

Study: Gay couples face pressure to marry, conform to relationship status quo

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Same-sex marriage is not just a right—it's also a new expectation. Unmarried same-sex couples in Canada are feeling pressure to tie the knot, according to a recent study published in the *Canadian Review of Sociology* that examined their experiences.

Researchers from UBC's Department of Sociology interviewed 22 people in same-sex common-law relationships. The goal was to learn how the Civil Marriage Act of 2005, which granted same-sex couples the right to marry, affected the way they thought about their relationship.

"It was surprising how prominent marriage became in participants' lives," said Katherine Lyon, who co-authored the study with H  l  ne Frohard-Dourlent. "Suddenly more people wanted to talk to them about their relationship and getting married."

Because [same-sex couples](#) were previously unable to marry, many LGBTQ people had developed relationship models outside the status quo. With the legalization of same-sex marriage, LGBTQ couples face new pressures to conform to [societal norms](#).

"A lot of participants came of age when coming out meant letting go of access to marriage," Lyon noted. "On a legal level, [same-sex marriage](#) is essential. But socially, when you get access to a new rite or institution like marriage, it can change how people think about themselves and their relationship. "

Many people reported feeling that their relationship would garner legitimacy through marriage, especially in contexts where they still encounter prejudice. This perception shows that marriage remains the relationship pinnacle in Canadian society, even as cohabitation rates increase. Still, participants chose not to marry for many reasons, including opposition to the institution.

"Now that [marriage](#) is legal, will we see LGBTQ politics and ideas about relationships shift in the coming decades?" asked Lyon. "Have we eliminated [relationship](#) hierarchies, or have we just extended a dominant ideal to a new group of people?"

More information: "'Let's Talk about the Institution': Same-Sex Common-Law Partners Negotiating Marriage Equality and Relationship Legitimacy" appears in the Canadian Review of Sociology, November 2015.

Provided by University of British Columbia

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