experiences of the social category to which one belongs' (Davis, 2005, p. 15), thus extrapolating individual experiences to those of the group and to conditions beyond their control. At the same time, narratives produce concrete and lived instances of social problems that may otherwise be too abstract to be impactful. In this regard, narratives serve a bridging function whereby they connect large-scale social problems with personal experiences that are highly relatable and interpretable.

A challenge for the gay and lesbian rights movement, as with other injustice movements, is to claim victimhood while asserting rights. A cultural disposition to hold victims accountable makes it difficult to construct structural accounts of inequality that absolve the group in question of any blame (Dunn, 2010). Gay and lesbian families exist outside of the protections of law automatically granted to married opposite-sex couples, and have long experienced the discriminatory effects of family law. Harding (2011) suggests that in telling stories of their accounts with family law, gay and lesbian couples resist official legal constructions of marriage and family, creating their own definitions and frameworks for their families that, often in a celebratory and empowering fashion, avoid the stigma associated with being a second class citizen (see also Hull, 2006; Lewin, 2001; Nicol & Smith, 2008). In the legal arena, gays and lesbians must walk a fine line between claiming victimhood as a result of social inequality and being agents who assert their rights. This dualism is mirrored in the use of narrative and frame.

Data and method

The data for this analysis include Connecticut's 2005 Judiciary Committee hearing on Senate Bill 264 (An Act Concerning Same-Sex Marriage). My analysis proceeded with a systematic coding of hearing transcripts retrieved from the state of Connecticut's government webpage (<http://www.ct.gov>) with the aid of qualitative data analysis software. I began with a content analysis of frames, identifying the specific arguments or ways of framing opposition to and support for same-sex marriage used by proponents and

opponents, and recorded the frequency of these frames. I drew on existing analyses of legislative and related proceedings on same-sex marriage (e.g. Fisher, 2009; Herman, 1997; Hull, 2001) to produce initial frames, such as those involving definitions of family, marriage, parenting, religion, rights, and the role of the state, and allowed additional themes to emerge from the data.

Forty-seven testimonies were included in the final analysis, representing the universe of responses. I note that proponents outnumbered opponents considerably; 30 testimonies were delivered by proponents and 17 were made by opponents. Due to this distribution, one could argue, at least for the purpose of gathering frequencies, that the strength of my findings is greater for proponents than for opponents. However, the overall pattern of interaction between opponents and legislators, and proponents and legislators is not compromised by this distribution, nor is the overall package of framing strategies used by opponents and proponents. It does suggest, though, that LMF, a repeat player in the legislative arena, may have achieved greater success in mobilizing its constituents and the public than FIC.

Once I had generated a list of opponent's and proponent's frames, I recorded the number of narratives or discrete stories that were told by presenters. Following scholars who have described the key features of narrative, I defined narratives as stories with the characteristics of (1) point of view, (2) temporality, (3) emplotment, and (4) moral (Nepstad, 2002; Polletta, 2006). Narratives could and did contain or evoke multiple frames. For proponents, I then noted which frames were most likely to be deployed via narrative. Since opponents of the legislation did not use a narrative strategy, the narrative count for opponents was zero.

Lastly, I analyzed legislator's interactions with opponents and proponents to understand how the arguments of each were received by decision-makers. It is argued that narrative has a disarming and persuasive quality that can solicit sympathy from power holders. Thus, I read each legislator's responses to opponents and proponents, when they did choose to respond, to discern whether the content of their remarks was challenging or supportive, and if so, how. I also observed the proceedings at the 12-h long 2005 Judiciary Committee hearing in person, recording field notes describing the setting and presenters' organizational affiliations or credentials. My observations at the hearing provided valuable information about the debate that could not have been garnered from the transcript alone, resulting in a richer and more detailed picture of the events.

Telling Our Stories: Proponents Narrate Their Frames

Proponents of same-sex marriage employed complimentary sets of frames that focused on the legitimacy and normalcy of gay and lesbian families, and the discrimination that resulted from their exclusion from the institution of marriage. Frames that occurred with the greatest frequency include the lack of *benefits*, the exclusion of gay and lesbian couples from marriage as a form of discrimination (*discrimination/equality*), and the assertion that marriage is one of the *rights* to which all citizens, regardless of gender, are entitled. Combined, this interrelated set of frames accounted for nearly half of the frames of proponents. This set of frames has been long used by the gay and lesbian rights movement to advocate for state recognition and protection (see, for instance, Andersen, 2006; Goldberg-Hiller, 2002), and is familiar to lawmakers.

A second set of frames argued for the legitimacy and normalcy of gay and lesbian families. Presenters argued that marriage was about *love* and commitment, and that lawmakers should grant these families the same cultural and social *legitimacy* as their straight counterparts. The *children* of gay and lesbian couples were also highlighted as parents extended the cultural illegitimacy argument to their children. Children were depicted as unfairly delegitimized in a culture that treated their parents as second class citizens. Without the sanctioning of their parents' relationships, the children of gay and lesbian couples were marginalized. Underlying family-focused narratives was the assumption that innocent children need protection, which can only come once their parents' relationships are afforded legal recognition. Though family-related frames were less frequent than rights and benefits frames, accounting for approximately 29% of proponents' frames, they were much more likely to be combined with narrative.

While proponents of same-sex marriage did employ frames not directly related to rights and benefits or family, these were much less frequent. For instance, some argued that the *separation of church and state* omitted any religious arguments in opposition to the legislation, such as those used by opponents. Others drew a *race analogy* meant to highlight the similarities between different forms of discrimination, or suggested that opening the institution of marriage to same-sex couples would actually *strengthen marriage* rather than weaken it. Still, these frames were less numerous, and notably, none of them incorporated narratives. This set of counterframes was used almost exclusively to counter arguments made by opponents.

In the analysis that follows, I discuss the framing and narrative strategies of proponents in the order of the likelihood that a given set of frames would be deployed via narrative, and then turn to a discussion of the role of opponents. While rights and benefits frames were often delivered without the aid of a story, nearly all family-focused frames included narratives.

Narrating the Frame: Families with Children

Children were often the subject of proponents' narratives due to their perceived innocence and vulnerability. Sandy Sergio, a mother of four children and new grandmother spoke about the differences between family recognition laws in the USA and Canada, and through her story she emphasized the importance of love and children to family. Her lesbian daughter, Lauren, who held dual Canadian and US citizenship, was unable to visit her mother and the children's grandmother in Connecticut due to the potential risks. With unwavering conviction in her voice, she addressed the Judiciary Committee about the resulting separation of her family:

Lauren calls Connecticut home, [...] in 2003 she was married to her beloved Meg in an elegant, traditional, I might say, ceremony in Toronto. She married to help build the community, to establishing a family, and to have for her and her spouse a committed, loving life companionship. In August of this year, Lauren gave birth to my granddaughter, Lindsay Katherine. In Canada, Lindsay's parents have all the rights and responsibilities of marriage. However, if they should return home to live in Connecticut, they, and thus Lindsay, would suffer a hurtful lack of legal protections and social respect.

Sandy clutched a photo of her baby granddaughter tightly in her hands, concluding her testimony with a passionate appeal to the General Assembly. 'I beg you to be courageous', she declared. 'History will bless you. Lindsay will be able to come home and live near Grandma'. As soon as she finished speaking, the room broke out in applause. Senator McDonald praised Sandy for sharing her story: 'Let me just say that these proceedings are being recorded and I hope that you will get yourself a tape and send it to your daughter. She should be very proud of her parents'.

As a strategy, storytelling calls for personalization to be effective. It is not surprising, then, that along with her written testimony, Sandy announced that she would be submitting a photo of her baby granddaughter to each member of the committee. This story also involves the victims of injustice, not only Lauren and Meg, but also innocent Lindsay Kate. Referring to herself in the third person as 'Grandma' further personalized Sandy's testimony, emphasizing the close familial relationships involved. The story retreated from the formalities of law and illustrated for the Judiciary Committee the commonalities between gay and straight families. Sandy also characterized her daughter's wedding as traditional, which appeals to normative understandings of marriage. The couple did not seek to disrupt mainstream society, but to blend in to it.

Other proponents of the legislation used narrative to underscore the vulnerability of gay and lesbian families when they come up against the law. Jeffrey Busch recounted an incident where, while vacationing, he and his spouse, Stephen, were stopped by Canadian border agents and questioned about their relationship to their young son, Eli. He addressed the Judiciary Committee about this threat to his family with Stephen by his side:

In June 2004, we were returning from a trip abroad and [...] we were stopped by Canadian Immigration on the way back to the United States. And the officials demanded to know where Eli's mother was and what was Stephen's relationship to the child. The agent did not care that I was listed as Eli's parent on his passport, that I had his birth certificate listing me as the parent.

The response to Jeffrey's story illustrates the power of narrative to draw the listener in with the specificities of a carefully crafted story, encouraging members of the audience to make connections between individual experience and broader social problems. The Chair of the Judiciary Committee replied:

I think this is one of, I guess, thousands of examples of where the law doesn't legally recognize the uniqueness of what you're describing as really a married-type relationship, right? I mean, you're saying that's what it is, right? [...] And the issue is should we recognize what you really have?

In extrapolating Jeffrey's experience to 'thousands of examples', the Chairman effectively bridged the gap between personal experience and structural and thus recurrent problems, amplifying the impact of the testimony. This example also illustrates the cooperative construction of the frame that occurred among legislators and proponents.

In addition to detailing the legal problems related to portability, both Sandy's and Jeffrey's stories sought to connect their personal experiences with those of everyone else. Telling stories allowed proponents to communicate the specificity of their individual circumstance and needs, but also to express the commonality of experience

that they shared with the straight majority. Jeffrey, for instance, pointed out to legislators that his family ‘looks a lot like a lot of other families in Connecticut’, explaining that ‘like many parents we juggle our professional lives [...] in order to spend as much time as possible with our son’. As parents or relatives of children, members of the Judiciary Committee could be emotionally swayed by stories involving innocent and vulnerable children and responsible, dedicated parents.

The children of gay and lesbian couples themselves provided compelling evidence that the children of such families were just as good, if not better, than their straight counterparts. Nineteen-year-old Emily Horne was one of the most emotionally moving presenters at the hearing. Her narrative was not the recounting of an illustrative instance of discrimination, but an expression of the love and admiration that she had for her lesbian parents and their care:

My moms are my role models. They’ve given me all the love, guidance and support any kid needs from their parents. They have taught me lessons about making good decisions. They have listened to me and given me good advice and taken care of me. Sometimes I thought that they were too strict or too involved in my life as I was growing up, but as I got older I realized that all the attention was because they wanted what was best for me. And I think I’m turning out to be a pretty great person because of the love of my moms.

Emily’s story connected with the audience on a personal level. As it was based on her own experience, her description of the effects of the love and support of her moms was undoubtedly difficult to counter or dispute. It was also emotionally compelling. Representative McMahon commended Emily on her speech. ‘I just want to thank you, Emily, for coming’, he said. ‘We love to hear from young people, and especially the young people who are directly affected by [...] this piece of legislation we have before you. Your moms can be very proud of you’.

Stories of Love and Legitimacy

Carolyn and Leslie, who delivered their testimony side by side, explained their wedding in detail:

The sun came out as we stood on the deck of our home on the Cape, surrounded by our families and a few dear friends. Our children and our two granddaughters were there, all of our siblings, several nieces and nephews were there, Leslie’s parents were there, my parents, who are 93 and 95, could not make the trip so we put a picture of them beside the wedding cake. We were embraced by love. It was a short ceremony. Our kids and grandkids held a canopy over our heads. Our dear friends said a few words. Then we said a few words. The justice of the peace declared us legally married. After the cheering and the tears, our family and friends offered toasts and we had lunch. It was a joyous day, incredibly special to us, yet so very much like thousands of other weddings that bring joy to couples and families every year.

Carolyn's story illustrates a familiar, valued, and touching celebration that involves children and families. She drew in frames of love, children, and the legitimacy of gay and lesbian families, which were woven together through a story that stressed sameness to the straight majority.

Beyond the Law: Narrative and Social and Cultural Legitimacy

Mark and Paul, who were Connecticut residents married in Massachusetts, held back tears as they recounted the passing of Mark's mother, who in his eyes clearly understood the importance of marriage for her son and future son-in-law. Mark addressed the Committee about the importance of same-sex marriage for him and Paul:

The recognition of our relationship is [...] the fulfillment of my mother's last wishes. She had been diagnosed with cancer in April of 2003, and on one of the last days of her life she called the members of our family together to tell us her final thoughts and wishes. She also took the time to give each of us a gift by which to remember her after she was gone. When it came to my turn, she took off her wedding band and engagement ring she had worn for 42 years and placed them on the table in front of Paul and me [...] She said, 'I want to offer these rings to Mark and Paul because I want to state publicly that I support them as a couple and that I view their relationship to be a marriage equal to that of all my other children or to my own. I don't know if the law will ever catch up, but I see them as married and Paul as part of my family.

Mark's story is moving, but it is also a strategically crafted account of events meant to highlight both the commonality of gay and straight couples when it comes to losing a loved one, and his mother's unconditional support of her son, regardless of his sexuality or choice of life partner. The story had a strong moral component and taught a lesson of unconditional love and acceptance, a message that is difficult to dispute both because of its specificity and its emotional content. Mark's story also alludes to the permanency and high level of commitment suggested of gay and lesbian relationships. Ultimately, Mark contextualized his story in terms of rights. 'It's wrong to deny any citizen basic rights and privileges that are so freely given to others', he explained at the close of his testimony. In this way, he was able to link his story and the themes of love and legitimacy to the broader social problem and resonant rights framing of same-sex marriage.

Stories of Discrimination, Rights, and Benefits

Most frequently, proponents framed and told stories about the complications and contradictions they faced because they were not able to access the rights and benefits to which one is automatically entitled in marriage. Medical decision-making was one aspect that surfaced throughout several of the narratives, demonstrating how well-suited stories are for conveying discriminatory treatment. Mark Pearsall, a local resident, explained to legislators how the hospitalization of his partner after a serious car accident demonstrated how the couple of 16 years were treated as legal strangers:

Paul was struck by a drunk driver head on [and . . .] was rushed to the hospital in an ambulance. I was refused entrance to see him at the hospital and was unable to gain any information about his condition for over an hour as I was terrified in the waiting room. Finally, only after Paul was lucid and able to request my presence, was I allowed to see him.

The language used by Mark, including words such as ‘refused’ and ‘terrified’ conveyed the couples’ victim status to the audience. Here, the storyteller positioned himself as vulnerable in the face of authorities, here hospital staff. The relationship between him and his partner was severed by institutional decision-makers who finally ‘allowed’ him to see Paul. In this instance, as in others, a proponent used an instance of discriminatory treatment to draw sympathy and encourage support for same-sex marriage.

Presenting with her partner by her side, Barb discussed the details of her cancer diagnosis, and her concerns for the future of her family:

Robin took care of me before, during, and after mastectomy surgery. She assisted me during my recovery from chemotherapy and radiation treatments. While Robin and I had shared childcare equally over the years, after my cancer diagnosis, Robin cut back on her work to allow me time to recover and to return to work myself on a reduced schedule. This crisis has heightened our awareness of our importance to one another and our vulnerability without the security and protections that can be provided exclusively by marriage. I very much want to see my children graduate from high school. While our family is hopeful and determined, we dread the possibility of a time when our children would lose a mother and Robin would lose a life partner, friend, and wage earner. Because Robin and I cannot marry, our family would struggle financially if I died.

Barb’s story not only demonstrates the temporal and moral components of narrative, but also illustrates the practical consequences of her predicament. In this instance, a proponent employs the benefits frame, but delivers it through a personal story that brings its potential consequences to life. Like Mark’s story, it also draws on the discourse of victimhood to compel sympathy. Barb’s ‘vulnerability’ without the ‘security and protections’ of marriage would cause her family to ‘struggle’ if she were to die. The families of straight, married legislators would never need to worry about such circumstances.

Other narratives highlighted technical problems that arose when same-sex couples were governed by competing sets of laws. Carolyn described the complications that she and her spouse Leslie faced since their wedding. The pair were residents of Massachusetts, where their marriage was legally recognized, but Connecticut employees, paying taxes in two different states. Representative Lawlor inquired as to how they were able to acquire proof of identification in the state of Connecticut while being legally recognized as a couple only in Massachusetts. Carolyn explained that while there was no stipulation in Connecticut law, in one instance they were able to ‘convince’ Connecticut Department of Motor Vehicles employees to use their new, hyphenated last name on documents and identification, including their driver’s licenses, without the protection and security that come with filing the appropriate documentation in probate court, leaving the couple vulnerable. In his response, Representative Lawlor highlighted the legal contradiction and

practical consequences that the couple faced since they could not marry. He also connected the specific experience of Carolyn and Leslie to broader legal implications. 'I think in a way it's probably the best illustration of what's to come now with all these technical complications that are kind of boring to most people but very significant in the eyes of the law', he explained.

Opponents Frame Marriage: Traditional and Religious Definitions

Opponents used a package of frames that focused on 'moral decline' in American society. Their frames were abstract, and in contrast to proponents, they did not reference concrete realities, specific objectives, or actual instances of the problems they defined. The most frequent argument used by opponents to oppose same-sex marriage relied on a definition of marriage as the union of a man and a woman as a historical and culturally universal *tradition*. Opponents referred to the heterosexual family as 'well-established' or 'older than law' in order to emphasize its universality. They sought to define same-sex families as a risky departure from tradition that legislators should not be willing to undertake.

Marriage was also defined by opponents in terms of *religion*. In legitimating same-sex relationships, the state would be unwisely contradicting centuries of global religious teachings and traditions, the argument went. Resident Charles Redding argued that marriage was a sacrament from God that necessarily fell under the auspices of religion rather than the state. 'Marriage between a man and a woman is ordained of God, and the family is central to the creator's plan for the eternal destiny of his children', he declared. 'Christ's church accordingly favors measures that define marriage as the union of a man and a woman and that do not confer equal legal status on any other sexual relationship'. Similarly, Trevor Forbes declared that he and his wife, who stood at his side, 'feel that God has said [marriage] is between a man and a woman, and there's nothing else'.

In response, proponents reminded the audience of the separation of church and state, which prohibits the influence of religion on the construction of law as mandated by the USA Constitution. As Brian Brothman argued, 'There is a separation of church and state. You cannot enforce religious principles on anyone'. He went on to point to portions of the Bible that conveyed religious teachings that would be ridiculous if made into law. Brothman's argument provided a counterframing of opponents' religious definitions of marriage. LMF also countered religious definitions of marriage that preclude same-sex marriage by providing testimony about the number and size of open and affirming Christian denominations. Sarah Verasco, an ordained clergywoman, reported that the delegates to the annual meeting of The Connecticut Conference 'voted overwhelming' to pass a resolution in support of same-sex marriage. Challenging opponents' religious definitions of marriage, she recalled a time when marriage meant that a woman was the property of her husband, and reminded the audience that in the not-too-distant past interracial marriage was illegal. When proponents countered opponents, they avoided a narrative strategy altogether. Instead, they relied on a framing strategy to redefine the problem, and rendered opponents' frames antiquated, inaccurate, and even unconstitutional.

Traditional and religious definitions of marriage as the union of a man and a woman were challenged by those such as Representative Walker, who reoriented the terms of the debate by defining those who opposed same-sex marriage as discriminatory:

I actually looked up the definition [of marriage] in Webster's Dictionary, and it talked about a relationship and a union between two individuals. It didn't talk about a man or a woman. And usually, I use Webster as sort of my foundation of getting my definitions, just like discrimination [...] is when you deny somebody the right or the ability to have a choice.

In this instance, Walker not only challenged opponents' understanding of marriage, but also employed a frame that would be used repeatedly by proponents: the *discrimination/equality* frame.

Another prominent framing used by opponents involved the well-being of *children*. Opponents argued that the nuclear family was the best place to raise children, and that children need both a male and a female parent to develop a proper gender identity and appropriate heterosexual orientation in adulthood. Families headed by same-sex parents, they argued, necessarily denied children this 'right'. Executive Director of the FIC, Brian Brown, defined the problem, but was less precise about the consequences:

[W]hy do people know that marriage is the union of one man and one woman? [...] One of the most important is the simple truth that children do best with both a mother and a father. Two mommies or two daddies do not make up for a mom and a dad [...] It is a vast untested social experiment on our state's children.

Opponents failed to provide evidence in support of this claim, however, and no explanation of how such a 'social experiment' would affect children was offered. Legislators generally expressed frustration over Brown's refusal to support the legal recognition of same-sex couples. Representative Lawlor followed up after Brown's testimony:

You're just opposed to any kind of legal recognition of same-sex – the fact that there are same-sex couples who love each other, whatever, you're just opposed to that period. Is that right? [...] The reason I ask is because [...] no matter what the initiative is, if it has anything to do with homosexuality or gays or anything, it seems like many of the people who are quite vocal on behalf of your organization are against everything, whether its antidiscrimination or adoption or pretty much everything. Whatever it is, you're just against it.

Lawlor not only criticized Brown and his organization for being oppositional without an reasonable cause, but he also implicitly debased opponents' arguments across an entire realm of policies affecting gays and lesbians.

In some instances, legislators used opponents' testimonies to draw attention to conflicting ideas present in opponents' arguments or even to recast a position in opposition to same-sex marriage into one made in support. Bishop Rosazza, an esteemed member of the religious community and leader of the Catholic Church was questioned about his thoughts on children raised by same-sex parents. He argued that the purpose of marriage was *procreation*, and that since two people of the same sex could not 'naturally' procreate, they should not be allowed to marry. As an opponent of same-sex marriage, he nonetheless conceded that, faced with other sorts of alternatives, such as single-parent families or

foster care, a family headed by a same-sex couple was preferable, if not ideal. Senator McDonald carefully led the Bishop to come to this conclusion:

Senator McDonald: I understand the Church's position that the purpose of marriage is for the benefit of procreation. But for children who are already created and don't have a home, what for them? Is it better for them to live in an orphanage, if you will, or to live in a family with two committed individuals of the same sex?

Bishop Rosazza: I think yes. A home that would be provided for them rather than languish in an orphanage? Yes, if I had the choice I would say definitely.

Senator McDonald: It's a tough choice for you, I understand.

Bishop Rosazza: No, but definitely.

In his interaction with Rosazza, McDonald tested beliefs about the suitability of gay and lesbian households for children. A home in which there were 'committed individuals of the same sex' was much preferred to life in an orphanage. McDonald took the definition of marriage for the purpose of procreation and reoriented it to focus on a concrete instance of vulnerable children coming up against the law, skillfully leading the Bishop to admit that a gay or lesbian family could be a safe, loving place to raise a child.

Opponents argued that when combined with the prevalence of single-parent families, same-sex marriage would be the death knell of the American family. They argued that *societal decline* would be the most important and far-reaching consequence of the legalization of same-sex marriage. Envisioning a future dystopia of sorts, Nancy Stratford argued that same-sex marriage would ultimately support a culture in which gender was irrelevant not just to one's choice of partner, but to anything. She asked,

What will happen in generations to come where our society is completely different and we are a neuter society, where it's irrelevant if you're a man or a woman and where children have no basis to connect themselves to the gender that they were born? I believe that would definitely change our world as we know it.

Stratford's testimony was delivered in the abstract, alluding to the unsubstantiated and vague threat that same-sex marriage would 'change our world as we know it'. Stratford spoke of a future far-removed from the realities of the lives of gay and lesbian couples seeking access to marriage to protect themselves and their children in the present. Following up with Stratford, Senator Capiello asked, 'whether we pass this bill or not, what would change in the relationships between the two gentleman that were here before [Jeffrey and Stephen] and their son?' Since Jeffrey and Stephen's family was already in existence, Capiello wondered what crucial difference providing legal protection would make. Same-sex couples were already parents, and this seemed to be the source of Stratford's concern. Stratford did not directly answer Capiello's question about Jeffrey and Stephen's predicament. She instead informed him that she was not referring to 'what would happen right now in this generation', but to what would happen in generations to come. The distant and largely incomprehensible threat of a 'gender-neutral' society did

not appear compelling to legislators, who were still attempting to arrive at a solution to Jeffrey and Stephen's immediate problem.

Proponents also responded to the argument that same-sex marriage would weaken the institution of marriage by arguing that it would actually *strengthen marriage*. Husband and wife Ian Ayres and Jennifer Brown expressed how troubled they were that as a heterosexual couple they could marry, while their gay and lesbian friends could not. Jennifer publically praised the rector of her church for halting all marriages performed by him in order to put an end to discrimination against gay and lesbian couples. 'So you can see that the state's discrimination against same-sex couples is weakening heterosexual marriage because it's causing churches to refuse to marry heterosexual couples,' Jennifer concluded. Proponents countered the arguments of opponents that the legitimization of gay and lesbian relationships was indicative of societal decline.

In other instances, legislators countered opponents' challenges to same-sex marriage and homosexuality, drawing on LMF's support of positive rights (Pierceson, 2005), which call for a proactive legislative roll on the part of the state in protecting vulnerable citizens. Though it has become less salient in recent decades, several opponents employed a *sickness/sin* understand of homosexuality (Herman, 1997). As one young mother put it, '[W]e know that, you know, Sodom and Gomorrah were destroyed because of homosexuality. We know that it's listed as an abomination before God'. Sickness/sin arguments were often dissected, and their logic unraveled and turned on its head. Carl Erickson vehemently opposed the bill, but more specifically, homosexuality, which he framed as an illness that could be 'cured' with the proper treatment:

Given recognition, homosexual behavior will certainly increase, with more and more individuals enticed to pursue acceptance in what I believe is a valueless community. Why is this a problem? Because the homosexual population is plagued with diseases such as hepatitis, AIDS, and other sexually transmitted diseases. Monogamy is almost unheard of in the gay community.

Representative Lawlor pursued a line of questioning that not only challenged the credibility of the presenter and the logic of his argument, but in doing so, he positioned gays and lesbians as a legitimate status-based group deserving of state protection, and further suggested that same-sex marriage might alleviate some of the presumed problems to which Erickson referred:

Representative Lawlor: It seems to me that one of the major concerns you have about homosexuality is promiscuity. Is that fair to say?

Carl Erickson: It is indicative, yes.

Representative Lawlor: Wouldn't it be a smart idea if we had a public policy that encouraged monogamy for gays and lesbians as much as it does for heterosexuals? Wouldn't that be a good idea?

Erickson paused briefly and replied:

No. I don't think it would be a good idea [...]. I think it's an impossible, what you're asking is, I think, a virtual impossible [...]. That is a huge social experiment and who will bear the costs for that? It will be this generation's children and the generations to follow after them.

Like other opponents, Erickson referred to the impact of same-sex marriage on future generations, but failed to specify concretely what that might be.

Other opponents tried to discredit the notion that sexuality constituted a minority status, a strategy used in litigation to challenge the notion that gays and lesbians constitute a 'suspect' or 'quasi-suspect' class, and are thus entitled to anti-discrimination protections on those grounds (Smith, 2007). Reverend White, one of three opponents to deploy the *lifestyle* understanding of homosexuality, argued that homosexuality was not a biological reality or naturally occurring phenomenon, but an individual 'choice', and thus unequal to categories such as race or gender, which legitimately entitled one to state protection.

Representative Lawlor agreed with White that there were divergent views on the origin of homosexuality, but he came to a different sort of conclusion, again implying a proactive role for the state in protecting gay and lesbian citizens:

So let me just ask you, if someone like myself or I think many others who think that you're either born gay or straight or whatever, if that's what you think, then that logically would follow that we should open up the institution of marriage for people who are gay. Does that make sense?

White explained that even if something is unchangeable, it does not mean that 'we should support or legalize that behavior'. He then likened 'homosexuals' to pedophiles, whose chances of relinquishing their sexually deviant behavior was highly unlikely, in his estimation. Like other arguments against same-sex marriage, White's testimony was far-removed from the daily trials and tribulations associated with family life. Connecticut allowed gays and lesbians to access reproductive technology, and allowed gay and lesbian couples to adopt children. These families already existed, and thus his argument was cast as incredible.

Discussion and Conclusion

This research demonstrates how narrative and frame can be deployed simultaneously. Existing work acknowledges that while they are structurally distinct, frames and narratives can perform many of the same tasks, from recruitment and mobilization, to collective identity development, to external deployment for legal and policy outcomes. Why do activists choose a narrative strategy? Where does its advantage lie? If the well-documented 'injustice frame' (Benford & Hunt, 1992; Jenness, 1995) can perform tasks similar to narratives of victimization, for instance, why do activists choose to tell stories? Connecticut's Judiciary Committee is well versed in many of the common frames deployed by LMF regarding gay and lesbian rights. The information they lacked related to the ways that existing legal conditions affected gay and lesbian citizens and their own experiences with the law. The audience *wanted* to hear their stories, and actively participated in their clarification, amplification, and in the bridging of stories with relevant frames. Legislators responded most frequently and at the greatest length

to testimonies that were delivered in the form of a narrative; they invited interaction. In contrast, it is likely that opponents were structurally unable to use a narrative strategy, given their non-victim status. In contrast to proponents, opponents stuck to a framing strategy that relied on abstract notions of moral and social decline, which drew objection from legislators, and who in turn used proponents' narratives to highlight their victimhood.

This study also suggests that 'resonance', as it's currently defined, should be expanded to include the ways that narratives are effective. Frames do not necessarily need to be technical, rational, or expert to be effective, nor do narratives rely solely on their emotional content to persuade. They interweave frames, bringing personal stories vividly to life, especially by highlighting real life conflicts and consequences. Nor do storytellers need to be credentialed. As members of a discernable minority group, gay and lesbian citizens and their supporters told powerful, compelling stories without expert evidence or the authority of professional credentials. In fact, credentials and institutional authority may render narratives *less* effective, since they are at odds with the purpose of providing personal accounts by the average person most likely to be affected by certain conditions.

The use of narrative and frame by the gay and lesbian rights movement reflects the skillful negotiation of victimhood and rights to gain important legal protections. This study begins to flesh out the relationship between frame and narrative. A comparative case could identify additional variables that affect the use of discursive strategies and their effectiveness, and ultimately the conditions most likely to produce progressive social change.

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