

QUEER UNIONS: SAME-SEX SPOUSES MARRYING TRADITION AND INNOVATION

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Abstract. Same-sex civil marriage is a focal point of debate among social conservatives, feminists, queer critics, and lesbian and gay assimilationists. In this paper, I draw on in-depth interviews of thirty same-sex married spouses to explore how actual same-sex marriages relate to these debates. Among these spouses, civil marriage is perceived to provide significant legal, social, and psychological resources that, in effect, consolidate the nuclear family and the institution of marriage. Yet, conversely, these spouses do not uniformly embrace traditional norms of marriage, but, rather, adopt a range of nontraditional norms and practices that, in effect, destabilize the traditional marital form. In sociological terms, however, their complexity is not surprising, as contemporary lesbians and gay men are *dually* socialized in the dialectic of a dominant “meaning-constitutive” tradition (Gross 2005) that valorizes (heterosexual) marriage and kinship, on the one hand, but a queer-meaning constitutive tradition that promotes sexual freedom and nontraditional gender relations, on the other. In this sense, one important sociological question for the future is the extent to which the increasing availability of same-sex marriage will transform the dialectic, eroding the structural conditions that underpin a distinctive queer meaning-constitutive tradition and, in turn, same-sex marital innovation.

Keywords: Same-sex marriage, monogamy, gay, lesbian, queer, heteronormativity

Résumé. L’union civile gaie engendre plusieurs débats entre conservateurs, féministes, commentateurs gais, et ceux qui proposent l’assimilation des homosexuels. La présente étude basée sur des entrevues structurées auprès de trente couples gais mariés a comme objectif d’explorer la relation entre l’expérience vécue des couples gais et les grands débats sur l’union civile. Selon ces couples, l’union civile donne accès à plusieurs ressources légales, sociales et psychologiques qui consolident la famille nucléaire et l’institution du mariage. Les couples gais n’adoptent cepen-

dant pas les normes du mariage de façon uniforme, mais adoptent des normes et pratiques alternatives qui confrontent et déstabilisent le mariage traditionnel. Cette complexité n'est pas surprenante du point de vue sociologique, car la socialisation des gais et lesbiennes est dialectique. La tradition dominante qui valorise et constitue le mariage hétérosexuel et la famille (Gross 2005) est opposée à une tradition homosexuelle valorisant la liberté sexuelle et de nouvelles relations entre les genres. Cela nous mène à une question sociologique importante pour l'avenir, à savoir si l'augmentation des unions civiles gaies aura pour effet de transformer cette dialectique et d'éroder les conditions structurelles qui soutiennent la tradition homosexuelle et donnent lieu à l'innovation dans l'institution du mariage gai.

Mots clés: mariage gai, monogamie, gaie, lesbienne, normes du mariages

INTRODUCTION

[I]t is not at all clear that, say, same-sex marriages will present a *fundamental* challenge to the institution of marriage or that gay parents will construct truly new ways of raising children.... These are, as we social scientists like to say, empirical questions. (Walters 2001:353; emphasis in original)

In the twenty-first century, throughout parts of Western Europe and North America, same-sex civil marriage is now a reality. To date, same-sex civil marriage is available in the Netherlands, Belgium, Portugal, Iceland, Canada, Spain, Sweden, South Africa, Norway, and parts of the US. Yet, while same-sex *partnership* has been a topic of inquiry since at least the 1970s (Bell and Weinberg 1978; Blumstein and Schwartz 1983; Weinberg and Williams 1975), and scholars have studied both “marriage-like” same-sex relations (Adam 2006; Eskridge 2002) and the impact of legal exclusion from marriage on lesbian and gay relationships (Green 2006; Weeks et al. 2001), state sanctioned same-sex marriage itself is neither well studied nor understood. That empirical work on the phenomenon has been sparse is not particularly surprising given its recency — first legalized in the Netherlands in only 2000, and in parts of North America, in 2003.¹ Nevertheless, if there is a dearth of empirical attention to same-sex marriage, there has been no lack of speculation on the topic as activists and social critics contemplate its social con-

1. Ontario and British Columbia became the first location in North America to issue same-sex marriage licenses in 2003.

sequences from a wide spectrum of cultural and political standpoints. Typically, these standpoints are marked by distinct forecasts regarding the effects of same-sex marriage on same-sex couples and on the larger society. Ranging from optimistic to apocalyptic, competing forecasts of the effects of state sanctioned same-sex marriage have produced a lively field of contentious debate, but do far less to shed light on same-sex marriage as a lived institution.

In this paper, I draw on thirty in-depth interviews of same-sex spouses residing in and around Toronto, Canada, to explore how actual same-sex marriages relate to this field of debate. Taken as a whole, these cases defy reduction to the forecasts of either the proponents or opponents of same-sex marriage but, rather, present a more complex sociological picture of assimilation and innovation than developed in the literature. That is, on the one hand, contrary to the social conservative forecast, same-sex spouses perceive civil marriage to provide significant legal, social, and psychological resources that strengthen the dyad, facilitate parenting, and generate a substrate of social support, thereby consolidating the nuclear family and the institution of marriage. On the other hand, contrary to the lesbian and gay assimilationist and critical feminist/queer forecasts, these spouses do not uniformly embrace traditional Western, 20th century norms of marriage, including monogamy and a gendered division of labour but, rather, engage in a variety of intentional practices that, in effect, depart from this idealized marital form.

In sociological terms, the complexity of these marriages is not surprising as North American lesbians and gay men are *dually* socialized in the dialectic of a dominant “meaning-constitutive” tradition (Gross 2005) that valorizes (heterosexual) marriage and kinship, in the first instance, but a “queer meaning-constitutive” tradition based in sexual freedom and nontraditional gender relations, in the second instance (Herd 1992; Weeks et al. 2001). In this sense, one important sociological question for the future is whether the availability of same-sex marriage will transform the dialectic, eroding the structural conditions that underpin a distinctive queer meaning-constitutive tradition and, in turn, same-sex marital innovation.

Below, I distill three broad positions within the literature on state sanctioned same-sex marriage, including social conservative, critical feminist/queer, and lesbian and gay assimilationist positions, and highlight their respective forecasts regarding the effects of same-sex marriage. A method section outlines the sampling and data analysis procedures of this study. Then, two data sections draw attention to the ways in which actual same-sex marriages both consolidate and subvert the “traditional” marital form of 20th century, middle-class North America

— i.e., a marital relation that includes monogamy as a norm and a practice, reproduction, and a gendered division of labour (Coontz 2000; Cott 2000). A final discussion section compares the findings of this study to the extant debates on the topic, and develops a sociological explanation of the marital forms found in this research. I conclude by advancing important lines of inquiry derived from the study's conclusions.

It should be cautioned that the present study is designed as an exploratory investigation that uses the voices and experiences of same-sex spouses to “speak back” to major themes in the same-sex marriage literature. It is therefore not intended to draw definitive inferences to a wider population of same-sex spouses. Nevertheless, regarding the impact of marriage on perceptions of dyadic commitment; social legitimacy; social support from family, friends, and coworkers; and the diversity of ideas and practices related to marital sexual arrangements; the present findings are consistent with the largest survey of same-sex marriage to date (Eskridge and Spedale 2006).² Hence, the marital relations in this study may share structural similarities with a broader set of same-sex marriages, though this question must be left for future empirical investigation.

FORECASTING SAME-SEX MARRIAGE: DEBATES IN THE LITERATURE

State sanctioned marriage is a protean institution with a contentious history marked by competing claims of inclusion and citizenship (Josephson 2005). In the US, for instance, until 1967, antimiscegenation laws in many states prohibited Whites from marrying non-Whites. Moreover, in the early part of the 19th century, African-Americans were prohibited from state sanctioned marriage altogether. In Utah, before 1896, marriage was permissible between a man and a woman, or a man and *multiple* women, but never a woman and multiple men. And, of course, until very recently and with only few episodic exceptions,³ same-sex couples could not marry in North America.⁴

2. See Eskridge's and Spedale's (2006:139–146) study of 812 married Danish gay and lesbian individuals. And for a smaller study with similar findings, see Lannutti (2005).

3. For instance, Faderman (1992) reports instances wherein lesbians of Harlem received marriage licenses during the middle 19th century. In 1996, in theory, same-sex couples of Hawaii were granted the right to marry for a period of hours. San Francisco granted same-sex marriage licenses for just under a month in 2004, only to have those marriages invalidated by later court rulings.

4. Same-sex marriage became available in Canada beginning in Ontario in 2003, and as of 2005, throughout Canada. As of this writing, New Hampshire, Vermont, Massachusetts, Iowa, Connecticut, and the District of Columbia are the only locations in the US that grant same-sex marriage licenses.

If claims to marital rights have been marked by a history of contentious politics, forecasts regarding the effects of same-sex marriage, including how same-sex married couples will affect and be affected by the institution of marriage, have been no less divided. Here, “pro” and “con” positions on same-sex marriage are distinguished, in part, by divergent prognostications of what will come of the institution should lesbians and gays be granted civil marriage, but also, in some instances, by opposing normative evaluations of the same forecast.⁵ While individual positions within this debate are irreducible to political, religious, or academic affiliation, it is possible to identify at least three broad perspectives within the activist and academic literature, including social conservative, critical feminist/queer, and lesbian and gay assimilationist positions. Below, I offer a selective review of these positions in order to provide a context for their respective predictions of the effects of same-sex marriage.⁶

Social Conservative and Critical Feminist/Queer: Critics of Same-sex Marriage

Within the activist and academic literature, social conservatives and critical feminist/queer theorists represent an internally differentiated contingent who oppose or are deeply critical of same-sex marriage. Social conservatives worry that same-sex marriage will undermine the stability of traditional, nuclear families and the sanctity of marriage, while critical feminist/queer theorists are concerned that same-sex marriage will reinforce patriarchal and heteronormative⁷ relations. In this sense, social conservatives and critical feminist/queer theorists advance opposing forecasts of the effects of same-sex marriage even as both reject the institution for lesbians and gays.

Social conservatives, arguably the best mobilized contingent among those opposed to same-sex marriage, conceptualize marriage by combining a crude functionalism with a select set of Judeo-Christian principles. In this discourse, heterosexual marriage is the foundation of society, resting on gender complementarity, monogamous partnership, and nuclear

5. For more on the complexity of characterizing the same-sex marriage debate, see Clarke and Finlay (2004).

6. As with all categorical exercises, this analytic strategy abbreviates these positions in order to highlight only those elements of the debates with direct relevance to the analytic objectives of the present paper. For an expanded discussion, the reader may wish to see Josephson (2005), Yup et al. (2003) and Young and Boyd (2006).

7. “Heteronormativity” refers to the dominant set of mutually reinforcing norms, practices, and institutions that include heterosexuality, marriage, monogamy, and the nuclear family. As a concept, heteronormativity is analogous to Neil Gross’s (2005) formulation of the contemporary, romantic “meaning-constitutive tradition” in the West (2005). For the original use of the term, see Warner (1991).

families. These elements are believed to constitute the optimal conditions for raising healthy, moral children and, in turn, a healthy, moral society (Dobson 2004; Elshtain 1991; Lutzer 2004; Josephson 2005). Same-sex marriage, by contrast, cannot serve this function, in part because while the heterosexual libido can be “tamed” by the institution of marriage, homosexuals are themselves incapable or unwilling to subscribe to marital fidelity. Thus, on the topic of the dangers of same-sex marriage, Dobson (2004) fears for the children of such marriages, for it is they who will suffer most from homosexuals’ “polyamorous” lifestyles.

The implications for children in a world of decaying families are profound. Because homosexuals are rarely monogamous, often having as many as three hundred or more partners in a lifetime — some studies say it is typically more than one thousand — children in those polyamorous situations are caught in a perpetual coming and going. It is devastating to kids, who by their nature are enormously conservative creatures. (Dobson 2004:53–54)

Grounded in reproduction (Christenson 2004; Dobson 2004), the heterosexual marital bond is the bedrock of the social order, “civilizing” men by channeling sexual desire into a reproductive bounty that stabilizes the dyad. Same-sex marriage, by contrast, will set a bad precedent for susceptible heterosexual youth because “unisex marriage” decouples childbearing from marriage and undermines traditional norms and practices associated with marital monogamy. Thus, Gallagher (2003) worries:

... I am sure unisex marriage will dramatically affect the cultural norms and values of the next generation in ways that will encourage divorce and disconnect marriage further from childbearing. Young people today do not reject marriage, but they are extremely tempted to redefine it in ways that exclude the childbearing dimension. (Gallagher, *National Review Online*, August 13, 2003)

While reproduction outside of the context of heterosexual marriage is bad for children and heterosexual young adults, it is more importantly a threat to the very foundation of civilization because it eliminates paternity (Baskerville 2006). In this latter respect, heterosexual marriage is vital not just because it reins in otherwise unruly sexual desires, but because it delivers humankind from the Hobbesian state of nature to civic law and order (Baskerville 2006).

Marriage turns a man from a sperm donor into a parent and thus creates paternal authority, allowing a man to exercise the authority over children that otherwise would be exercised by the mother alone. Feminists under-

stand this when they renounce marriage as an institution of “patriarchy.” Among some conservatives, it has become almost a cliché that marriage exists foremost to civilize men and control their promiscuity. If so, it performs this role as part of a larger function: to protect the father-child bond and with it the intact family. This point, potentially the strongest in their case, is overlooked by some traditionalists who argue that marriage undergirds civilization. For it is the presence of the father that creates both the intact family and, by the same measure, the civil institution itself. (Baskerville 2006)

Hence, according to this position, same-sex marriage will further erode marital monogamy and the traditional gendered division of labour, increase out-of-wedlock childbirth among heterosexuals, undermine dyadic stability and the nuclear family, and even return humankind to an earlier state of precivilization (Baskerville 2006; Dobson 2004; Lutzer 2004). In this sense, for social conservatives, opposition to same-sex marriage represents an impassioned battle for the salvation of civilizations and souls.

By contrast, whereas social conservatives see in same-sex marriage the downfall of patriarchal relations and, in turn, the demise of civilization, a contingent of feminists and queer theorists see the opposite — the consolidation of patriarchal relations, the bolstering of a social order organized around sexism and gender inequality, and the disciplining of a new, assimilated queer subject. While these feminist and queer discourses are not interchangeable, there is an important element of correspondence regarding same-sex marriage that lies in their mutual critique of heteronormativity.

That a contingent of feminists would be critical of same-sex marriage — Josephson (2005:274) refers to them as “lesbian feminists” — is perhaps not surprising given the more general feminist criticism of the institution of marriage, long regarded to be a fundamental source of women’s oppression.⁸ In fact, in the latter half of the 20th century, a second wave of feminists developed a sustained analysis of marriage in a critical exegesis of heterosexuality as an “institution,” including the “private” sphere of personal life, the domestic division of labour, the patriarchal nuclear family, and the control of women’s bodies and subjectivities through wedlock, child-bearing, domestic violence, and marital rape (Bavacqua 2004; Brook 2002; Cott 1987; Firestone 1970;

8. But see feminists Calhoun (2000), Cox (1997) and Graff (1997) — each of whom suggest that same-sex marriage will have a positive transformative effect on the institution itself. In this sense, Peel and Harding (2004) argue that some “pro” and “anti” feminist same-sex marriage positions are reconcilable. See Eskridge and Spedale (2006) and Hunter (1991) for a related position.

Friedan 1963; Greer 1970; Hartmann 1981; Luxton and Corman 2001; Rich 1980).⁹

To the extent that heterosexual marriage is an institution profoundly implicated in the historical disempowerment of women, some feminists extend this indictment to same-sex marriage, regarding it as a “sell out” (Baird and Rosenbaum 1997:11), incapable of rehabilitation (Saalfield 1993), and unworthy of queer struggle (Ettelbrick 1997).

For feminists, the question of lesbian and gay marriage is, or should be, inextricably bound to the ongoing critique of marriage as an institution. That critique originates in the theoretical and practical indictment of all social institutions, built upon inequality and exclusion, which function as tools of male dominance. (Bavacqua 2004:36)

Historical considerations aside, feminists critical of same-sex marriage forecast that the institution will colonize gays and lesbians, producing institutionalized gender-role differentiated marriages (Lehr 1999, Robson 1992; Walters 2001) and a new kind of same-sex, nuclear “patriarchal family” based in monogamy, parenthood, and the concept of partners as property (Auchmuty 2004; Baird and Rosenbaum 1997; Butler 1996; Ettelbrick 1997; Lehr 1999; Polikoff 1993; Walters 2001). Hence, Yup et al. write:

First, being that marriage has been afforded only to heterosexuals, it is reasonable to believe that same-sex marriages might reproduce conventional gender roles, thereby reinforcing the binary gender system.... Second, such an arrangement reproduces the kind of containment and control that has been so much a part of heterosexuality along the lines of role conformity, monogamy, viewing partners as property, and other signifiers of traditional marriage. (Yup et al. 2003:56)

In a related analysis, queer theorists (the ranks of whom may be feminist-identified, too) regard the institution of marriage as a governing relation by which the state transforms docile liberal subjects into self-regulating domestic citizenry (Bronski 1998; Brook 2002; Butler 2002; Duggan 2002; Phelan 2001; Valverde 2006; Warner 1999). Not only is marriage a site of sexual regulation and social control for both males and females, it is, more importantly, an institution of normalization wherein the married are rendered “normal,” healthy, and moral, and the unmarried “abnormal,” unhealthy, and deviant.¹⁰ In this sense, not unlike feminists

9. For some notable feminist sociological exceptions, however, see Waite and Gallagher (2000) on the overall value of marriage for women, and Stets (1991) on marital protection against violence for women.

10. Some lesbian and gay assimilationists articulate shared concerns with feminists regarding the misogynistic history of marriage, and in this regard, these positions overlap.

before them, queer theorists envision an emancipatory project rooted in resistance to normalization through practices that defy normative intimate life — including the domain of marriage and the nuclear family.

Being queer is more than setting up house, sleeping with a person of the same gender, and seeking state approval for doing so.... Being queer means pushing the parameters of sex, sexuality, and family, and in the process transforming the very fabric of society. (Ettelbrick 1997)

Queer theorists fundamentally reject same-sex marriage because, in part, the making of the marital subject constitutes a normalizing process that assimilates queers to heteronormativity, including the categories of gender, the doctrinaire coupling of sex and love, the valorization of monogamy, and the institutionalization of the nuclear family:

In many ways, same-sex marriage is contrary to the queer conception of relationship construction, which deeply challenges the taken-for-granted traditional notions of sex, sexuality and gender.... The more lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender individuals marry, the more they and the queer challenge to sexism and heterosexism disappear (Yep et al. 2003:56, 59).

Hence, Duggan (2002:176), alarmed by the prospect of same-sex marriage and the broader politics of queer assimilation, advances the term “*homonormativity*” to signal a hegemonic lesbian and gay culture now wholly unmoored from its roots in the radical liberationist politics of the 1970s. And in a similar vein, Valverde (2006:156) “half jokingly but half seriously” finds in same-sex marriage the birth of the “respectable same-sex couple” — a new social entity comprised of same-sex individuals for whom the radical marginality of homosexual subjectification is now long gone. In its place, Valverde suggests, one observes what Duggan (2002) might see as the *sine qua non* of homonormativity: the bourgeois same-sex wedding couple:

Bank loans, florists’ bills, joint bank accounts, renovated gentrified downtown homes, and worries about the relatives are the pieces that make up the new, post-homosexual entity that Canadian jurisprudence has helped to fabricate: the respectable “same-sex” couple. (Valverde 2006:162)

Lesbian and Gay Assimilationists: Proponents of Same-sex Marriage

Proponents of same-sex marriage typically advance a liberal, rights-based discourse in support of extending the institution to same-sex couples. Here, marriage is understood to confer a wide range of benefits to which lesbian and gay couples are entitled, including those related to

inheritance, health benefits, taxation, parenting, and childcare (Eskridge and Spedale 2006; Sullivan 1996; Walters 2001). While same-sex domestic partnerships and civil unions — such as those now found in Vermont and New Jersey — may include many if not all the rights and privileges extended to the marital couple, proponents of same-sex marriage argue that such arrangements lack the social and symbolic legitimation of marriage, constituting instead a kind of “second-class citizenship” for lesbian and gay couples (Wolfson 1996). Thus Kaplan (1997) and Merin (2002) oppose civil union on the grounds that it establishes a parallel institution inferior to and separate from civil marriage. By contrast, proponents of same-sex marriage wish for the unmediated assimilation of lesbians and gays into the familial norms and institutions of the larger society (Eskridge and Spedale 2006; Sullivan 1996).

Among lesbian and gay assimilationists, same-sex marriage is regarded as an especially important entitlement because the institution is predicted to bring stability to the same-sex dyad. Recalling some of the virtues attached to heterosexual marriage by social conservatives, lesbian and gay assimilationists forecast that same-sex marriage will strengthen same-sex relationships by reining in the libido and promoting monogamy (Hausknecht 2003; Josephson 2005; Rauch 1997; Rotello 1997; Sullivan 1996). In fact, Hausknecht (2003) argues that without the right to marry, gay men are propelled into “disorderly” sexual careers characterized by high rates of multiple sexual partners:

If marriage does discipline sex, then those denied its benefits can more easily drift into a life of disorderly or promiscuous sex. This is precisely the situation of gay men. (Hausknecht 2003:9)

In a similar vein, Sullivan (1996; 1997) employs the metaphor of an “anchor” to describe the stabilizing effects of marriage for prospective same-sex couples. Symbolically, marriage represents the highest form of dyadic commitment, and will thereby encourage same-sex spouses to take their relationships more seriously. Moreover, the structure of marriage, rooted in norms of monogamy, promotes marital fidelity when “human virtue” fails:

They make a deeper commitment to one another and to society.... Marriage provides an anchor, if an arbitrary and weak one, in the chaos of sex and relationships to which we are all prone. It provides a mechanism for emotional stability, economic security, and the healthy rearing of the next generation. We rig the law in its favor not because we disparage all forms of relationship other than the nuclear family, but because we recognize that not to promote marriage would be to ask too much of human virtue. (Sullivan 1996:254)

To conclude, forecasts regarding the effects of state sanctioned same-sex marriage take a variety of forms and are distinguished, in part, by either divergent predictions or by diverging normative evaluations of the same prediction. Social conservatives argue that same-sex marriage will result in the (further) erosion of gender-role differentiation and the nuclear family, an increase in marital infidelity and fatherless children, and a decrease in the stability and longevity of the marital dyad. Critical feminist/queer opponents, by contrast, predict that same-sex marriage will assimilate lesbians and gays into a wider field of heteronormativity in a process whereby marriage, monogamy, gender-role differentiation, and reproduction become valorized social practices institutionalized in the new “homonormativity.” And finally, lesbian and gay assimilationists forecast that marriage will strengthen dyadic ties, promote monogamy, and produce stronger, more stable queer nuclear families — a prediction opposed to the social conservative position, but congruent with, if differently valued from, the critical feminist/queer position.

METHOD

This study is based on thirty, semistructured, in-depth interviews of legally married lesbian and gay spouses residing in two urban centres in Ontario, Canada. Fifteen lesbians and fifteen gay men were recruited between 2005–2007 through public advertisements and solicitation at local lesbian and gay organizations. Each respondent was married to a same-sex partner for at least one year. Respondents are between 26–61 years old. With exception to two spouses, the same-sex spouses of this study identified as White.¹¹ Most of the sample is university educated and characterized themselves as earning a yearly combined income of \$80,000 and above. Female same-sex couples were together for an average of 10 years, but ranged from 4–32 years; male same-sex couples were together for an average of 13 years, with a range from 5–40 years. Most couples were married for approximately 2 years, which is not surprising given the legalization of same-sex marriage in Ontario in 2003.

11. Despite the diversity of sample starting points in Toronto, and a wide distribution of recruitment materials to web sites and community centres, I was able to recruit only two visible minorities: among two marriages, one female partner identified as Aboriginal, and another female partner identified as Asian. As well, nearly all respondents were middle-class. This may be emblematic of the population of same-sex married spouses in North America which, according to some critics, will strongly favour a white, middle-class constituency (see for example Warner 1999). Given the paucity of demographic research on same-sex married couples in North America, the racial and class composition of these marriages is still not known.

Semistructured interviews lasted between 1.5–2.5 hours, and were organized by a standardized interview guide that elicited a general relationship history, beginning in adolescence and ending with the current marital relationship. In an effort to understand the substance and character of same-sex civil marriages, I focused on questions related to the marital relationship, including how the partners met, the development of their relationship, the character of their relationship before and after marriage, the decision to marry, the meaning of marriage, the content and meaning of the civil and wedding ceremonies, relationship to family and in-laws, the reception of the marital couple at work and in the broader community, the decision (or not) to parent, and future expectations regarding the marital dyad.

All interviews were audiotaped and transcribed. The transcriptions were analyzed using the coding procedures of grounded theory (Strauss and Corbin 1998). The coding schema began with open codes to establish general categories, and then axial coding to establish dimensions among the open codes. Analytic memos were created from the open and axial codes to establish patterned themes across respondents. A final analytic process compared study findings from the analytic memos with key themes from the literature, including issues around the impact of marriage on dyadic commitment; perceived social legitimacy; the relationship of marital status to social support from family, friends, and coworkers; and the sexual norms and practices of the marital relationship.

Below I use data from this study to provide a preliminary examination of the ways in which actual same-sex marriages compare with the prognostications advanced by social conservative, critical feminist/queer, and lesbian and gay assimilationist positions. Rather than present the data as an exhaustive catalogue of variation in same-sex marital relations within the sample, I highlight patterns in these relationships and how they relate to the literature.

SAME-SEX MARRIAGE: CONSOLIDATING THE NUCLEAR FAMILY AND THE INSTITUTION OF MARRIAGE

To the extent that social conservatives extol the virtues of (heterosexual) marriage in terms of deepening commitment between partners, increased social support, and the facilitation of a reproductive, nuclear family, these effects are consistent with the ways in which same-sex married spouses experience, conceive of, and talk about their marriages. Perhaps more than any other sentiment, growing “commitment” to the dyad following marriage is ubiquitous throughout their narratives. This commitment

is then linked to increased dyadic stability. Frank, for instance, found that even after six years with his partner, including a public commitment ceremony, the act of getting married in the seventh year brought a new sense of commitment and, in turn, stability.

Interviewer: Would you say being married has changed your life in any way?

Respondent: Yeah, very much so. I think that prior to being married ... if you were in disagreement about something, you know, there was always an easier way out. Whereas the commitment is definitely more.... I think it's just the sense of commitment that you feel. You've made a vow and, it's hard to describe, it definitely feels different than prior to. *Frank, 32 years old*

Cindy, too, finds in marriage a new level of commitment that bolsters the dyad:

It's [marriage] about finding a place of safety that allows our relationship to go deeper. So it's not just political. And I know that these things are really not set in stone — I've been divorced. So maybe it's just those few moments that things seem incompatible that one takes a few moments longer to say, we've made a legal commitment that somehow exceeds just living together. It's different. It's different being married than simply being in a long-term relationship. *Cindy, 50 years old*

And for Hillary, marriage itself imparts a narrative of dyadic continuity that maps partners' commitment to one another into late adulthood and even death.

It really is life-changing and relationship-altering. It advances a relationship so much higher.... There's just, the marriage has just made the commitment even more solid. We talk about where will we will be buried together and stuff [laughs], where we will retire and what our retirement be like. *Hillary, 45 years old*

While civil marriage includes rights and privileges that same-sex couples covet, its impact on relationships is often articulated in other terms. Premised on life-long partnership, marriage is perceived as a psychological resource that "cements" the relationship above and beyond other more "tangible" benefits. For instance, Greg believes that marriage provides a psychological "cementing" that bolsters the dyad:

Interviewer: What does marriage mean to you?

Respondent: I think it's only partially intellectual but there's something emotional as well. I think it's a partnership. A partnership

of trust. And security, not financial security, [but a] kind of emotional security.... Yeah, about cementing the relationship and declaring it to one another.... I think it's more of a psychological advantage than a real financial or, actual tangible advantage. *Greg, 32 years old*

Not uncommonly, same-sex spouses were coupled to their partners for many years prior to the legalization of civil marriage, and were therefore already highly committed to their relationships. Hence, the consolidating impact of marriage on the relationship was all the more surprising to Ava.

It's funny, I wouldn't have thought that it would, but I think that it has a huge psychological thing going on. Confidence. I feel more relaxed. It's weird ... just going through the ritual just helped me feel even after all those years, more comfortable in our relationship. Like, ok, she's going to stay [laughs]. She's not going anywhere. Which is kinda funny 'cause it doesn't guarantee that, but I just felt, I just felt that way. *Ava, 55 years old*

And Emma, who had already been heterosexually married and divorced, compares the psychological magnitude of getting married to the birth of her children.

Before I got married, I really felt that the marriage was a ring and a certificate. It was the formalization of our legal right. And then our ceremony took place and I never thought I would come away from it feeling as elated and completed, and as joined as I did.... To me it's the foundation of my life — it's as significant to me as being a mother. The impact of our wedding and our marriage has impacted me as strongly as birth. And it completely threw me off! I was going into it, you know, the removed 'been here, done that,' getting married for Evelyn.... No one was more surprised than I was how significant it was and continues to be. *Emma, 33 years old*

If marriage consolidates and deepens one's sense of commitment to the dyad, it may also serve as an important institutional bridge of legitimation to family. In these instances, marriage operates as a normalizing rite of passage that catalyzes support and recognition from family members otherwise opposed to or minimally tolerant of homosexuality. For some, the event of the wedding ceremony itself provides an occasion that pushes families of same-sex spouses to confront unresolved issues around the same-sex relationship. Jen, for example, has been in a relationship with Jackie for nearly thirty years. Still, over three decades, her mother and larger family were blissfully ignorant, choosing not to overtly recognize the relationship. The announcement of her intent to

seek civil marriage, and the ceremony itself, however, initiated a significant shift in family reception.

Respondent: It was an absolutely incredible, overwhelming, just, even my mother.... [P]eople we hadn't talked to in years would phone and ask if it was okay to come to the wedding.... I'm getting emotional about this....

Interviewer: So your mom was able to come to the wedding. Do you remember what she said or how she thought about the wedding?

Respondent: I remember exactly. We sat her down at the kitchen table, because we had never really come out to her. We sat her at the kitchen table and gave her a wedding invitation. She looked forward and she frowned and she said, "What's this?" I said, "Well, Jackie and I want to get married." We gave her the whole spiel.... And she said, "Well, you know, I'm an old-fashioned girl and I don't understand all of this stuff."... But she did the whole thing, walked down the aisle like the mother of the bride.... And apparently she did say to my sister that we'd been together a long time and it was the right thing to do. *Jenifer, 56 years old*

For Larry, too, marriage brought legitimization and increased emotional support from family and friends.

They started recognizing, wow, this isn't just a gay relationship — this is a relationship. And the parallels between a heterosexual and a homosexual relationship haven't been thought of in that sort of light and the way it is perceived by some family members and even friends.... So the language we're using, doing the [wedding] planning, setting up the stuff we're talking about — it magnified it. It really changed the whole concept of gay relationships for a lot of these different people.... We would have had a strong relationship regardless of being married or not, but what we've learned from the process of being in marriage to each other and how it has affected the people around us, is that the support group has become magnified in terms of their acceptance of us. *Larry, 48 years old*

Clark takes great comfort that his civil marriage is the same marital form of his parents and grandparents:

[J]ust knowing she [Clark's mother] sees us as equally married as my family, like we're not just roommates or not just partners or not just common-law — we're *married*. And when you say that, it's not a civil union, it's marriage, just like your marriage mom and dad, nana and grandpa [has]. So that makes us feel equal and special and carrying on our family traditions and just being, reflecting what we've learnt from our parents

and knowing that marriage is something very special between two people. And it's equal and it feels good. *Clark, 36 years old*

The legitimating effect of civil marriage for same-sex spouses, and the added social support they perceive to follow, is by no means limited to the domain of family and friends. In fact, because of the social intelligibility of marriage — i.e., its normativity in the wider society — same sex spouses find that their marital status helps them to assimilate with and garner the support of co-workers and employers. For instance, now married, Greg perceives himself to be a socially recognizable, “real person” by his employer. His marriage provides a social status to which his heterosexual employer can relate. In turn, Greg feels greater integration in the informal culture of work:

I'll be honest, there's probably part of that, that you want to feel that you're part of the time[s] and recognition. I'll give you an example. I went to dinner with my boss and his nephew ... and his nephew was planning his wedding. And they asked me if I was married and I told them to a guy. And they started asking me about my experience and about the restaurant and the invitation or whatever, and it really validated that I had something in common, that I was a real person. As much as it was completely ridiculous and childish, it made me feel good that I wasn't a freak, that my relationship was as valid as theirs. *Greg, 32 years old*

For Eric, too, being identified as part of a married couple provides advantages in the sphere of informal work interaction wherein one's personal life structures work identity, network affiliations, and professional rapport. Here, Eric contrasts his marital status with some of the unmarried “gay village boys” at work. His discussion reflects the particular importance marital status may hold for gays and lesbians who otherwise hold a marginal position in the social structure.

There are honestly work benefits for us being married. When I interact with the partners [of the firm] in general ... it's probably more comfortable if they had us over for dinner. We could get invited as a couple. It's a different comfort aspect to it ... even how people interact and so on, even the signs of stability which is important to them when you get to the next level.... And in contrast to the gay village boys that are at work who might even be at the same career level [but] can't talk about their [partners] at all.... For sure, there's a difference, the whole perception of stability is different between the two. Because even small-talk wise, even if you were gay and kind of semi-in, semi-out at work, you just don't talk about your personal life.... And part of the way you develop rapport with anyone is to talk about your personal life: “Are you married and do you have kids?” It's the standard small-talk question. *Eric, 33 years old*

Like Greg and Eric, Izzy's marriage announcement seemed to affect her social reception at work. Even among those for whom she attributed the least regard for her relationship, marriage seemed to garner some semblance of support.

I took her to the company picnics and company gatherings at work. And some people were more comfortable than others. But even by the time we announced we were getting married, even the people that were most tight-assed were like, "congratulations." *Izzy, 29 years old*

If marriage transforms perceptions of legitimacy, integration, and social support within family and work domains, it also can produce a more abstract but perhaps no less significant perception of credibility vis-à-vis the "generalized other" (Mead 1934). That is, as in the realm of work, marriage is perceived to confer social recognition upon lesbians and gay men who acquire the legitimating status of "spouse" in the larger society. Subsequently, following civil marriage, informal interactions on the street, in the grocery store, or at the bus stop, are perceived to change because one's self-concept has changed.

[Civil marriage] has not changed the day-to-day of life in any way whatsoever. What it has changed is my internal feelings of being socially accepted. So, I meet you and we're at the bus stop and you say, "Hi," and we're chatting. And you say, "So, you have a family?" ... And I say, "Yep, I'm married with children." That validates me. I feel like in society I can say that I'm married with children. And for me, who is a life-time lesbian, being able to somewhat be part of the norm, is so unusual. I love it! I'm part of the norm: I'm married with children! I just happen to be a lesbian ... it changed something in my head. *Barbara, 52 years old*

Same-sex spouses also see civil marriage as an institution conferring both social and legal benefits conducive to parenting. These spouses associate family formation and parenting in the context of a marital relationship and the familial, community, and state resources that accrue from marriage. Thus, Izzy sees marriage as a status in which the larger society will be held "accountable" to the needs of her reproductive family:

One of our first conversations was about how neither of us believed in the concept of marriage or were planning on getting married.... And then we started talking about families and about the fact that we wanted to get married.... The big ceremony was literally to show everybody who we were and to be a couple and ... because we also planned on having a family and we wanted some sort of accountability.... We talked about the security in that. *Izzy, 29 years old*

Among male same-sex partners, the context of marriage and the security it imparts may be particularly consequential as acquiring a child requires extensive planning and concerted effort. Thus Eric regards his marriage as the foundation of a “package arrangement” (Green 2006) that will likely include children and a larger house in the suburbs in the coming years. Though his discussion of his and his partner’s aspirations for children is delivered with humour, Eric articulates a marital trajectory that incorporates parenthood and domesticity in the near future.

Um, I hope we find a friendly suburb that we can move to [because] we probably want a bigger, nicer house. Kids: one versus two? I like the idea of a designer baby that I can talk to like an adult.... Versus he likes the two-kid idea so they can amuse themselves! Which isn’t a bad option. I’ve actually spent a lot of time asking people one versus two, because you can’t travel as much if you have two kids. But [with] one, you can.... Probably we’ll have a nanny, so we’re kind of waiting to see if we can afford a nanny versus daycare. *Eric, 33 years old*

To conclude, among the respondents of this study, civil marriage is regarded as an institution that bears in significant ways upon the self, the dyad, and one’s relationship to the larger social order. Once married, same-sex spouses commonly report an increased sense of commitment to the dyad and a reframing of their relationship around the themes of stability and permanence. In addition, civil marriage is regarded as an important legitimating institution that mediates the outsider status of being homosexual and creates a context for added integration and social support within the family. Similarly, marital status provides a normalizing and socially intelligible identity that same-sex spouses perceive as an advantage in work environments, in informal work interactions, and in interactions in the society at large. Finally, marriage provides a context of stability and sociolegal support that encourages parenthood and a dyadic trajectory organized around the goal of family formation. In total, these perceptions suggest that same-sex civil marriage reproduces and consolidates the traditional institution of marriage and the nuclear family more generally. That is, contrary to the predictions of social conservatives, but consistent with the predictions of feminist/queer critics and lesbian and gay assimilationists, same-sex marriage may indeed establish a new “homonormativity” anchored, in part, in the norms and traditions of heteronormativity.

However, while same-sex marriage may encourage same-sex relationships that replicate and thereby reinforce aspects of traditional marriage, the marital forms in this study also depart in important ways from heteronormativity and cannot, therefore, be reduced to “homonormativ-

ity.” Below, I explore this theme with special attention to marital sexual norms and practices and the division of domestic labor.

SAME-SEX MARRIAGE: DYADIC INNOVATION AND DEPARTURES FROM TRADITIONAL MARRIAGE

If same-sex marriage is a conservative phenomenon that reproduces the traditional, Western, 20th century family ideal, the same-sex spouses in this study do not uniformly embrace traditional principles of marriage — including marital monogamy and a gendered division of labour — but rather, hold a variety of views and engage in a range of intentional practices that depart from traditional marriage.

One of the most pronounced ways in which the same-sex married spouses of this study depart from traditional marital conventions is through the adoption of nonmonogamous norms and practices. While nearly 100% of US heterosexual married partners were found to expect sexual exclusivity from their partners (Laumann et al. 1994), and support for marital monogamy among the American public has actually *increased* in the last three decades, with 92% of respondents reporting that extramarital sex is “always wrong” or “almost always wrong” in 1998 (Cherlin 2002)¹² — two-thirds of same-sex spouses (40% female, 60% male) in this study do not believe that marriage need always be monogamous. What is more, nearly half of male same-sex spouses (47%) report an *explicit* policy of nonmonogamous practice, as did one female same-sex spouse. In fact, of this latter group (eight spouses), three reported that they became nonmonogamous only *after* civil marriage. And finally, monogamous practice itself is not typically taken for granted by either male or female same-sex spouses but, instead, emerges in a reflexive process organized more by the personal needs and wants of the partners than the heavy hand of heteronormative tradition. Taken as a whole, these cases recall Giddens’s (1992) “pure relationship” — a late modern dyadic form premised on the continuous negotiation of emotional and sexual needs freed from a reproductive imperative, religious proscription, or coercion of any kind.

Among the same-sex spouses with open marital relations, Giddens’s notion of “plastic sexuality” is seen in the decoupling of sex and love whereby the former is distilled from the latter. In this regard, while marriage should be based in love, it need not preclude extramarital sexual

12. Unfortunately, no comparable Canadian data exists, with the exception of a World Values Survey conducted in 1990. In this survey, nearly of Canadian respondents reported that a marital affair was either never justifiable or rarely justifiable.

relations. Thus Henry and his spouse are not troubled by marital non-monogamy and, in fact, find it to enhance their sex life.

[Quite honestly, I always found it very erotic that somebody else would find my partner sexually appealing. I just found that a real turn-on. I wasn't jealous. If anything, I was really proud.... But I always realized that it was sex. I've always been able to put sex and love in two categories.... One of the things I used to say to people was that you can have sex with your hand — it's ok. You don't fall in love with it though.... So you can really keep it in perspective. And I really do think people do make a huge mistake confusing sex and love. Sex is sex and love is love. And they don't always fall into the same category. *Henry, 60 years old*

David, by contrast, believes that extramarital sexual relations can introduce “risk” to the relationship. However, he also believes that unlike heterosexual couples, he and his partner communicate effectively about the pleasures and shortcomings of marital sex, and can negotiate the full range of their sexual needs with men outside the marital relationship. For David, the key to a successful open marriage is communication — “a conversation that basically never finished.”

Respondent: Like I said, in terms of communication, we've realized that we can communicate and talk about these kinds of things whereas a typical straight couple might flounder around or get frustrated. And we've realized that in some areas we're just not as sexually compatible as in others. So, we sort of, share some other sexual activities outside the relationship as well.

Interviewer: And do you continue to negotiate this relationship?

Respondent: Absolutely. It was very specifically a conversation that basically never finished, you know? Here's the situation, what can we do about it, what do we feel comfortable with, how do we approach it, what limits do we have psychologically or physically or emotionally. We're constantly revisiting that. *David, 29 years old*

Conversely, perhaps counterintuitively, some couples remain monogamous *until* they are married. For example, Karl and his spouse find that marriage creates a level of dyadic commitment that makes possible sexual exploration outside the dyad:

The fact that we are legally married to each other is a completely different ballgame for opening up the relationship. I would not have felt comfortable to do it, not being legally married. So, it sounds kind of backwards to

the traditional model, but the fact that we're legally married to each other and permanently committed makes us both feel very secure about doing this. *Karl, 47 years old*

And for Laura, the stability of marriage creates new sexual choices:

In the beginning ... we talked about monogamy ... and it sort of came up, on and off.... And then about three and a half years into our marriage, it came up again, and she said, "I want a chance to take a look at it."... And so I said, "Okay, let's try it."... And I have some straight friends that were like, "Oh my God, I would totally freak out, I would totally just say no!"... I feel like marriage allowed us to be ... ironically, through all the fear around it, it actually made Lanna feel safe enough to bring it up in a very honest way.... She could actually be completely honest.... Because we were married and she felt I made a commitment to her that meant that I wouldn't be like, "see ya!" *Laura, 34 years old*

If intentional and negotiated marital nonmonogamy represents an innovation on the conventions of traditional marriage, so the norms that same-sex spouses articulate around marital monogamy also represent a sharp departure. In this study, of those with explicitly monogamous marriages (73%), half of these latter respondents believe that it is acceptable for marriages to be nonmonogamous (roughly equal by gender), while over one-fifth (22% monogamous males, 9% monogamous females) remain open to the possibility that their own marriages may one day become nonmonogamous.

David, mentioned above, is not against monogamous marriages but, rather, the doctrinaire approach of social conservatives who believe that marriage *must* be monogamous. For him and his partner, marriage is a negotiated arrangement that should be flexible enough to accommodate the particular sexual needs of the partners.

Interviewer: Do you think marriage should always be monogamous?

Respondent: Oh, always? No. Just because there's nothing that always works for everybody. If what each person in the relationship wants is a monogamous relationship, then that's what should happen. If they're happy with it and that's what works for them then obviously that's the only way to go. But if the people involved aren't interested in that or if they have other needs that are equally met or similarly met by nonmonogamous relationships, then that's something to consider....
David, 29 years old

Candy, like David, rejects a hard-line approach to marital fidelity. Asked if she felt marriage should always be monogamous, Candy draws

from her own positive experience with an open relationship, finding the latter to have a therapeutic quality.

No, I have to say. My little thing I had a few years ago was very pleasant. Because my self-esteem was so low, being with this ... wonderful, beautiful woman who was interested in me treated me very nicely. Not a person I wanted to spend the rest of my life with, that I knew from the beginning. But I got that little hint of that I was special. And it was really, really pleasant. *Candy, 60 years old*

Monogamous spouses, too, are often unwilling to categorically reject nonmonogamous marriage, even when they cannot imagine it for themselves. Ava, for instance, has always had a monogamous relationship with her spouse and has no interest in an open marriage. Nonetheless, she approaches the principle of marital monogamy with suspicion because it precludes the particular needs of the partners involved:

[We] are always monogamous. I just can't see it [nonmonogamy]. I can't, for me, I can't ... it's too complicated [laughs]. I can't be intimate, or I can't be sexual without being intimate, so it would, so I wouldn't want to, first of all, it just would feel like a betrayal.... But at the same time, I respect other people's life choices.... I guess it depends on the couple. And you know, consenting adults, what makes them happy, what they need.... I think it comes down to the people involved in the relationships, what works for them. *Ava, 36 years old*

Ian, too, is committed to monogamy in his own marriage, though this commitment arises as a function of an individual, reasoned choice, rather than adherence to religious proscriptions or dominant norms of marital fidelity.

I don't [think] marriage should always be necessarily [monogamous].... I can't see any argument in the abstract against polygamy.... I can't see any argument in the abstract against an asexual couple being married.... They should be faithful by whatever definition the people involved chose to define fidelity. And for us, monogamy is the route we have taken. *Ian, 53 years old*

Moreover, monogamous marital arrangements in the present do not preclude a different future arrangement. Instead, like the pure relationship described by Giddens, these partners are willing to renegotiate needs over the course of the marriage.

Interviewer: Do you think your marriage will always be this way [monogamous]?

Respondent: We don't know that, and we understand that at the moment we are very happy with that. I don't think either of us thinks about going the other way. We have everything we want at the moment. In other words, it's not like "forever and ever," just let's do it and it works, so let's keep doing it.... *Alex 55 years old*

In the same way that these spouses reject traditional norms of marital monogamy for a more democratic negotiation of sexual needs and wants, they also commonly report negotiating the domestic division of labour and authority. In fact, the vast majority of same-sex spouses describe a highly egalitarian domestic division of labour organized by individual interests and desires, rather than predetermined, role-differentiated tasks.¹³ While these accounts cannot be assumed to reflect actual practices (Carrington 1999), and more research will be required to validate such accounts, they are consistent with a larger body of research on the egalitarian character of housework among same-sex couples relative to their heterosexual counterparts (Blumstein and Schwarz 1983; Dunne 1997; Patterson 1995). Moreover, where partners describe an unequal domestic division of labour, it is not ossified gender roles that guide who does what but, rather, fluid and pragmatic considerations associated with time and financial earnings. For instance, Ava — whose spouse has a considerably more high-powered occupation than she — divides house and yard work according to her and her partner's respective likes and dislikes:

She cooks, I do the dishes. I clean the house, she gets the groceries [laughs]. We share yard work and, generally, she's the person who fixes things. Although, I usually do the technical stuff — the television, the computer stuff.... Like I hate doing laundry, so she does the laundry and I'll clean the bathroom because she hates cleaning the bathroom. So that's pretty much how it balances out.... It seems to work pretty well. We've got our routine down pat. But it's not rigid. If she doesn't feel like doing something or I don't feel like doing something, that's ok. *Ava, 36 years old*

Frank and his partner, on the other hand, divide house and yard work according to ability:

Respondent: I don't like housework [laughs]. We're very different in certain aspects like that. I'm very good at straightening and organizing and keeping track of bills and stuff like that and he is very good at actually getting down and cleaning.

Interviewer: So what about cooking?

13. For related findings, see Dunne (2000) and Sullivan (2004).

Respondent: We share that 50/50.

Interviewer: And laundry?

Respondent: 50/50

Interviewer: But heavy cleaning is...

Respondent: Definitely not my job. And it's not even discussed, it's just you know where our interests and our strengths lie.

Interviewer: I guess I'll ask, since you have your own home — gardening and outdoor kind of things — who takes care of that sort of thing?

Respondent: Well, we probably both take care. Him more so. He is from a family that owns a landscaping and nursery [business], so he's very into that type of thing. But he won't pick up a paintbrush, so I'm the painter. I think it's neat because we don't have roles. Like there are no defined roles: whoever's good at whatever does that. *Frank, 32 years old*

With multiple children, the domestic division of labour becomes even more complex. And yet, the division of labour in Izzy's marriage is flexible and guided by the principles of pragmatism.

Interviewer: How do you divide the work that needs to be done around the house?

Respondent: Depends on who is home most that day. And it depends on what the kids [have] done that day. If Irene is at work generally [and] if I'm home and I have the time I'll do stuff. When she gets home she takes over some of the stuff. And we pretty well split everything based on each day. And if things get left then they get done the next day. Yeah, we're pretty good about splitting. I have things I absolutely hate doing but still have to do.... It's which ever one has free hands and the least sore legs by the end of the day [laughs].... We definitely 50/50 things up more than all of the other moms that I can think of.... Everything is like we take turns in the night who'll wake up with the kid — everything is split down the middle.... When she's at work, I parent, and when I'm at work, she parents. *Izzy, 29 years old*

While both Izzy and her partner balance career and homemaking, Kate and Kristina have a more traditional arrangement whereby Kate stays home and Kristina works full time. Nevertheless, though Kate does more housework than Kristina, this couple shares the care of their three children and many of the day-to-day household tasks.

[I] think we're unique in a lot of different ways. We're very egalitarian and share pretty much everything 50/50 — be it from childcare to household stuff.... Pretty much it's what we're good at. Like, I do all the finances. I'd say I do the majority of the house stuff because I'm home and she's working. When it comes to the kids, we're 50/50. She probably does more with the two-year old than with the baby.... Like if one of the kids gets up in the middle of the night and we listen to the cry then if its Mandy — which is the older one — then Kristina gets up. With Andrea, Andrea is a crummy sleeper in the night so we both take turns getting up with her.... We both make dinners, we both do dishes.... It's just very equal. *Kate, 34 years old*

The egalitarian and negotiated character of domestic labour to which these respondents refer is a theme repeated by many same-sex spouses. While some spouses attribute this to the absence of gender-differentiated roles in a same-sex relationship, others attribute it to the fact that same-sex partners experience the same gender socialization. No matter that one partner has a high paying job and a doctorate degree, while the other has a comparatively low-paying job and a high school diploma, the couple's shared gendered expectations levels the playing field.

Interviewer: Do you think your marriage is different from the relationships of married heterosexual people?

Respondent: I guess the answer would have to be yes, it's very different. It's different because we're two women so we're brought up in a culture of being women, so the roles aren't gender-specific. Who takes out the trash, who mows the lawn, who does all the gender-stereotyped roles? We both do. So we've both been brought up as women.... You know, the garbage has to go out, there absolutely is no role-playing. What is convenient. *Barbara, 52 years old*

If the same-sex marriages of this study have a pronounced egalitarian character in terms of the domestic division of labour, they also tend to be egalitarian in terms of control of household finances. Faith, for example, discusses in detail the equitable financial arrangements of her household.

Interviewer: Are your finances integrated together?

Respondent: Yes and no. We have a joint account, which is the household account, and we each contribute a certain amount into that account, and that covers monthly expenses, which is the household expenses. As well, we have an account, a mutual fund account for our property taxes, so what happens is a certain amount is pulled out of our household account into

a mutual account bi-weekly, and when the property tax bill comes it gets paid out of our mutual funds account. We have two credit cards in both our names, and when the bill comes, unless it's a personal item for me or her, the bills are divided evenly and we pay that.... [But] not everything is blended; we have our own personal accounts [too]. *Faith, 49 years old*

Ben and Barry have switched financial roles organically as their respective careers have ebbed and flowed over time. Upon combining their expenses into one household bill, this couple pays expenses in proportion to their shifting relative incomes, rather than a predetermined set of expectations or gender roles.

[T]he money comes in, the money goes out, and it pays all the bills no matter whose bills they are. And it's been that way for some time. Initially, when we first were together, I would pay my bills and he would pay his bills, and I was working. We really switched roles from the time we met. Barry was working full-time and I was working part-time.... And so he was the major bread-winner and it's, since we've been in the city ... my income has outstretched his so I've become the major bread-winner. But the money comes in, the money goes out, and all the bills get paid. *Ben, 44 years old*

For many same-sex spouses, decision-making authority, too, has a marked, negotiated give-and-take quality. Hence, Jennifer and her partner take turns playing "boss" for the day.

We built our own house.... We found that we'd get bogged down on stupid things.... If there were two opinions, you couldn't get two out of three because there were only two. So we would be boss for the day, and if you were boss for the day, you got to decide that stupid question. If it was something really serious, then we'd both have to decide, but for something that didn't matter, we'd take turns being boss for the day. We still can do that sometimes if something comes up that's not important, we say, "who's boss for the day?"... That's just another negotiation that we developed. *Jen, 56 years old*

To conclude, these findings do not support the critical feminist/queer position which predicts a uniform homonormativity organized around marital fidelity and the exaltation of monogamous norms. Moreover, the negotiated quality of the domestic division of labour and authority across same-sex married couples does not align with the critical feminist/queer prediction that marriage will assimilate lesbian and gay spouses into role-differentiated marriages that reproduce power inequities found in

traditional heterosexual marriages. Conversely, while these findings cannot be construed to *promote* nonmonogamous marriages among heterosexuals, they do coincide with the social conservative prediction that same-sex marriages will be less likely to retain traditional norms of marital monogamy. The findings also coincide with the social conservative forecast that same-sex marriage will erode gender-differentiated roles of traditional marriage and the concomitant domestic division of labour.

DISCUSSION

In this paper, I have used the voices of legally married same-sex spouses to “speak back” to a now voluminous, speculative literature on the effects of civil marriage on the same-sex dyad. Taken as a whole, the marital arrangements of this study defy reduction to the forecasts of either proponents or detractors of same-sex marriage. On the one hand, same-sex spouses of this study discuss assimilating to, reproducing, and thereby consolidating a traditional, idealized marital form premised on life-long partnership, the adoption and valorization of marital identities (e.g., husband/wife/spouse), and, in some cases, the formation of reproductive, nuclear families. Consistent with the lesbian and gay assimilationist and critical feminist/queer positions, but contrary to the social conservative position, same-sex marriage is experienced in this study as a superior arrangement that strengthens the bonds of the dyad, promotes deeper commitment and stability, and ties the same-sex marital family to larger networks of social support *vis-à-vis* extended family and work settings, thereby consolidating the marital dyad itself.

On the other hand, same-sex spouses of this study depart from and innovate upon the traditional marital ideal by adopting *explicit* nonmonogamous sexual norms and practices and through a highly negotiated domestic division of labour. In fact, the majority of spouses of this study reject a universal norm of marital fidelity, over one-fifth of those in monogamous marriages remained open to the possibility of nonmonogamous marriage in the future, and nearly half of the male study participants had intentional, negotiated open marriages, along with one female participant. Regarding these latter cases, perhaps most interestingly, nearly half of those with open marriages became nonmonogamous only *after* getting married. That is, civil marriage provided a structure of permanence that these men regarded as a secure context in which to explore sexual pleasures outside the dyad. Indeed, monogamous practice, where it occurs, is a consequence more of personal needs and wants than the heavy hand of marital tradition. To be sure, to the extent that male spouses are

less invested in monogamous *practice* than their female counterparts, the meanings that male and female same-sex spouses build around marriage are not reducible to the same. Nevertheless, taken as a whole, the findings call into question the lesbian and gay assimilationist and critical feminist/queer forecasts — both of which predict that civil marriage will produce a new homonormativity organized around the uniform adoption of heteronormative monogamous norms and practices. Conversely, these dyadic arrangements coincide, in part, with the social conservative prediction that same-sex marriages will be organized by norms other than marital fidelity. So too, the vast majority of same-sex spouses organize the domestic division of labour not around pre-established gender roles, but around the principles of interest, practical economic considerations, and egalitarianism. For this latter contingent, it would appear that a process of negotiation, rather than the heavy hand of gender inequality, determines who does what in the household. These latter findings are not predicted by critical feminist/queer theorists, who anticipate that marriage will produce internally stratified, role-differentiated relations, but confirm the worries of social conservatives, who abhor the dedifferentiation of gender roles.

That the spouses of this study construct marriages which, in part, reproduce traditional marriage and the nuclear family is perhaps not surprising as they, like their heterosexual counterparts, are socialized in a regulative tradition that confers superior status upon this marital form. That is, following Gross (2005), even as life-long, internally gender-stratified marriages are on the decline, and even as those who deviate from such marital forms suffer diminishing consequences, North American intimate life remains, nevertheless, embedded within a “meaning-constitutive tradition” of romantic love (Gross 2005:288). This tradition, like all meaning-constitutive traditions, is an objective source of subjectification wherein identities, subjectivities, and life projects are constituted by the particularities of history and culture. Thus, Gross (2005) likens meaning-constitutive traditions to a Durkheimian social fact:

[L]anguage and cultural traditions are the most fundamental example of a Durkheimian social fact, for they not only preexist the individual and hence are external to her, but beyond being constraining, are actually constitutive of her. (Gross 2005:295)

Anchored to heteronormativity, the dominant meaning-constitutive tradition of contemporary North American culture imparts an idealized (if unrealized) narrative of self-fulfillment in the context of married, life-long dyadic commitment and the reproductive, nuclear family (Cherlin 2004; Gross 2005; Seccombe 1993; Townsend 2002). Indeed, even as

divorce rates have increased dramatically since the 1960s in the US and Canada (Ambert 1998; Laumann et al. 1994), and age of marriage has increased while rates of fertility have dropped (Laumann et al. 1994; Statistics Canada 2004), marital fidelity is quite high (Laumann et al. 1994), and the idealization of marriage and the nuclear family as the superior familial arrangement for relational happiness and child raising prevails (Gross 2005; Seccombe 1993; Waite and Gallagher 2000) — i.e., marriage continues to be “the capstone” of adult personal life (Cherlin 2004:850). “Detraditionalization,” argues Gross (2005), has indeed occurred over the course of the past century insofar as nearly half of marriages in the US end in divorce and traditional, internally gender-stratified marriages are waning. Nevertheless, it does not follow that romantic norms and ideals that underpin traditional marriage are anachronistic. Indeed, as Gross notes, they may continue to play an important role in shaping intimate life.

[W]hile those who deviate from the practice of LISM (lifelong, internally stratified marriage) are subject to fewer and less intensive social sanctions than in the past, the image of the form of couplehood inscribed in the regulative tradition of LISM continues to function as a hegemonic ideal in many — perhaps most — American intimate relationships. American intimacy also remains beholden to the tradition of romantic love, a cultural form that has its origins in 11th- and 12th-century Europe. These forms of indebtedness to tradition impose cultural constraints on intimate practices that theorists of detraditionalization have largely ignored.... (Gross 2005:288)

In this cultural context, it is no wonder that a significant contingent of same-sex spouses would conceive of, experience and talk about marriage in a manner that idealizes the traditional marital form and associates it with increased commitment, life-long dyadic stability, social support and integration, and a child-rearing, nuclear family. Indeed, it was Simon and Gagnon (1967) who, forty years ago, made the seminal social constructionist observation that the sociological study of homosexuality cannot *but* begin with an analysis of the larger social order in which homosexuals are embedded. In this regard, the marriages that same-sex spouses create should not be exoticized or essentialized, conceived as a *sui generis* dyadic form without context or precedent. In fact, homosexuals live with and alongside heterosexuals and heteronormativity, and are, in significant measure, subject to the latter’s socializing properties.

Conversely, that same-sex spouses adopt norms and practices which depart from and innovate upon traditional marital sexual relations and the domestic division of labour, is also not surprising. Indeed, if con-

temporary lesbians and gays are subject to heteronormativity, they are also, by dint of their outsider status as homosexuals, subject to a “*queer* meaning-constitutive tradition.” Emerging out of an historical dialectic marked by the exclusion from marriage and its concomitant relational norms and practices, this queer meaning-constitutive tradition effects a resocialization process situated outside of and in opposition to heteronormativity and the nuclear family (Green 2006; Herdt and Boxer 1992; Muchmore and Hanson 1991).

[Y]oung gays and lesbians must both overcome the cultural stereotypes of homosexuality and give up previously internalized heterosocial life goals. This identity change may involve some “grief work” and mourning as previously held expectations for marriage, heterosexual parenthood, etc., are replaced with new expectations, ideals and ambitions. (Herdt and Boxer 1992:19)

Perhaps nowhere is a queer meaning-constitutive tradition more fully realized than in the development of “sex-positive” (Becker 1984) queer cultures in large Western cities over the past four decades. These cultures strongly promote sexual freedom and celebrate sexual pleasure (Altman 1982; Fitzgerald 1986; Padgug 1989; Weeks 1988). In this context, heteronormative assumptions regarding the tight coupling of sex and love, dyadic commitment and monogamy, are subject to a “*transformational process*” (Herdt 1992:30) whereby the dominant meaning-constitutive romantic tradition identified by Gross (2005) is “unlearned” (Herdt 1992:30) and reworked (Adam 2006). In its place, a queer meaning-constitutive tradition imparts an “ethics of relating” centred on the negotiation of sexual needs and wants (Weeks et al. 2001:148) — or what Woolwine and McCarthy (2005:400) call a queer “moral pragmatism.” Thence in their study of gay men, Woolwine and McCarthy (2005) find no single moral code around sexual fidelity, but rather, a kind of “morally pragmatic stand” (2005:400) arising in the historical context of antihomosexual sentiment and associated stigmatization (2005:399). Similarly, while most lesbian couples prefer monogamy, Johnson (1990) finds that it is not uncommon for lesbian relationships to enter into phases of negotiated nonmonogamy. In sum, monogamy, even when practiced, is not a taken-for-granted dyadic norm, but is instead an outgrowth of the needs, desires and reflexive communication of spouses.

This historical dialectic in meaning-constitutive traditions, and the *dual* socialization process that follows, is perhaps nowhere more clear than in contemporary same-sex marriage. That is, on the one hand, lesbian and gay spouses are socialized within the dominant, heteronormative meaning-constitutive tradition, which includes discourses of roman-

tic love and the idealization of matrimony and the nuclear family (Hull 2006). On the other hand, for the majority of their lives, these same lesbian and gay spouses were excluded from access to the institution of marriage, and socialized, by contrast, in a queer meaning-constitutive tradition organized around sexual freedoms, dyadic innovation, and support for gender nonconformity (Adam 2006). Thence contemporary lesbians and gay men arrive at the institution of marriage in the context of discordant meaning-constitutive traditions. Put another way, with one foot anchored in heteronormativity and the other in homosexuality, today's same-sex married spouses are likely to express the cultural contradictions of their lives in the form of complex marital arrangements that bring together tradition and innovation, with the effect of both reproducing and subverting traditional marriage.¹⁴ These are, indeed, *queer* unions.

CONCLUSION: THE FUTURE OF SAME-SEX MARRIAGE

In this paper I review major themes in the literature on same-sex civil marriage and compare these against the accounts of actual, legally married same-sex spouses. I find that the forecasts of both proponents and critics of same-sex marriage are only partially reflected in the data. In fact, the same-sex marriages of this study marry tradition and innovation — a phenomenon, I suggest, arising out of a dual socialization process by competing meaning-constitutive traditions. In their most radical dimensions, these same-sex marriages challenge conventional norms around marital monogamy and the gender role-differentiated domestic division of labour. In this sense, the idea that gays and lesbians will transform the institution, rather than the institution transforming gays and lesbians, may have some credibility. Indeed, consistent with the arguments of some social commentators, same-sex marriage might be a very radical proposition in its effects (Calhoun 2000; Graff 1997; Hunter 1991; Josephson 2005).

Because contemporary lesbian and gay spouses create marital forms against the waning historical backdrop of exclusion from the institution, they may represent less the future of same-sex marriage, than a generational anomaly. That is, it is unclear if the radical dimensions of same-sex marriage will endure or, if instead, these elements will slowly erode as

14. The first generation of married same-sex couples may also have been together for a longer period of time prior to marriage relative to future generations. In this sense, the institution of marriage may have less of an effect on this first generation of married couples than future generations. This seems especially plausible among couples with a relatively long premarital relationship history.

younger lesbian and gay spouses are socialized into the dominant meaning-constitutive tradition without the mediating effects of a competing, queer meaning-constitutive tradition. This is conceivable insofar as future-to-be lesbian and gay adult-children who grow up in the context of same-sex marriage provisions will have a different experience with the structures of kinship than the generation of queers who came of age in earlier times. The idea that lesbians and gays will change the institution of marriage — as set forth by Josephson (2005) — may itself be both true and false. In the short run, the dual socialization of lesbian and gay spouses in both a heteronormative meaning-constitutive tradition *and* a queer meaning-constitutive tradition, may provide the contradictory cultural conditions upon which a substantial contingent of “first generation” same-sex spouses will reimagine the marital form. In the long run, the increasing availability of same-sex marriage may transform the historical dialectic outlined above, eroding the distinctiveness of what it means to be lesbian and gay and, in turn, queer and married. New generations of lesbians and gay men brought up with a same-sex marriage option may find a more “normalized” gay sexual subculture, accompanied by a “homonormativity” (Duggan 2002; 2003) grounded in the dominant, heteronormative meaning-constitutive tradition. Under these conditions, while surely not all lesbian and gay spouses will become marital traditionalists, they will also no longer encounter the structural conditions that underpin a queer marital innovation. If this were true, the forecasts of critical feminists and queer theorists may be prescient, after all.

Finally, it is interesting to note that in important respects, the effects of same-sex civil marriage in this study are similar to the effects of same-sex marriage found in other studies where legal marriage was not possible. For example, Hull (2006), Smart (2007) and Stiers (1999) find that commitment ceremonies create perceptions of increased commitment and permanence among same-sex couples. Moreover, these same couples felt that their public declaration of marriage consolidated social support among family and friends. Finally, for some of these couples, marriage was regarded as an important foundation for building a family, including childrearing. The overlap in findings across these studies suggests that marriage need not be legal or state-sanctioned to transform same-sex relationships.

This thesis can be overstated, however. Data from the present study, for instance, suggest at least three ways in which civil marriage may have a unique impact on the same-sex dyad. First, as noted above, some same-sex couples embraced nonmonogamy only after becoming legally married. In some instances, this change was expressly attributed to the legally binding status of civil marriage and the sense of permanence it

brought. Second, when participants spoke of the increasing status that accrued to them at work following civil marriage, they attributed this effect to the fact that heterosexual colleagues and employers — some of whom were themselves married — recognized marriage as a legitimating institution conferring intelligibility on their relationship and lifestyle. It may be that, in some cases, commitment ceremonies can have a similar effect, but this may not always be the case. And finally, some same-sex couples in the present study commonly reject commitment ceremonies outright as a kind of “second hand marriage” and “less than real marriage.” In these cases, the power of same-sex marriage comes as a function of its formal institutionalization in law and the resulting symbolic cache accruing to legal recognition. Hence, taken together, the data from this study provide a preliminary portrait that indicates a range of effects of same-sex civil marriage, some of which appear to overlap with the effects of nonlegal marriage, but others that may be unique to civil marriage. It will take future research to identify more precisely their relative impact on the same-sex dyad.

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