Introduction

- Social inclusion refers to how disadvantaged groups perceive the abilities, opportunities, and dignity presented to them by their community.
- Men who have sex with men (MSM) often face social exclusion due to their sexual orientation.
- The stigma and discrimination that accompanies this social exclusion is referred to as Minority Stress (internalized homonegativity, anticipated, and enacted stigma).
- The legalization of Marriage Equality has been shown in other countries to improve MSM’s perceptions of social inclusion and may reduce feelings of minority stress.
- It is unknown whether the legalization of same-sex marriage in the USA has changed MSM’s perceived social inclusion.
- Differing social norms across the USA may alter the degree to which marriage equality has changed perceived social inclusion among MSM.

Methods

- Data comes from Project Nexus, a prospective, randomized control trial of male-male couples recruited online between April, 2016 and September, 2017.
- The final sample for this study included n=498 unmarried, partnered MSM.
- The continuous outcome is a four-question scale (α=0.85) of perceived gains in social inclusion due to the legalization of same-sex marriage using Likert-type questions.
- Example Question: “Since the ruling, I feel more welcome in my community.”
- Key covariates included respondents’ political environment and Minority Stressors.
- 2016 Presidential election data was used to proxy community social norms regarding same-sex marriage.
- Four community types were identified: 1) living in both a state and county carried by Donald Trump (Trump/Trump), 2) a Trump-carried state and a Clinton-carried county (Trump/Clinton), 3) a Clinton state and a Trump county (Clinton/Trump), or 4) a Clinton state and a Clinton county (Clinton/Clinton).
- Minority stressors were measured using existing scales previously validated in samples of MSM in the United States.
- ANOVA tests were used to examine differences in scores on the perceived inclusion scale between political environments.
- Multiple linear regression was used to test associations between demographic factors, minority stressors, and political environment and perceived social inclusion. An interaction term between political environment and enacted stigma was tested separately.

Discussion

- This is the first study to examine gains in perceived social inclusion due to nationwide marriage equality among MSM across a broad range of U.S. states.
- Gains in perceived social inclusion are not equally shared among male couples across the United States and minority stressors may play a role in this disparity.
- Gains in perceived social inclusion did not differ significantly by political context.
- Respondents who experienced more enacted stigma perceived significantly fewer gains in social inclusion.
- The combination of living in a state and county won by Donald Trump and experiencing more discrimination was associated with fewer gains in perceived social inclusion.
- There are clear improvements to the perceptions of social inclusion after nationwide marriage equality, but federal legalization of marriage is unlikely to change the social norms of a community where partnered MSM feel socially excluded.
- Multilevel interventions aimed at changing social norms may help decrease overall levels of minority stress and improve perceptions of social inclusion for this population.

![Graph showing Associations between Perceived Social Inclusion and Demographic Variables, Minority Stressors, and Political Environment](image-url)