

A qualitative exploration of the impact of the marriage equality debate on same-sex attracted Australians and their allies

Joel R. Anderson^{1,2}  | Marianne Campbell¹ | Yasin Koc³ 

¹School of Behavioural and Health Sciences, Australian Catholic University, Melbourne, Australia

²Australian Research Centre in Sex, Health and Society, La Trobe University, Melbourne, Australia

³Department of Social Psychology, University of Groningen, Netherlands

Correspondence

Joel R. Anderson, School of Behavioural and Health Sciences, Australian Catholic University, Melbourne Campus (St Patrick), Locked Bag 4115, Victoria 3065, Australia.

Email: joel.anderson@acu.edu.au

Abstract

Objective: In 2017, the Australian Government announced that a voluntary postal survey would be used to quantify the views of the Australian public on marriage equality. This non-binding, voluntary postal survey—and the associated public debate—can be viewed as a discriminatory event for same-sex attracted Australians. The exacerbation of minority stress likely imposed by this unexpected event has resulted in an unprecedented demand for psychological services by members of this community. Despite this surge of use, relatively little is known about the specifics of the impact of this discriminatory event.

Method: In this article, we present the findings of a thematic analysis of semi-structured interviews that qualitatively examined the impact of the marriage equality debate among a sample of 14 Australians (eight sexual minority and six affected ‘allies’).

Results: Two themes were identified from the interviews, each with four sub-themes: (a) *personal impacts* (emotional wellbeing, empathic concern, devaluation, and connection to religion), and (b) *social impacts* (activism, avoidant behaviour, social connections, and societal perceptions).

Conclusions: Overall, the findings of the current study reveal a range of intra- and inter-personal negative impacts of public debate about the equal rights of same-sex attracted people to marry. Moreover, the results suggest that the impact is not only on this minority and at-risk group but also on their heterosexual allies. These results can help inform future policy with the aim of decreasing minority stress experienced by same-sex attracted people.

KEYWORDS

gay, lesbian, LGBTIQ, marriage, marriage equality, minority stress

1 | INTRODUCTION

Marriage equality has been a contentious social issue in Australia for over a decade with a tumultuous political history. In 2004, two Australian same-sex couples initiated proceedings in the Family Court to have their Canadian marriages recognised in Australia (Farouque, 2004; Tomlins, 2004). However, before their cases were heard, the Howard Liberal Government passed the *Marriage Amendment Act* (2004) (Cth) to prevent Australian courts from recognising same-sex marriages. By specifically (re) defining marriage as the ‘union of a man and a woman to the exclusion of all others’,¹ the Australian Government actively removed legislative ambiguity to prevent same-sex couples from being able to legally marry or have their overseas marriages recognised in Australia. Several years later, same-sex marriage was legalised in the Australian Capital Territory after the *Marriage Equality (Same Sex) Act* (2013) was passed by the Australian Capital Territory Legislative Assembly. However, 5 days after it was implemented, the federal High Court unanimously voted to retract this Act in its entirety, voiding the 31 marriages that had already occurred (Marszalek, 2013). The High Court’s decision resulted in the prevention of concurrent state or territory laws that allowed same-sex marriage where federal law did not (Nielsen, 2013). This ruling, along with the *Marriage Amendment Act* (2004) (Cth), can be considered a clear example of institutionalised discrimination against same-sex attracted (SSA) individuals (see Anderson, Georgantis, & Kapelles, 2017; Herek & McLemore, 2013).

In August 2017, the Australian Government announced that a non-binding voluntary postal survey (*The Australian Marriage Law Postal Survey*) would be used to officially determine the view of the Australian public on whether same-sex couples should be allowed to marry (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2017). The Australian government allocated \$122 million to pay for the postal survey from Government funds designated for ‘urgent and unforeseen circumstances’ (Karp, 2017). If a simple majority voted ‘Yes’, the Australian Government would allow a bill legalising same-sex marriage to be introduced in parliament (Turnbull, 2017). The survey targeted any adult Australian citizen on the electoral roll and had the explicit aim of informing policy, thus resembling a referendum or plebiscite. However, voting in the survey was voluntary, and in addition, the results were informative and non-binding (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2017). As such, the survey was legally redundant to holding a conscience vote on same-sex marriage in parliament and was therefore criticised as being an expensive delaying tactic (Harris, 2017).

WHAT IS ALREADY KNOWN

1. A non-binding, voluntary postal survey was used to quantify the views of the Australian public on marriage equality—following this, the legislation was modified to allow marriage beyond the traditional man–woman dyad.
2. The associated public debate was a discriminatory event for same-sex attracted Australians, and this unexpected event exacerbated minority stress experienced this at-risk group.
3. Research has yet to explore the specifics of the impact of this discriminatory event.

WHAT THIS PAPER ADDS

1. A range of impact types emerged which could be broadly classified as personal or societal impacts.
2. The majority of impacts were negative and experienced pervasively by all same-sex attracted participants.
3. In addition, these same impacts were also experienced by heterosexual allies, albeit to a lesser degree.

Even before the postal survey was announced, relevant national bodies (including the Australian Psychological Society, 2016) emphasised the damaging effect that a public debate and the associated devaluing social discourse could have on same-sex attracted individuals (i.e., non-heterosexuals, which includes lesbian women, gay men, bisexual men and women, individuals as well as those transgender, intersex, and queer individuals who are same-sex attracted).² In fact, a 2015 inquiry into the Australian Government’s proposed plebiscite on marriage equality recommended against a popular vote on same-sex marriage due to significant concerns surrounding the potential negative impact on same-sex attracted Australians (Legal and Constitutional Affairs References Committee, 2015). Relevant support groups emphasised that voting on marriage equality would devalue the status of sexual minority people by treating them separately from regular parliamentary votes and would subject them to homophobia and harassment in the lead-up to the vote (Just.Equal, 2017).

The Australian Marriage Law Postal Survey was followed by the eventual legalisation of same-sex marriage in Australia in December 2017; however, the process of being surveyed and the associated public debate

about marriage equality caused considerable harm to the psychological and emotional wellbeing of same-sex attracted Australians (Ecker & Bennett, 2017). Through various campaign techniques, opponents of marriage equality publicly questioned the normality and morality of people who are involved in same-sex relationships or identify as same-sex attracted (Quinn, 2018). Figure 1 presents an example of such an advertisement, which has been criticised for its unfounded base which is reliant on misinformation and harmful stereotypes.

Exposure to such negative media messages was found to have an impact on same-sex attracted Australians during the survey period (Verrelli, White, Harvey, & Pulciani, 2019). More specifically, in an online survey of 1,305 lesbian, gay, and bisexual Australians, more frequent exposure to such messages was associated with greater psychological distress, and this was particularly pronounced for individuals without personal support for same-sex marriage from their immediate social circles. Similar findings were reported by Anderson, Dredge, and Koc (2020) who reported that increased engagement with the marriage equality debate via social media negatively impacted their 'yes voting' participant levels of mental health and wellbeing, regardless of their sexual minority status. Unsurprisingly, this period was associated with increases in the number of same-sex attracted Australians seeking help for mental health issues such as depression and anxiety (Gartrell, 2017). According to one survey, more than 90% of LGBTIQ+ Australians reported that the postal vote had a negative impact on them (Ecker & Bennett, 2017), and a large-scale study reported that over three-quarters of their 3,300 LGBTI participants were negatively impacted by the survey and two-thirds found their experiences during the period of the postal survey

to be worse than anticipated (Just.Equal, 2017). These findings are in line with research conducted in the United States, where LGB people reported intense feelings of alienation and anger as a result of the devaluing social discourse associated with public debate about marriage equality (Rostosky, Riggle, Horne, Denton, & Huellemeier, 2010; Rostosky, Riggle, Horne, & Miller, 2009).

2 | MINORITY STRESS THEORY: EVIDENCE FROM THE AUSTRALIAN POSTAL SURVEY

Theoretical conceptualisations of *minority stress* can be used to explain the negative impacts on the psychosocial wellbeing of same-sex attracted individuals being exacerbated as a result of the Australian Marriage Law Postal Survey and the associated public debate. The minority stress model suggests that there are stigma, prejudice, and discrimination experienced by individuals in minority groups that are unique and persistent psychosocial stressors, and that these stressors exist as a function of being a minority group member and are not experienced by individuals who do not have this minority group membership (Meyer, 1995, 2003). Due to their minority status, same-sex attracted individuals are continually exposed to external stressors such as the experience or threat of hate-based discrimination and violence (which has been linked to attitudes towards same-sex marriage, see Anderson, Koc, & Falomir-Pichastor, 2018) as well as internal stressors, such as rejection expectation, identity concealment, and internalised stigma (Meyer, 2003). The minority stress model proposes that as a result of these

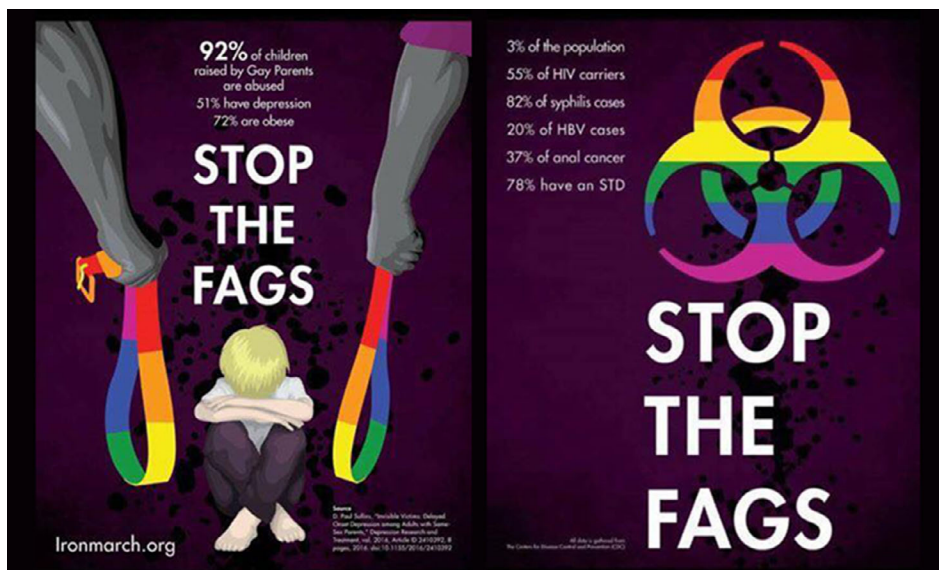


FIGURE 1 'Stop the Fags' (Murphy, 2017)

stressors, same-sex attracted individuals are at increased risk of psychological distress and mental and physical disorders (Cochran, 2001). Compared to their heterosexual counterparts, same-sex attracted Australians are three and a half times more likely to be diagnosed with anxiety and three times more likely to be diagnosed with a depressive disorder in their lifetime (National LGBTI Health Alliance, 2016). Same-sex attracted people also have the highest rates of suicidality of any population in Australia, with sexual minority Australians up to 14 times more likely to attempt to end their own life than their heterosexual peers (Rosenstreich, 2013).

The extant research exploring the impact of the postal survey and the associated debate on same-sex attracted people and has used mainly quantitative methods—A single study has used qualitative methods to explore these impacts (Ecker, Rostosky, Riggle, Riley, & Byrnes, 2019), in which they asked participants to share their feelings about the postal survey in an open-ended question format. Across their large data set of responses ($n = 5,313$), participants described perceptions of perceived impacts of the intrapersonal, interpersonal, and institutional levels. There are advantages to qualitative methods, particularly when the research question is exploratory, as it can elicit rich and nuanced data that can be missed using quantitative methods (Hammarberg, Kirkman, & de Lacey, 2016). However, this qualitative research was conducted online and elicited relatively short answers ($M = 83$ words). It is worth noting that the question eliciting this data was at the end of a fairly extensive quantitative questionnaire on stress, psychological distress, and coping. As such, these qualitative responses might have been influenced by the previous questions and might explain the shorter (and potentially less nuanced) answers provided by their sample. The first major aim of this article is to conduct the first in-depth qualitative exploration of the impacts of the postal survey and the surrounding debate on same-sex attracted Australians.

3 | STIGMA-BY-ASSOCIATION: MINORITY STRESS EFFECTS ON ALLIES

There is some evidence that sexual minority stress effects impact not only same-sex attracted people but also their heterosexual counterparts. One explanation for this could be based in the knowledge that supportive family members and friends (i.e., *allies*) can be the victims of stigma by association (e.g., devaluing or derogating the heterosexual person because of their association with a sexual minority or gender diverse person; Neuberg, Smith,

Hoffman, & Russell, 1994). As such, allies may experience a version of the unique and persistent psychosocial stressors faced by same-sex attracted people, and thus may also be impacted by sexual minority stress. For example, in a study, the supportive family members of GLBT people in the United States were interviewed during a period where their state-law was facing an amendment to limit marriage to only heterosexual people. They found that this process negatively impacted the physical and mental health of these family members, in addition to their personal relationships and their perspectives about the United States and its government (Arm, Horne, & Levitt, 2009). Another study revealed that family members of LGBTIQ people in states that had passed such an amendment to restrict marriage recognition reported greater negative affect than family members that did not make this amendment. Importantly, these family members reported levels of negative affect that were similar to their LGB family members (although they reported less increases in stress; Horne, Rostosky, & Riggle, 2011).

A large-scale study from Australia collected data during the period of the postal survey debate ($n = 7,390$) explored the relationship between debate-specific stress and general psychological distress in a sample of self-identifying LGBTIQ people (78%) and their allies (22%; Ecker, Riggle, Rostosky, & Byrnes, 2019). They found that debate-specific stress was the strongest predictor of psychological distress for both the LGBTIQ individuals ($sr^2 = .23$) and their allies ($sr^2 = .14$) in their sample. Anderson & Koc (2020b) also found strong evidence that the postal that both same-sex attracted and opposite sex attracted transgender and gender diverse Australians suffered from poor mental health and wellbeing during the period of the postal survey. Taken together, these findings are revealing a pattern of sexual minority stress effects on non-heterosexual individuals. While the effects of debate-related stress were stronger for LGBTIQ people than for allies (Ecker, Riggle, et al., 2019; Ecker, Rostosky, et al., 2019) and for same-sex attracted gender diverse individuals than opposite-sex attracted gender diverse individuals, these studies provides evidence for the impact of sexual minority stress on heterosexual individuals. The second major aim of this article is to add to this literature by conducting an in-depth qualitative exploration to establish the range of the impacts of the postal survey and the surrounding debate on allies.

4 | THE CURRENT STUDY

The Australian Marriage Law Postal Survey and the associated public debate regarding marriage equality can be viewed as a discriminatory event for same-sex attracted

Australians. As a result of the exacerbation of minority stress likely imposed by this unexpected event, unprecedented demands for psychological services by LGBTIQ individuals were observed. Despite this surge in help-seeking behaviour, relatively little is known about the specifics of the impact of this discriminatory event.

A small body of research has explored the impact of this discriminatory event on same-sex attracted people and has used mainly quantitative methods (Ecker, Riggle, et al., 2019; Ecker, Rostosky, et al., 2019; Just.Equal, 2017; Verrelli et al., 2019; Anderson, Dredge, et al., 2020). A smaller body of research study has explored the impact of this discriminatory event on LGBTIQ *allies*, and has only used quantitative methods (Ecker, Riggle, et al., 2019; Anderson, Koc, et al., 2020). To our knowledge, no research has used qualitative methods to explore these impacts for allies.

In this article, we present the findings of a study using face-to-face, in-depth qualitative interviews to explore the aims of the current study—to examine the impact of the Australian Marriage Law Postal Survey and the associated public debate about marriage equality. This existing literature on this topic is relatively small, and in particular, ours is one of few studies to explore both the impact on both same-sex attracted Australians *and* their allies.

5 | METHOD

5.1 | Interview schedule

Data were collected through a series of individual, semi-structured interviews using an interview schedule developed for the purpose of this research. The interview schedule divided questions into four categories: (a) demographic information (including questions about age, gender, and sexual orientation), (b) level of engagement with the marriage equality debate, (c) general impact/s of the marriage equality debate, and (d) the specific impact/s of purposely engaging with the marriage equality debate on participants. Questions were purposefully designed to be open-ended and non-leading in order to elicit comprehensive participant responses about their experiences.

5.2 | Participants and procedure

Participants self-selected into the study in response to widely circulated paid advertisements on Facebook. When participants responded to the advertisement, they were given the option of participating in a quantitative survey or this qualitative study (for those individuals based in Melbourne, Australia). Those who expressed interest in the

qualitative research were invited via email to arrange a time and location of mutual convenience with the interviewer (the first author of this article conducted all interviews). Following a short introduction to the study and a confidentiality statement, participants agreed to the terms of their participation and provided written consent. The sample were 14 Australians ($M_{\text{age}} = 30.14$ years, $SD = 9.27$) who self-selected to be interviewed as a result of being affected by the marriage equality postal survey. More specifically, the sample were eight self-identified sexual minority Australians (2 female, 6 male; 6 gay, 1 bisexual, 1 gay queer demisexual pansexual) and six self-identified heterosexual allies (i.e., heterosexual individuals who actively support the social and legal equality of same-sex attracted people; 5 female, 1 male). Participants were aged 18 years old or over, were based in Melbourne, and participated as volunteers (i.e., there was no incentive). All participants reported supporting same-sex marriage.

Participation involved a one-on-one semi-structured interview with the researcher that lasted between 14 and 39 minutes ($M = 26$) and were digitally recorded. A semi-structured approach allowed the interviewer to address themes relevant to the research question while also allowing relevant avenues of enquiry that were opened by the participants to be followed. All interviews were conducted in English. Upon the interview's natural resolution, participants were provided with a debriefing statement and a directory of psychological services. Interviews were conducted in October of 2017, during the voting period of the Australian Marriage Law Postal Survey (12 September 2017 to 7 November 2017).

5.3 | Analysis

All interviews were transcribed verbatim and analysed using semantic thematic analysis as outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006). The transcribed interviews were entered into NVivo (2018). Once the transcribed interviews had been read a number of times to ensure familiarity with the data and gain an overall understanding of participant responses, preliminary codes were generated from the participants' dialogue based on reoccurring patterns. These preliminary codes were then developed into clusters of codes based on similarity of participants' experiences. Finally, these clusters were revised into meaningful themes and named.

6 | RESULTS

The data were examined to explore the impact of the marriage equality debate on a sample of sexual minority

Australians and their allies. Participants' narratives were analysed and two major themes were attained: (a) personal impacts and (b) social impacts. A number of sub-themes were found within these two themes, which are outlined later.

On average, the length of interview transcripts was 1,921 words, with 52.5% of each transcript consisting of content relevant to one of the two themes. Of this, 36.1% of interview transcripts referred to personal impacts, and 63.9% referred to social impacts. The themes and subthemes are described later and include direct participant quotations to illustrate key points. Quotations are accompanied by self-reported age, sexual orientation, and gender identity.

6.1 | Personal impacts of the marriage equality debate

A significant theme found in the interviews was the personal impact that the marriage equality debate had on both sexual minority and allied participants. Participants described a range of personal outcomes, resulting in four subthemes: impacts to emotional wellbeing; empathic concern for same-sex attracted people; feelings of being devalued; and personal connection to religion. Sexual minority participants were particularly vulnerable to these personal impacts when compared to their heterosexual counterparts.

6.2 | Emotional wellbeing

I feel diminished...I'm very aware of how I'm feeling constantly...It's certainly a stressor that I don't normally have to deal with. (Participant #3, 46-year-old gay queer demisexual pansexual male).

The emotional impact of the marriage equality debate was highlighted throughout participants' dialogues. Every participant reported experiencing emotional distress to some extent, with sexual minority participants consistently reporting more frequent and intense impacts to their emotional wellbeing when compared with their allied counterparts. Overall, four main categories of emotions were apparent throughout the data: anger, stress, sadness, and hope.

The majority of sexual minority ($n = 6$) and allied ($n = 4$) participants described feelings of anger and frustration, which were directed in large at people who did not support marriage equality. Several participants described feeling frustrated and critical of no voters due to their 'ignorance' and 'close-mindedness'. Participants

also reported anger regarding the misinformation and misrepresentation of same-sex attracted people in the no campaign's advertisements. Campaigns were perceived to essentialise the many sexual orientations and identities that sexual minority Australians have, and reduced these into one single homogeneous category:

Some of the no stuff—definitely around people making general assumptions around my sexual orientation—feels negative because it's just lumping everyone together, and that definitely makes me feel angry. (Participant #4, 27-year-old gay male).

Moreover, feelings of sadness were common among both sexual minority ($n = 4$) and allied ($n = 3$) participants. These feelings were repeatedly attributed to the negative attitudes towards same-sex attracted people that participants had been exposed to during the debate:

Like the billboards and stuff, that makes me sad, like instantly...you know, you're driving and see a billboard like that and I'm just like why does that even exist... (Participant #14, 23-year-old straight female; see Figure 1).

A number of sexual minority ($n = 3$) and allied ($n = 1$) participants also reported feeling stressed and anxious as a result of the debate. Sexual minority participants in particular described the stress they were experiencing as constant and consuming:

Is it impeding on how I feel? Yeah it is. It's that fight-or-flight feeling—that's what it is—and it's always there...it's always there and it's very much related to this debate. (Participant #7, 47-year-old gay male).

Experiences of stress was not only limited to psychological stress. One participant also emphasised the physical stress he was experiencing and how it turned him into a 'teary person':

It's impacted me a lot—more than I expected. For example, I'm normally a fairly bright and bubbly guy, but since this all started I've felt like I might cry at any second...like it might just start without warning. It's clearly having a stress, a physical impact, for it all to make me feel like I'm about to cry when I'm not normally a teary person. (Participant #3, 46-year-old gay queer demisexual pansexual male).

On the other hand, a small number of participants (2 sexual minority, 1 ally) also reported feelings of hope, attributing to their optimism that the debate would eventually result in the legalisation of same-sex marriage:

I still feel a great sense of hope, because I know that this argument is really bound to resolve itself eventually. I know that there's people who think like I do...and I know that that's increasing...So I still feel hopeful. (Participant #2, 25-year-old mostly gay female).

Overall, all participants reported elevated levels of predominantly negative emotions due to the debate, and how this affected their wellbeing. However, for some, the debate also ignited hope through which they expected change to happen.

6.2.1 | Empathic concern and solidarity

Sexual minority ($n = 3$) and allied ($n = 1$) participants described feeling concerned and upset for same-sex attracted Australians:

It affects me more indirectly when I see people that are within our community. They're so upset by the fact that they can't make that choice for themselves...that's how it affects me...because I identify as part of that community. (Participant #6, 44-year old gay male).

In particular, participants spoke about their concerns that the debate would have a significant negative impact on younger same-sex attracted Australians:

It's stuff that I've had to live though before, which is where my concern of people who haven't being exposed to this...I'm going use the term homophobia because that's what I'm seeing...they're not going to know how to cope with that and they don't have the coping mechanisms to see themselves through it...I have grave concerns for younger same-sex identified people who probably haven't experienced that and are going through it for the first time. (Participant #7, 47-year-old gay male).

Both examples clearly indicate that the debate was not a personal issue for the participants, but it was about their social identity of being same-sex attracted (or of

identifying as an ally). They were concerned because their agency was disrupted when they were not allowed to make their own choice about marriage. Moreover, they were concerned about younger members of their community, because they did not have the right skills to cope with such societal negative attitudes. Participant #7 had experienced such negative attitudes when he was young, and now as a 47-year-old man, he knew how to deal with it. However, he was concerned for younger people because the debate had brought the 'homophobia' back into their lives which was once thought dead. Overall, through empathic concern towards the ingroup members, this debate seems to have increased solidarity among same-sex attracted Australians.

6.2.2 | Devaluation

The vast majority of sexual minority participants ($n = 7$) reported feeling dehumanised and devalued as a result of the debate. Participants expressed that by debating the right of someone to marry a same-sex partner, sexual minority people were being considered as less than human:

It's offensive even to think that you can debate a small group of people's right to do or to not do something, to debate whether I not I should be allowed to take part in something that's so central to being human... (Participant #3, 46-year-old gay queer demisexual pansexual male).

Feelings of being devalued were fostered by the fact that participants' agency was taken away from them, not only because they were not allowed to marry whom-ever they want, but also the decision to change this was given to the whole society. This clearly disrupted their sense of agency and right to choose, making them less of a human. Moreover, the devaluation of same-sex relationships also had an impact on participants' sense of self:

The thing that is challenging when I do read the comments is the way that – and I'm going to have to use the word 'devalued', only because I can't think of anything else - devalue my rights as a person. The love and commitment I've made to somebody just isn't the same as what two other people can do. The fact that they can be two consenting adults and joined into a union under law but I'm unable to do so makes me feel like I'm

somehow inferior and unable to make my own decisions. (Participant #5, 36-year-old gay male).

The devaluation of same-sex relationships heightened the differences between heterosexual society and the LGBTIQ minority. The disadvantaged faced by the minority became more salient during the debate, and this made them feel inferior.

6.2.3 | Re-evaluating the connection to religion

Although the majority of participants reported that they were not religious, the small number (1 sexual minority, 2 allies) who did describe themselves as practicing a religion all highlighted the changing attitudes towards their faith and their church they had experienced as a result of the debate. Some described a decline in their personal devotion to religious practice:

There was one church service I went to in particular that was awful, they bought in a guest speaker who apparently had a gay friend who was cured magically or whatever...and just the way he talked about LGBT people made it seem like we're diseased. That was the last service I attended in the last few months. I haven't gone back since. (Participant #8, 27-year-old bisexual female).

Clearly, this person experienced exclusion from her social group. However, as a person who identifies both religious and bisexual, this exclusion creates identity conflict where one does not feel accepted by their own group members, which is related to isolation and negative well-being outcomes. Similarly, other participants described their changing relationship with their faith:

I was a Christian until very recently, when I started realizing that my beliefs did not gel with what the church was telling me I should believe. I have found that during this debate I have wanted to keep removing myself further and further from the church. I no longer see love and support in the church, I only see a lot of hate and bigotry. (Participant #14, 23-year-old straight female).

In both cases, it is clear that the debate resulted in identity threat for both participants. They both coped with this by reducing their identification with their faith

or completely giving up on their religion. However, known as negative religious coping, this type of coping is not beneficial for the self and is linked to negative mental health outcomes. Therefore, it can be said that the religious discourses around the debate not only threatened the non-religious same-sex attracted individuals and allies, but also religious same-sex attracted individuals and allies had to re-evaluate their connection to their faith.

6.3 | Social impacts of the marriage equality debate

The second major theme emerging from the interviews was the social impact the marriage equality debate had on both sexual minority and allied participants. Participants described how the debate had resulted in a range of social impacts, resulting in four subthemes: activism, avoidant behaviour; social connections; and societal perceptions.

6.3.1 | Activism as a double-edged sword

Sexual minority ($n = 7$) and allied ($n = 2$) participants commented that the debate had influenced them to publicly advocate for same-sex marriage and increase their involvement in same-sex marriage activism-related activity:

I spent some time last week delivering posters to local businesses in my area about yes [campaign]. Simply because I think it is something that I do believe in so it's important to get amongst. (Participant #5, 36-year-old gay male).

Other forms of activism included participants frequently using social media to express their support of same-sex marriage:

I remember when they first said that the vote was going public...I put up a status on Facebook saying 'I'm so excited—I can finally vote yes.' (Participant #9, 22-year-old straight female).

Together with the emotions like anger created as a response to the debate and developing an empathic concern for same-sex attracted individuals and their allies, some participants felt that engaging in activism was one way to address the injustice they felt about the debate.

These are known as typical drivers of collective action for social change (i.e., anger, efficacy, ingroup identification; Van Zomeren, Postmes, & Spears, 2008), and both sexual minority and allied participants engaged with these factors.

On the other hand, some participants also described the negative effects of activism, often reporting feeling conflicted between wanting to advocate for same-sex marriage, but feeling as though they needed to avoid engaging in the debate for their own wellbeing:

I'm actually getting to the point that I need to actually just stay away from Facebook. It's a catch-22 because you feel compelled to partake, you read some of the comments...it does impact you and you go 'I shouldn't be doing that' but then there's that other part that goes 'but I should be because I need to actually give that balanced view'. There's almost a tug of war going on - I need to stand up for myself and my people, but at the same time it's not great for my own well-being to be privy to some of the hateful speech that's actually come through. (Participant #7, 47-year-old gay male).

6.3.2 | Avoidant behaviour as coping

Similar to the participant above who felt ambivalent about activism, every sexual minority participant ($n = 8$) and most allied participants ($n = 5$) also reported instances of actively avoiding becoming involved in the debate in order to reduce the negative impacts of the debate on their emotional wellbeing.

When I went on Facebook it was just constantly about the same-sex marriage debate over and over again, it was just depressing and I didn't want to go on Facebook anymore. I started hiding things, unliking a few pages. I hid a few people I know from church who I had on Facebook because their posts were really irritating me. (Participant #8, 27-year-old bisexual female).

As can be seen, this is a coping strategy to protect their wellbeing by reducing the exposure to the debate especially through social media or through people who reminded them of larger structural drivers of this debate like the Church. For some participants, this meant withdrawing socially in real life beyond social media:

I don't meet new people anymore, and I keep to myself... Cause I just don't wanna get hurt...I wake up and I start the day now as a cold bitch... like it's my starting point now, to avoid getting hurt. It's now my daily routine - I start on a more intense level of distance... more and more distance between myself and other people... (Participant #2, 25-year-old mostly gay female).

Overall, avoidant behaviour was used as a coping strategy to protect wellbeing from the negative impact of the debate.

6.3.3 | Social connections at stake

The implications of the marriage equality debate on participants' social connections were highlighted throughout participants' dialogue. These impacts were often dependent on whether there was a similarity or difference in opinion regarding same-sex marriage, with all sexual minority ($n = 8$) and many allied ($n = 4$) participants reporting a clear impact on their social connections:

It strangely made me really aware of all the people who would want same-sex marriage, and I guess surprised me by some people who were like suddenly on social media piping up about it and it gives me a bit more respect for those people. (Participant #14, 23-year-old straight female).

I was just like 'whoa, I never expected you guys to be so closed and judgmental', so I just cut them out of my life... (Participant #9, 22-year-old straight female).

In these examples, it is clear to see that participants were positively surprised to see some support for their choices and more broadly for their identities. However, there were also other cases where this was not always positive. In general, for existing relationships, the severity of the impact of the debate was often contingent on the nature of their current relationship. In particular, both sexual minority ($n = 7$) and allied ($n = 2$) participants described the ways in which the debate had accentuated the existing quality of their current relationships with family members, in either a positive or negative direction:

I've got a really supportive family who are even more supportive now. (Participant #5, 36-year-old gay male).

I can see that there are some extremely homophobic tendencies to him [his brother] which infuriates me...so there are tensions there. Would I talk about same-sex marriage with him? I'm barely talking to him so I wouldn't even approach the topic with him. (Participant #7, 47-year-old gay male).

The impact of the debate on sexual minority participants' friendships was less severe than on their family relationships as the majority reported that they would be unlikely to come across people who did not support marriage equality within their friendship circles:

I don't have any friends who aren't supportive of same-sex marriage. (Participant #7, 47-year-old gay male).

In contrast, allied participants often reported that 'no' voters existed within their social networks, but that they avoided discussing the topic in order to prevent conflict:

I know people who might vote no. Some of my friends have very strong views and I think they might vote no...you can sort of feel just everyone's discomfort around the issue. Because there's so much controversy, everyone believes in different things...but I think because no one brings it up I don't say anything about it. (Participant #13, 26-year-old straight female)

Overall, there was evidence from every participant that they had needed to re-evaluate their social connections to others in the light of the debate. Participants mostly reported an increase in strain placed on their relationships, typically based in finding out that either new or existing social connections were against marriage equality. Participants either reported conflict with these people, or the need to engage in avoidant behaviour to circumvent the potential conflict. Less commonly, participants reported that they (sometimes unexpectedly) found support for marriage equality in their social connections. Participants mostly reported this as strengthening their ties to their family and friends, but none with new social connections (indeed, most reported avoiding making new social connections during the period of the debate surrounding the postal survey. Interestingly, these strengthened social connections may function as protective factor against minority stress (Meyer, 2003) and suggest that there are positive implications for coping and wellbeing (e.g., social cure approach, Jetten et al., 2017).

6.3.4 | Reactions to societal perceptions

The majority of sexual minority ($n = 8$) and allied ($n = 3$) participants reported how the debate had impacted their view of Australian society, commenting that they felt as though society was moving 'backwards' in terms of equality and human rights:

It's almost like society is trying to push you back into that closet...so it's really going backwards. (Participant #7, 47-year-old gay male).

It makes me think 'is this really the direction that society's going in'...like it kind of makes me worry about the future. (Participant #11, 28-year-old straight male).

In some sense, this could be interpreted as disappointment in their own society. Sexual minority participants ($n = 3$) commented that the debate had made them feel alienated as citizens of Australia and that they would consider moving to another country if same-sex marriage was not legalised as a result of the postal survey:

I can't believe they're doing this to us. It's just made me feel like I hate living here. (Participant #2, 25-year-old mostly gay female).

To me, if your own country's not going to recognise your relationship, then that's a country that doesn't see you as being equal to other people...I would definitely look at moving my life so I could actually be married in a country that supports that. (Participant #4, 27-year-old gay male).

Last two examples are extreme sense of feeling detachment from one's national identity. When participants felt that they were not recognised as who they are and on equal basis with others, they were ready to move away where their sense of identity is affirmed and they can be whomever they want. Overall, lack of recognition of one identity can have detrimental impact for other identities within the same person.

7 | DISCUSSION

This article presents a qualitative exploration of the impact of the 2017 Australian Marriage Law Postal Survey and the associated public debate regarding marriage equality in a sample of sexual minority Australians and

their allies. The current study found two main themes related to the impact of the marriage equality debate: (a) *personal impacts*—emotional wellbeing, empathic concern, devaluation, and connection to religion; and (b) *social impacts*—activism, avoidant behaviour, social connections, and societal perceptions. It is worth highlighting that the majority of the impacts were negative and affected sexual minority Australians to a larger extent than their allies across all subthemes.

7.1 | Personal and social impacts

Sexual minority and allied participants reported significant personal impacts as a result of the marriage equality debate. Although every participant described experiencing some form of emotional distress, the negative impact on emotional wellbeing was most severely felt by sexual minority participants. Similarly, sexual minority participants experienced the highest levels of empathic concern regarding the considerable negative effect they believed the debate was likely to have on other same-sex attracted individuals. Older sexual minority participants were the most likely to discuss this impact, with their concerns focusing on younger same-sex attracted individuals whom they feared lacked the skills or experience to deal with the increased discrimination and harassment associated with the debate. While allied participants' narratives included acknowledgement that marriage is a human right, only sexual minority participants reported feelings of being devalued or dehumanised as a result of the debate.

According to Haslam's (2006) definition, participants in the current study experienced dehumanisation in the form of the denial of uniquely human characteristics—specifically, in this case the uniquely human characteristic of marriage was being denied to same-sex attracted individuals by heterosexual individuals. These feelings of dehumanisation are consistent with research conducted by Rostosky et al. (2010) who found that after legal amendments denying same-sex marriage were passed in the United States, sexual minority people reported feeling like second-class citizens whose humanity was not recognised. Others have also found that feeling excluded from the Australian majority results in feelings of dehumanisation (e.g., asylum seekers; Hartley & Fleay, 2017). Finally, many of the negative messages presented by the 'No' campaign used religious arguments against homosexuality (Quinn, 2018), and subsequently sexual minority and allied participants who identified as religious reported feeling alienated from their faith and church. This is problematic, since the evidence shows it is detrimental to the health and well-being of religious

sexual minority people to feel like their religion and their sexuality are at odds with each other and that these identities cannot be integrated (Anderson & Koc, 2020a; Anderton, Pender, & Asner-Self, 2011).

The second major theme emerging from the interviews was the significant social impacts the marriage equality debate had on participants. Participants described a stressful 'double-bind' between efforts to cope through activism for the rights of same-sex attracted individuals and the need to protect themselves emotionally from exposure to negative messages and interactions associated with the debate. Although LGBTIQ activism can be considered a specific coping strategy (Russell & Richards, 2003), research has shown that activism can be associated with increased stress for sexual minority individuals (Levitt et al., 2009; Rostosky et al., 2009). Consistent with the minority stress model (Meyer, 2003), engaging in activism as a form of coping appeared to have exacerbated the stress experienced by both sexual minority and allied participants due to increased exposure to discriminatory messages associated with the 'No' campaign. However, when the right drivers are in place such as anger, efficacy and ingroup identification, activism can bring social change as also can be seen among our participants (Van Zomeren et al., 2008).

Participants also reported that the debate tended to accentuate the existing quality of their current relationships, with this impact especially salient for same-sex participants' relationships with family members. Allies were more likely than sexual minority participants to avoid talking about the marriage equality debate with people in their social network, usually in an attempt to avoid conflict within their relationships. Participants also reported increasingly negative views towards Australian society. This finding is similar to research by Rostosky et al. (2010) who found that LGB people often felt alienated as citizens of their state as a result of legal amendments denying same-sex marriage in the United States.

Consistent with the minority stress model (Meyer, 2003), sexual minority participants were particularly vulnerable to the negative impacts of the debate, with the increased stigma, prejudice and discrimination associated with the Australian Marriage Law Postal Survey adding to the existing, chronic psychosocial stressors participants already experience as a result of their minority sexual status. The addition of intense and widespread public and political discourse regarding their right to marry a same-sex partner and exposure to the demoralising and dehumanising stereotypes presented by the 'No' campaign are clear psychosocial stressors that contributed to the range of negative outcomes presented in this study. This is also consistent with the evidence demonstrating that there are negative consequences for

gay men who believe heterosexuals endorse stereotypes about them (i.e., meta-stereotyping; Hinton, Anderson, & Koc, 2019).

7.2 | Situating these findings within the literature

Our findings largely replicate and extend those found in the existing literature. The existing data, both from Australia and abroad, unequivocally reveals that same-sex attracted people are negatively impacted by such discriminatory events. However, the documented range of impacts continues to expand. We found evidence for *personal* and *social* impacts in our in-depth, face-to-face interviews with both same-sex attracted people and their allies, while the existing qualitative study in this field used online open-ended response data from same-sex attracted individuals (but not allies) that was evidence for intrapersonal, interpersonal, and institutional impacts (Ecker, Rostosky, et al., 2019). Our analyses elicited some of the same themes as those reported in the qualitative analysis of short, online open-ended responses measured in this research, however most themes that emerged did so at a different 'level'. For example, while both studies reported impacts to do with religion, participants in our study felt saddened or angered by their loss of a connection to personal religion (and thus fell into the personal impacts category) which participants in the other study reported feeling of betrayal and alienation from the Church (and thus fell into the institutional impacts category). Other sub-themes of ours that also emerged in some capacity in the Ecker study include *emotional well-being* (negative emotional responses), *social connections* (support with/conflict from others), and *societal perceptions* (betrayal from state).

Our analyses did reveal some new themes that had not emerged in the previous qualitative research. For example, our interviews elicited responses where participants discussed feeling of being *dehumanised*, and of feeling levels of *empathic concern for others*. These sub-themes reflect ideas that are somewhat more elegant than those reported previously in the literature. Although speculative, one explanation for this could be that the in-depth nature of our interviews allowed participants to reflect on their experiences in a more critical and reflective manner, thus facilitating a richer response as a result of spending more time talking about their experiences. Additionally, our work directly aligns with quantitative findings from Australia, including overwhelming evidence for negative impacts (Ecker & Bennett, 2017; Just.Equal, 2017), links to psychological distress (Verrelli et al., 2019), and decreased health and well-being (Anderson, Koc, & Lyons, 2020). This also

aligns with findings from overseas, revealing detrimental impacts associated with public discourses about marriage equality (Rostosky et al., 2009, 2010).

Finally, our work also aligns with the existing evidence exploring the impact of such a discriminatory event on allies. Although ours was the first academic work to use qualitative methods to explore the impact of the postal survey on heterosexual allies, others had previously done so using quantitative methods. For example, Australian research (Ecker, Riggle, et al., 2019; Anderson, Koc, & Lyons, 2020) has found that public discussions about marriage equality negatively impact LGBTIQ+ allies. Similarly, research from abroad has also found such public discussions can have a detrimental impact on allies who are family members (Arm et al., 2009; Horne et al., 2011). Although these cases report negative impacts on allies, in all instances the impact was more severe for the sexual minority individuals. Taken together these findings provide evidence for that sexual minority stress effects can impact people who are empathic to the cause of same-sex attracted people, even though they themselves do not belong to this group.

7.3 | Limitations, future research, and implications

Although the use of qualitative methodology allowed an in-depth exploration of the impacts of the marriage equality debate on sexual minority Australians and their allies, it is possible that the results of the current study do not generalise to all same-sex attracted Australians, nor the entire LGBTIQ population. Participants self-selected into the study and may overrepresent people who are willing to share their experiences, comfortable disclosing their sexual identity, and deeply invested in and concerned about the outcome of the debate. In addition, participants responded to an advertisement calling for participants who were 'affected by the marriage equality postal survey'. This might have been interpreted as 'negatively affected', which could have impacted the findings by accidentally targeting participants who are the most heavily impacted. However, it is also possible that people who suffered the severest impacts of the debate did not elect to participate in this study as a form of avoidant coping. In addition, participants were from one Australian city (Melbourne) and were all employed in full-time work, and therefore findings may not be transferable to individuals living in rural or remote locations, or those experiencing a lower level of socioeconomic status.

It is vital that future research continues to examine the impacts of prejudice-related stress events on sexual

minority (as well as gender diverse) Australians so that government policy can be developed and implemented to protect this highly vulnerable group. In order to address the negative personal and social impacts found in the current study, further investigation focusing on methods to support sexual minority individuals and their allies during discriminatory events would be valuable. In addition, future research could focus on better understanding potential mediators of the relationship between prejudice-related events and negative impacts, including adaptive and maladaptive coping strategies.

Results of the current study build on the existing literature in this space (e.g., Ecker, Riggle, et al., 2019; Ecker, Rostosky, et al., 2019; Verrelli et al., 2019; Anderson, Koc, et al., 2020) to further highlight the important implications for policy makers, mental health professionals, and the general public. Future policy should aim to reduce prejudice and discrimination associated with the introduction and increasing prevalence of same-sex marriages into society, with the aim of decreasing minority stress experienced by same-sex attracted people and their allies. In addition, an understanding of the impacts of the marriage equality debate allows mental health practitioners to provide targeted intervention to help sexual minority individuals and their allies who are experiencing distress as a result of discriminatory events. Results can also inform the development and facilitation of preventative measures, aimed at protecting the mental health of same-sex attracted individuals.

One positive implication of this work shows that when some more 'experienced' members of the minority community perceive potentially difficult situations, they increase their empathetic concern for the younger members of the community. This might increase the solidarity among same-sex attracted individuals. The members can help each other by sharing their experiences which might help 'less experienced' members to develop adaptive coping skills much easily (e.g., Stroebe, Postmes, & Roos, 2019).

8 | CONCLUSION

The Australian Marriage Law Postal Survey and associated public debate regarding marriage equality can be viewed as a discriminatory event for sexual minority Australians. Consistent with the minority stress model, participants in the current study reported a range of personal (intrapersonal) and societal (interpersonal) negative impacts as a result of public debate about marriage equality. Findings of the current study suggest that the impact is not only on this minority and at-risk group but also on their heterosexual allies. In order to inform

future policy and facilitate targeted mental health interventions with the aim of decreasing minority stress experienced by same-sex attracted people and their allies, it is essential that policymakers, mental health professionals, and the general public understand the negative impacts that the marriage equality debate had on the psychosocial wellbeing of same-sex attracted people and their allies.

ORCID

Joel R. Anderson  <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-3649-2003>

Yasin Koc  <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-6727-3842>

ENDNOTES

¹ Text presented in italics was added to the existing legislation in order to prevent non-heterosexual matrimonial unions.

² We acknowledge that there are transgender, intersex, and queer individuals who are heterosexual, and that they would also have been impacted by the postal survey and the associated debate. Our data do not reflect the experiences of these individuals, and so we have focused our article only on same-sex attracted Australians.

REFERENCES

- Anderson, J. R., Dredge, R., & Koc, Y. (2020). Media engagement and sexual minority stress during the Australian Marriage Equality Debate. *Manuscript under review*.
- Anderson, J. R., Georgantis, C., & Kapelles, T. (2017). Predicting support for marriage equality in Australia. *Australian Journal of Psychology*, 69(4), 256–262. <https://doi.org/10.1111/ajpy.12164>
- Anderson, J. R., & Koc, Y. (2020a). Identity integration as a protective factor against guilt and shame for religious gay men. *The Journal of Sex Research*, 1–10. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00224499.2020.1767026>
- Anderson, J. R., & Koc, Y. (2020b). Minority Stress for Transgender and Gender Diverse Australians during the period of debate preceding marriage equality. *Manuscript under review*.
- Anderson, J. R., Koc, Y., & Falomir-Pichastor, J. M. (2018). The English version of the attitudes toward homosexuality scale. *Swiss Journal of Psychology*, 77(3), 1–10. <https://doi.org/10.1024/1421-0185/a000210>
- Anderson, J. R., Koc, Y., & Lyons, A. (2020). Discriminatory events and sexual minority stress: Evidence from the Australian marriage equality debate. *Manuscript under review*.
- Anderton, C. L., Pender, D. A., & Asner-Self, K. K. (2011). A review of the religious identity/sexual orientation identity conflict literature: Revisiting Festinger's cognitive dissonance theory. *Journal of LGBT Issues in Counseling*, 5, 259–281. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15538605.2011.632745>
- Arm, J. R., Horne, S. G., & Levitt, H. M. (2009). Negotiating connection to GLBT experience: Family members' experience of anti-GLBT movements and policies. *Journal of Counseling Psychology*, 56(1), 82–96. <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0012813>
- Australian Bureau of Statistics. (2017). Australian Marriage Law Postal Survey, Retrieved from <http://www.abs.gov.au/>

- Australian Psychological Society. (2016, November 3). *APS opposes a same-sex marriage plebiscite* [Press release]. Retrieved from <http://www.psychology.org.au/>
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3(2), 77–101. <https://doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp063oa>
- Cochran, S. D. (2001). Emerging issues in research on lesbians' and gay men's mental health: Does sexual orientation really matter? *American Psychologist*, 56, 931–947. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0003-066X.56.11.931>
- Ecker, S., & Bennett, E. (2017). Preliminary results of the coping with marriage equality debate survey: Investigating the stress impacts associated with the Australian marriage equality debate. Retrieved from <http://www.tai.org.au/>
- Ecker, S., Riggall, E. D., Rostosky, S. S., & Byrnes, J. M. (2019). Impact of the Australian marriage equality postal survey and debate on psychological distress among lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex and queer/questioning people and allies. *Australian Journal of Psychology*, 71(3), 285–295. <https://doi.org/10.1111/ajpy.12245>
- Ecker, S., Rostosky, S. S., Riggall, E. D. B., Riley, E. A., & Byrnes, J. M. (2019). The Australian marriage equality debate: A qualitative analysis of the self-reported lived experience of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex, and queer (LGBTIQ) people. *International Perspectives in Psychology*, 8(4), 212–226. <https://doi.org/10.1037/ipp0000116>
- Farouque, F. (2004, February 4). Gay “husbands” to test their marriage in court. *The Age*. Retrieved from <https://www.theage.com.au/>
- Gartrell, A. (2017, November 13). Mental health service calls for plan to deal with same-sex marriage survey damage. *The Sydney Morning Herald*. Retrieved from <https://www.smh.com.au/>
- Hammarberg, K., Kirkman, M., & de Lacey, S. (2016). Qualitative research methods: When to use them and how to judge them. *Human Reproduction*, 31, 498–501. <https://doi.org/10.1093/humrep/dev334>
- Harris, B. (2017). Human rights and the same-sex marriage debate in Australia. *Journal of Politics and Law*, 10, 60. <https://doi.org/10.5539/jpl.v10n4p60>
- Hartley, L., & Fleay, C. (2017). “We are like animals”: Negotiating dehumanising experiences of asylum-seeker policies in the Australian community. *Refugee Survey Quarterly*, 36(4), 45–63. <https://doi.org/10.1093/rsq/hdx010>
- Haslam, N. (2006). Dehumanization: An integrative review. *Personality and Social Psychology Review*, 10, 252–264. https://doi.org/10.1207/s15327957pspr1003_4
- Herek, G. M., & McLemore, K. A. (2013). Sexual Prejudice. *Annual Review of Psychology*, 64, 309–333. <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-psych-113011-143826>
- Hinton, J. D., Anderson, J. R., & Koc, Y. (2019). Exploring the relationship between gay men's self- and meta-stereotype endorsement with well-being and self-worth. *Psychology and Sexuality*, 10(2), 169–182. <https://doi.org/10.1080/19419899.2019.1577013>
- Horne, S. G., Rostosky, S. S., & Riggall, E. D. (2011). Impact of marriage restriction amendments on family members of lesbian, gay, and bisexual individuals: A mixed-method approach. *Journal of Social Issues*, 67(2), 358–375. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1540-4560.2011.01702.x>
- Jetten, J., Haslam, S. A., Cruwys, T., Greenaway, K. H., Haslam, C., & Steffens, N. K. (2017). Advancing the social identity approach to health and well-being: Progressing the social cure research agenda. *European Journal of Social Psychology*, 47(7), 789–802.
- Just.Equal (2017). *Experiences of the marriage postal survey and views on religious exemptions: A report on a nation-wide study*. Retrieved from https://www.equal.org.au/lgbti_postal_survey_experience_exemptions
- Karp, P. (2017, September 28). High court accepts \$122m for same-sex marriage postal survey was ‘unforeseen’. *The Guardian*. Retrieved from <http://www.theguardian.com/>
- Legal and Constitutional Affairs References Committee (2015). *Matter of a popular vote, in the form of a plebiscite or referendum, on the matter of marriage in Australia*. Retrieved from <https://www.aph.gov.au/>
- Levitt, H. M., Ovrebo, E., Anderson-Cleveland, M. B., Leone, C., Jeong, J. Y., Arm, J. R., ... Vardaman, J. M. (2009). Balancing dangers: GLBT experience in a time of anti-GLBT legislation. *Journal of Counseling Psychology*, 56(1), 67–81. <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0012988>
- Marriage Amendment Act 2004 (Cth) (Australia). Retrieved from <https://www.comlaw.gov.au/>
- Marriage Equality (Same Sex) Act 2013 (Australia). Retrieved from <http://www.legislation.act.gov.au/>
- Marszalek, J. (2013, December 12). High court strikes down ACT's same-sex marriage laws. *News Limited Network*. Retrieved from <http://www.news.com.au/>
- Meyer, I. H. (1995). Minority stress and mental health in gay men. *Journal of Health and Social Behavior*, 36, 38–56. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2137286>
- Meyer, I. H. (2003). Prejudice, social stress, and mental health in lesbian, gay, and bisexual populations: Conceptual issues and research evidence. *Psychological Bulletin*, 129(5), 674–697. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0033-2909.129.5.674>
- Murphy, T. (2017, August 11). Lies, misdirection and hate from the #no campaign. *DNA Magazine*. Retrieved from <https://www.dnamagazine.com.au/>
- National LGBTI Health Alliance. (2016). *The statistics at a glance: Mental health of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex people in Australia*, Sydney, Australia: Author. Retrieved from <http://lgbtihealth.org.au/>
- Neilsen, M. (2013, December 12) High Court decides the ACT's same-sex marriage law is invalid. *FlagPost*. Retrieved from <https://www.aph.gov.au/>
- Neuberg, S. L., Smith, D. M., Hoffman, J. C., & Russell, F. J. (1994). When we observe stigmatized and “normal” individuals interacting: Stigma by association. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 20(2), 196–209. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2F0146167294202007>
- NVivo 12. (2018). [Qualitative data analysis software]. QSR International Pty Ltd. Retrieved from <http://www.qsrinternational.com/nvivo/home>.
- Quinn, P. (2018). Hopes and fears: Television advertising and the same-sex marriage postal survey [online]. *Screen Education*, 89(4), 80–85. <https://search.informit.com.au/fullText;dn=733349240350037;res=IELAPA>
- Rosenstreich, G. (2013). *LGBTI people mental health and suicide. Revised 2nd Edition*, Sydney, Australia: National LGBTI Health

- Alliance. [Briefing statement]. Retrieved from <https://www.beyondblue.org.au/>
- Rostosky, S. S., Riggle, E. D., Horne, S. G., Denton, F. N., & Huellemeier, J. D. (2010). Lesbian, gay, and bisexual individuals' psychological reactions to amendments denying access to civil marriage. *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry*, 80(3), 302–310. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1939-0025.2010.01033.x>
- Rostosky, S. S., Riggle, E. D., Horne, S. G., & Miller, A. D. (2009). Marriage amendments and psychological distress in lesbian, gay, and bisexual (LGB) adults. *Journal of Counselling Psychology*, 56(1), 56–66. <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0013609>
- Russell, G. M., & Richards, J. A. (2003). Stressor and resilience factors for lesbians, gay men, and bisexuals confronting antigay politics. *American Journal of Community Psychology*, 31(3–4), 313–328. <https://doi.org/10.1023/A:1023919022811>
- Stroebe, K., Postmes, T., & Roos, C. A. (2019). Where did inaction go? Towards a broader and more refined perspective on collective actions. *British Journal of Social Psychology*, 58, 649–667. <https://doi.org/10.1111/bjso.12295>
- Tomlins, J. (2004, September 3). When I do becomes I Don't. *The Age*. Retrieved from <https://www.theage.com.au/>
- Turnbull, M. (2017, August 8). *Press conference with senator the Hon. Mathias Cormann, acting special minister of state*. Retrieved from <https://www.malcolmtturnbull.com.au/>
- Van Zomeren, M., Postmes, T., & Spears, R. (2008). Toward an integrative social identity model of collective action: A quantitative research synthesis of three socio-psychological perspectives. *Psychological Bulletin*, 134, 504–535. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0033-2909.134.4.504>
- Verrelli, S., White, F. A., Harvey, L. J., & Pulciani, M. R. (2019). Minority stress, social support, and the mental health of lesbian, gay, and bisexual Australians during the Australian Marriage Law Postal Survey. *Australian Psychologist*, 54(4), 336–346. <https://doi.org/10.1111/ap.12380>

How to cite this article: Anderson JR, Campbell M, Koc Y. A qualitative exploration of the impact of the marriage equality debate on same-sex attracted Australians and their allies. *Aust Psychol*. 2020;55:700–714. <https://doi.org/10.1111/ap.12473>