THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO

THE INSTITUTIONALIZATION OF SAME-SEX MARRIAGE:
HOW ACCESS TO LEGAL MARRIAGE IMPACTS LGBQ PEOPLE'S RELATIONSHIPS

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO

THE FACULTY OF THE DIVISION OF THE SOCIAL SCIENCES

IN CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE OF

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

DEPARTMENT OF SOCIOLOGY

BY

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CHICAGO, ILLINOIS

DECEMBER 2015

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ABSTRACT

The Institutionalization of Same-Sex Marriage examines how contemporary marriage operates and is experienced as an institution. It draws on survey and in-depth interview data collected from 116 individuals in married and unmarried same-sex relationships, who recently gained access to legal marriage in Massachusetts. Bridging two disparate fields of study, I use insights in neo-institutionalism to offer a counterpoint to theoretical ideas in family sociology about the "de-institutionalization" of marriage and demonstrate that same-sex marriage is a case of the continuing institutionalization of marriage. I detail how marriage has become taken-for-granted as an expected and necessary relationship outcome among LGBQ people; how it shapes their relationship choices and behaviors; and how it is understood and experienced as a unique means of obtaining social legitimacy. The findings in this study also illuminate the institutional mechanisms through which marriage shapes social action today. They reveal that although the formal rules and informal norms of marriage have weakened, widely shared cultural scripts that connect marriage to love and commitment preserve its institutional force. In addition, this study provides a detailed, complex picture of the consequences of legal marriage for LGBQ people. It finds that marriage can provide them with more defined templates for their relationships, fulfill their desires for commitment and security, and make them feel they belong in their communities and society at large. At the same time, it can also weaken relationships that do not follow the marital path, depress debate and critical perspectives, create new inequalities, and highlight the limits of family and societal acceptance. This study offers family scholars a more comprehensive and nuanced examination of contemporary marriage, institutional scholars a new empirical case study for thinking through institutional processes and outcomes, and sexualities scholars much needed empirical data on same-sex relationships in a rapidly changing legal and social landscape.

INTRODUCTION

When Erin and her wife started dating in 2003, same-sex marriage had not yet been made legal in her home state of Massachusetts. She had always imagined getting married and thought she and her partner might have a non-legal commitment ceremony at some point if they stayed together. Then, later that year, on November 18th, the Supreme Judicial Court of Massachusetts declared that it could find "no constitutionally adequate reason for denying civil marriage to same-sex couples" and ordered the state to begin issuing marriage licenses after a 180-day stay period (Goodridge v Dept. Public Health, 440 Mass 2003). By May 2004, less than a year into their relationship, she had the option to legally marry her partner. Within only a few months, Erin knew that they were going to get legally married – she said it was "just a matter of who was going to pop the question." Over the course of the next year, she and her partner talked about getting married casually, joking and teasing one another about when and how they would finally decide to do it, until Erin proposed to her on vacation. They immediately went shopping for rings, and got married the following year in an outdoor ceremony surrounded by friends and family.

When I interviewed Erin in 2012, I asked her why she had wanted to get legally married and, after having asked many others the same question already, I could almost anticipate her response. She replied:

> I mean the truth be told I think there was a big part of us that just felt like this is what you do. It was kind of like when you love someone and you're committed to them, I mean, that's kind of what you do. And so I think that was actually probably the biggest driving force, but also certainly we love each other. We were committed to each other. … I think we felt like first comes love, then comes marriage.

Erin's response encapsulated ideas and themes I encountered repeatedly over the course of a year as I interviewed 116 people in same-sex relationships in Massachusetts about their

understandings and experiences of marriage. Like others, Erin simply took-for-granted that she and her partner would get legally married after such an option became possible. It was not something she felt she *should* do or *had* to do. Instead she understood marriage as something obvious and inevitable that anyone would *want* to do if they were in a loving, committed relationship. Hearing Erin's response, I remember feeling a mixture of both surprise and familiarity. No matter how many times I heard similar responses, I continued to feel surprised at the extent to which lesbian, gay, bisexual, and queer (LGBQ) identified people had already come to expect marriage and attribute it so much importance in their relationships. Just 8 years after same-sex marriage had become legal, it appeared that marriage had become institutionalized among LGBQ people.

As soon as same-sex couples could get married in Massachusetts, on May 17, 2004, large numbers of people rushed to take advantage of the opportunity. In the first week it was legal, 2,468 same-sex couples applied for marriage licenses (MacDonald and Dedman 2004). By 2010 68% of all resident same-sex couples in Massachusetts had legally married (Badgett and Herman 2011).[1] Same-sex couples in Massachusetts were nearly three-quarters of the way to the same cumulative take-up rate for marriage as different-sex couples in Massachusetts after just 6 years. By the 10-year anniversary of legal same-sex marriage in 2014, analyses suggested that 80% of same-sex couples in Massachusetts were legally married (Williams Institute 2014). These high rates of marriage certainly suggest some degree of institutionalization had occurred. Yet, a simple, dichotomous model of adoption or non-adoption of marriage as a legal status tells us

[1] Their data distinguishes resident from non-resident same-sex couples because when same-sex marriage was first made legal in MA an old law dating back to 1913 was used to restrict same-sex marriage to only couples who resided or intended to reside in Massachusetts. This so-called "1913 law" was not repealed until July 31, 2008.

little about how LGBQ people think about and experience marriage or what institutional mechanisms drive the process of institutionalization.

The Institutionalization of Same-Sex Marriage offers an in-depth look at how contemporary marriage operates and is experienced *as an institution*. It draws and builds on neo-institutional theory to make sense of how having the option to legally marry governs relationship choices and behaviors as well as the meanings people attach to them. Offering a counterpoint to theoretical ideas within family scholarship about the "de-institutionalization of marriage" (Cherlin 2004), I demonstrate instead that same-sex marriage is a case of the continuing institutionalization of marriage. Further, I use the experiences of a group of people who had recently gained the right to legal marriage to provide new insights into the character and strength of contemporary marriage more generally. Drawing on survey data and in-depth interviews, I find that the institution of marriage continues to have great power over personal and intimate relationships because, even though marital rules and norms have weakened, people continue to take-for-granted widely shared cultural scripts about marriage, love, and commitment.

The Changing Institution of Marriage

Among family scholars, there is broad consensus that the institution of marriage has undergone dramatic changes in the past century, and the last few decades (Amato 2004; Axinn and Thornton 2000; Cherlin 2004; Coontz 2004, 2005; Thornton, Axinn and Xie 2007). Marriage is generally understood as having undergone two major transitions in the past century, first from "institutional to companionate marriage" in the early to mid twentieth century (Burgess and Locke 1945), and then from companionate to "individualized" marriage in the late twentieth century (Cherlin 2009; see Amato 2012 for a fuller description of these changes). Prior to the

first transition, an institutional model of marriage meant that the stability of the family took precedence over the needs of individual family members. Although many marriages involved strong ties of affection, practical considerations figured more prominently than love. Legal restrictions and community norms made divorce difficult. At the beginning of the twentieth century, marriage became less about social and religious obligations and more focused on ideas about love, companionship, and compatibility. Nonetheless, marriage remained the only socially acceptable way to have a sexual relationship and raise children, and it was still strongly bound by religious ideals and community norms.

Beginning in the 1960s, the wall separating marriage from non-marriage broke down. Unmarried cohabitation became much more acceptable (both before or instead of marrying) and childbearing outside marriage less stigmatized (Bumpass and Lu 2000; Raley 2001; Smock 2000). The result was that marriage came to have less of an institutional hold over people's relationships and lives. Today a wider array of alternative relationship choices exist, and marriage is "no longer necessary to activate one's property rights, legal standing, public role, and social status" (Coontz 2004:975). However, these changes have resulted in widespread scholarly concern and debate about the "retreat from marriage," especially among racial minorities and lower-income groups (Cherlin 2014; Gibson-Davis, Edin and McLanahan 2005; Lichter, Roempke and Brown 2003; Schoen and Cheng 2006). As alternatives to marriage grew, marriage itself also became a qualitatively different kind of union. In this new "individualized" model of marriage, there was a shift in emphasis from "from role to self" and a new focus on personal fulfillment (Cancian 1987; Cherlin 2009). Love became absolutely essential to marriage, but marriages were successful only to the extent that they fulfilled each partners' innermost psychological needs. These shifts were part of much broader cultural changes toward

individualization (Beck & Beck-Gernsheim 2002; Bellah et al. 1985; Giddens 1991, 1992). As a result of these cultural shifts as well as changes to legislation, divorce rates rose to unprecedented levels (Cherlin 1992; Furstenberg 1990; Teachman, Tedrow and Crowder 2000). Today, most Americans continue to get married but they remain in marriage only so long as they find it emotionally rewarding (Amato et al. 2007; Cherlin 2009).

In the contemporary "individualized" model of marriage, its institutional basis is assumed to have decreasing significance. The sociologist Andrew Cherlin (2004) has argued that marriage has become "de-institutionalized," which he defines as ''the weakening of the social norms that define people's behavior in a social institution such as marriage'' (848). Other family scholars have also made similar claims. For example, historian Nancy Cott (2000) compared changes to marriage to the historical disestablishment of religion. Family demographers Arland Thornton, William Axinn and Yu Xie (2007) boldly stated "the declining centrality of marriage in defining and guiding human behavior and relationships" is "one of the most important stories of the past several centuries of Western history" (4). Statements about the weakening institutional strength of marriage have been ubiquitous throughout family scholarship since the 2000s. Yet the idea of de-institutionalization has received very little theoretically grounded debate, nor has it been tested empirically by family or institutional scholars. Scholars have not offered any in-depth analyses of how people actually experience marriage *as an institution,* nor empirically examined the way in which marriage does or does not shape social action today. The result is that amidst widespread public and political debate about marriage – about if the government should actively promote marriage, and who should and should not have access to it – we actually know very little about the nature of the institution that scholars, and the American public, are fighting over.

Despite changes to the institution of marriage, marriage remains both the most common

and idealized family form in America. There has been no decline in the importance young people attach to marriage (Thornton and Young-DeMarco 2001), and it is estimated that 90% of people in the U.S. will continue to marry at some point in their lives (Goldstein and Kenney 2001). Marriage also continues to be a central component in the way Americans define what a family is (Powell et al. 2010). In an attempt to make sense of these facts, Cherlin (2004) described marriage as "deinstitutionalized but also common and distinctive" (857). He argued that marriage has lost its institutional power but remains important "on a symbolic level" as a ''marker of prestige.'' It has been "transformed from a familial and community institution to an individualized, choice based achievement" (858). The implication is that individuals choose marriage freely as one lifestyle choice among alternatives, but that marriage is the most prestigious choice.

By contrast, I argue that to make sense of why so many people still marry and attribute so much prestige to marriage, we need to understand the institutional mechanisms behind its continuing power. Instead of seeing contemporary marriage as a kind of puzzle – as "de-institutionalized but also common and distinctive" – focusing on institutionalization helps explain its character and strength. The findings in this dissertation do not necessarily conflict with Cherlin's (2004, 2009) argument that people marry for the status it provides. Rather, my findings explain the institutionalized basis on which marriage continues to confer status (see Lauer & Yodanis 2010). I am not the first to challenge the *idea* of de-institutionalization. In her history of marriage, Cott (2000) questions the dominant view of marriage in the U.S. today as a private commitment, and offers historical evidence for its strong and continuing institutional basis. Lauer and Yodanis (2010) present a strong theoretical challenge to the idea that marriage has become de-institutionalized. However, this dissertation also offers much needed empirical

evidence regarding the changing and enduring institution of marriage.

Institutions and Institutionalization

Family scholars refer to marriage as an institution but have only rarely attempted to theorize or study empirically exactly what this means. Neo-institutional scholars, in contrast, have focused primarily on economic and political organizations and typically mention marriage only in passing. I connect these disparate fields in order to push scholarship about the institution of marriage to a more rigorous and analytical level. Institutional analysis is concerned with how social choices and actions are shaped, mediated, and channeled by institutional arrangements. Institutions govern social action in several ways. One way they govern action is through formal and informal rules that constrain and enable behavior (DiMaggio 1998). They are the "rules of the game" (North 1993). Formal rules might be developed at the level of the state but can also be found in the bureaucratic rules of organizations. In addition, informal rules, or norms, develop outside of formal organizations as actors develop a shared sense of what behaviors are best and appropriate. Other members of social groups then enforce these rules and norms. Until relatively recently, most institutional theories held that institutions shaped action in these kind of normative ways – so that individuals acted out of a sense of duty or an awareness of what one is "supposed" to do. This is how Cherlin (2004) defined a social institution when he argued marriage had been de-institutionalized - as external, informal rules for behavior.

While formal and informal rules are an essential component of the ways institutions govern behavior, it is not the only way. One of the most central contributions of neo-institutional theory has been to raise awareness of a more cognitive type of institutional influence. This "cognitive turn" in social theory has changed the way social scientists think about human

motivation and behavior (DiMaggio and Powell 1991). In older institutionalist theories, cultural norms were internalized and human behavior was seen as grounded in morality and commitment. The shift in thinking has placed emphasis on the more purely cognitive aspects of routine social behavior. This version of neo-institutionalism originated in phenomenological sociology and is partially captured in the process of ‘‘habitualization’’ (Berger and Luckmann 1966). Instead of acting under rules or because of obligation, individuals also act because of the things they are able to conceive. They make certain choices because they cannot conceive of any alternative. In this way, institutions are built on shared cognitions that define "what has meaning and what actions are possible" (DiMaggio and Powell 1991:9). They constrain not only our possible actions but also our possible preferences for action (Lauer and Yodanis 2010:59). They are the context within which our interests are developed, so that taken-for-granted assumptions concerning interests, preferences, and what is possible in certain circumstances guide individual action (Meyer and Rowan 1977; DiMaggio and Powell 1991). Clemens and Cook (1999) summarize these two different images of institutions as “constraining and proscriptive” (old-institutionalism) and “constitutive and prescriptive” (neo-institutionalism). They are not mutually exclusive perspectives, and both theoretical models may account for the same empirical observations (Clemens and Cook 1999:446). Nevertheless, the approaches that predominate in sociology conceive of institutions as providing models, schemas, or scripts for behavior rather than rules or norms. This is important because it means that even as external formal and informal rules regarding marriage weaken and actors have more freedom in their relationship choices, other institutional mechanisms may still play a powerful role in shaping intimate relationships.

Clemens and Cook (1999) explain that institutions endure because shared cognitive models become "taken for granted" through repeated use and interaction (Berger and Luckmann

1966; DiMaggio and Powell 1991:19-22) and "legitimate" through the endorsement of some authoritative or powerful individual or organization (Meyer and Rowan 1977). Models for action get reinforced through repeated interaction and legitimation, and over time alternative scripts become meaningless, even “unimaginable” (Clemens and Cook 1999:446). Institutionalization, then, is the “process by which certain social relationships and actions come to be ‘taken for granted’” (DiMaggio and Powell 1991:9). It is perhaps best conceived of as like a process of sedimentation - a gradual layering, settling, and solidifying of expectations as they become accepted as external fact and other possibilities become inconceivable (Tolbert and Zucker 1996; Zucker 1977). When models for action become institutionalized, they exert higher-order effects on the actions, indeed the constitution, of individuals without requiring repeated collective mobilization or authoritative intervention to achieve these regularities (Jepperson 1991). Direct social control - whether through incentives or negative sanctions - is therefore no longer necessary (Zucker 1977:728).

Given these understandings, marriage operates via both formal and informal rules and norms, and shared scripts about why couples should marry and how married couples should act. Formal rules at the state level connect marriage to a wide variety of rights and responsibilities. At the organizational level, benefits, such as health care coverage for dependents, are also usually provided based on marital status. Informal norms also operate to make individuals feel they should marry, for example as a means of creating stability before having children. These rule- and norm-based institutional mechanisms have weakened but shared cognitive understandings and cultural scripts about marriage have not. One does not need to look very far to see how widely shared cultural ideas about marriage as the epitome of love and commitment are. They permeate every corner of popular culture. This was also a primary basis on which the

Supreme Court of the United States made same-sex marriage legal (Obergefell v. Hodges 576 U. S. 2015). Justice Kennedy argued, "The right to marry is fundamental because it supports a two-person union unlike any other in its importance to the committed individuals" (13). He concluded, "No union is more profound than marriage, for it embodies the highest ideals of love, fidelity, devotion, sacrifice, and family. In forming a marital union, two people become something greater than once they were … marriage embodies a love that may endure even past death" (28). After it became legal, almost every major news source contextualized the victory as about "love:" the *New York Times* Opinion headline read "Love Has Won;"[2] the *USA Today* headline read "Ohio Man Fought for His Love: Won Gay Marriage;"[3] and President Obama simply tweeted "Love Wins!"[4]

There are a variety of different cultural scripts about love and commitment, but Ann Swidler's (2001) *Talk of Love* identifies the two primary scripts that shape marital decisions and behaviors as "prosaic" and as "mythic." The "prosaic realistic" view is that "love requires continuing hard work, compromise, and change, and that it grows slowly" (114). By contrast, the "mythic" view of love is that of a decisive choice, a unique other,[5] of overcoming obstacles, and of love lasting forever (118). These two different cultural ideas about love persist and coexist because people employ them in different contexts (129). When thinking about the choice of

[2] http://www.nytimes.com/2015/06/27/opinion/love-has-won-reaction-to-the-supreme-court-ruling-on-gay-marriage.html?_r=0 (Last Accessed: July 20 2015).
[3] http://www.usatoday.com/story/news/politics/2015/06/26/ohio-same-sex-marriage-plaintiff/29344307/ (Last Accessed: July 20 2015).
[4] https://www.whitehouse.gov/blog/2015/06/26/live-updates-lovewins-supreme-court-rules-gay-and-lesbian-couples-can-marry-0 (Last Accessed: July 20 2015).
[5] The idea of a "unique other" also aligns with cultural ideas about marrying one's "soul mate" (Whitehead and Poponoe 2001). Based on a survey of young men and women, aged 20-29, conducted by the Gallup Organization for the National Marriage Project, Whitehead and Poponoe (2001) found that 94% of never married singles agreed to the statement, "When you marry you want your spouse to be your soul mate, first and foremost."

whether to marry or stay married, people draw on cultural ideas about love in mythic terms. When thinking about how to maintain ongoing relationships people tend to mobilize the prosaic realistic culture of love. We can also easily see how cultural ideas about marital commitment have their roots in these two different cultural scripts. On one hand, the commitment involved in marriage stems from a prosaic view of love - commitment is about putting in the hard work necessary to make marriages last. On the other hand, it stems from the idea that marriage symbolizes a deeper and more lasting kind of commitment than other relationship options. Swidler argues that Americans draw heavily on "mythic" ideas about love because they are grounded in the "structural reality" of marriage (117): "It is the structure of marriage as an institution that makes the love myth plausible" (127). In other words, it is the institution of marriage that makes it possible for people to enact the core features of the mythic love script – to make a decisive choice about who to be with, to publicly state that they have a unique love for one person, to prove that obstacles to love can be overcome, and to make a commitment that is meant to last forever.

Marriage can be thought of as *institutionalized* to the extent that these cultural ideas about marriage and its unique connection to love and commitment are *taken-for-granted*. It is also institutionalized to the extent that it is a unique means of gaining external social legitimacy. These two characteristics are highly connected, as the social legitimacy that marriage grants stem from shared beliefs in marriage as a special kind of love and commitment. These taken-for-granted beliefs and external legitimacy then combine to ensure that marriage continues to be widely desired and routinely practiced without the need for authoritative intervention or collective mobilization to maintain it. Government agencies and organizations, still fearful of the decline of marriage, may try to promote marriage (Heath 2012), but as a fully institutionalized

social practice these actions do not explain why so many people marry or attribute marriage so much importance in their lives.

Same-Sex Marriage*:* A Case Study of Institutionalization

Many of the changes to marriage that family scholars are concerned about are really behaviors that take place *outside* of marriage, such as unmarried cohabitation and childrearing. However, as Lauer and Yodanis (2010) explain, the existence of alternative relationship and childrearing arrangements do not represent a change to the institution of marriage itself. In fact, it is the clear institutional understanding of what it means to be married that allows us to recognize these alternatives as *not* marriage (61). To explore the institutional nature of marriage therefore requires focusing more directly on how people think about and behave in marriage today. As a new population with access to marriage, same-sex couples offer an exceptional window into institutional experiences of marriage. Same-sex marriage represents a critical juncture in the institutional development of marriage. It signals both the continuing institutionalization of marriage, as it expands to include new populations, and suggests the possibility of de-institutionalization or institutional change, as adherence to traditional marital norms decline, and marital practices and experiences become more varied.

I find that gay men and lesbians offer a kind of "outsider-within" perspective (Collins 1986; Schilt 2010) on marriage.[6] Because marriage has always been available to (same-race) heterosexual couples, it exists for many people as an unexamined institutional backdrop in their

[6] In Schilt's (2010) research on the experiences of transmen in the workplace, she argues that, having worked on both sides of the gender binary, transmen have an "outsider-within" perspective on gendered workplace practices, and are able to illuminate much about unequal gender relations between men and women more generally. Likewise, the "outsider-within" perspectives of gay men and lesbians illuminate much about the institutional experiences of marriage that heterosexuals are less able to recognize and articulate.

lives. By contrast, same-sex couples are moving from a situation of being excluded from the institution of marriage, having spent much of their lives not being able to marry someone of the same sex or even thinking it would be possible, to now gaining access to it. It is this shift from an excluded to an included status that makes same-sex couples acutely aware of the power of marriage and the ways it impacts the kind of choices and experiences they now have. Their recent exclusion from marriage enables them to think about and compare their pre- and post-marital experiences, and provide insights into how having access to legal marriage has changed their relationships. The marital experiences of LGBQ people therefore provide an exceptional opportunity to study processes of institutionalization *as they occur*.

In line with neo-institutional scholarship, this dissertation offers specific kinds of evidence of the institutionalization of marriage among LGBQ people. In particular, it focuses on two core components of institutionalization: taken-for-grantedness and external legitimation. I show that getting legally married has become taken-for-granted as an expected and ideal relationship outcome among LGBQ people. I also demonstrate that, once married, LGBQ people take-for-granted that they should follow particular marital practices. I illustrate how LGBQ people draw instinctively and unconsciously on widely shared scripts about marriage, love and commitment to explain their relationship choices and make sense of their marital experiences. These define what has meaning and what actions seem possible to them. Moreover, I show that LGBQ people take-for-granted marriage as a means of obtaining external social legitimacy, and outline how this desire for legitimacy shapes their relationship choices and experiences as well as interactions with both heterosexuals and others in the LGBQ community.

What Do We Already Know about Same-Sex Marriage?

In the decade since same-sex marriage first became legal in Massachusetts in 2004, Americans have witnessed a rapidly changing marriage landscape for same-sex couples across the country, with states both legalizing marriage and alternatives such as domestic partnerships and civil unions as well as passing constitutional amendments excluding same-sex couples from marriage.[7] By the time the Supreme Court of the United States ruled to make same-sex legal throughout the country in June 2015 (Obergefell v. Hodges 576 U. S. 2015) same-sex couples could already legally marry in 37 states, and nearly 72 per cent of the U.S. population lived in a state currently issuing marriage licenses to same-sex couples state-wide (Freedom to Marry 2015). Yet just four years before, only 4 percent of the U.S. population lived in states where same-sex marriage was legal (Silver 2015). As the statistician and political forecaster Nate Silver argues, the pace of change on the issue of same-sex marriage has been "unusual" and "remarkably fast" (Silver 2015). One result has been that it has been difficult for scholars to keep up and there is still very little reliable empirical information about same-sex marriage.

More than a decade on we still know very little about same-sex marriage in the United States. This is not to suggest that the topic of same-sex marriage hasn't garnered much scholarly attention. Scholars have spent a great deal of time debating the merits of same-sex marriage (Card 2007; Conrad 2010; LaSala 2007; Polikoff 2008; Walters 2014; Weeks 2008). Another growing body of work examines the genesis and development of the marriage equality movement and the politics surrounding same-sex marriage (Barclay, Bernstein and Marshall 2009; Klarman 2012; Nicol and Smith 2008; Stone 2012; Taylor et al. 2009). Some have also

[7] A full list of state and federal judicial opinions on the issue of same-sex marriage are listed in Appendix A of the Supreme Court of the United States decision on same-sex marriage (Obergefell v. Hodges 576 U. S. 2015). The Attorney General of Maryland's (2015) *The State of Marriage Equality in America* also reviews the litigation, legislation, and referenda that occurred state-by-state in the years leading up to the Supreme Court decision.

outlined the legal issues facing same-sex couples in marriage (Cahill and Tobias 2007; Oswald and Kuvalanka 2008). However, there is very little empirical research on how LGBQ people experience marriage and what impact marriage has on their relationships.

Until very recently, it was difficult to even gain accurate data on how many same-sex couples in the United States had legally married. The U.S Census Bureau's 2013 American Community Survey (ACS) marked the first time that a large national demographic survey explicitly identified both married and unmarried same-sex couples, allowing for separate analyses of these two groups. Prior to its release, the U.S Census Bureau reported married same-sex couples as "unmarried partners" (see Cohn 2014; O'Connell and Felix 2011). Thanks to the ACS data, we now know that, as of February 2015, more than 700,000 Americans are part of a married same-sex couple, meaning that there are now about 350,000 married same-sex couples in the country (Gates 2015). Survey data has also provided information about how married same-sex couples compare to their unmarried same-sex and different-sex counterparts (Badgett and Herman 2011; Gates 2015). From this, we know, for example, that female same-sex couples are more likely than male couples to get legally married. Compared to their unmarried counterparts, married same-sex couples have a higher household median income, and are more likely to own homes, and have children. Compared to different-sex married couples, married same-sex couples are much more likely to be raising adopted or fostered children.

However, we still know surprisingly little about how LGBQ people in same-sex relationships in the United States experience legal marriage when it becomes available to them. Some earlier research provides information about how same-sex couples experienced civil unions and domestic partnerships (Balsam, Beauchaine, Rothblum, and Solomon 2008; Rothblum, Balsam and Solomon 2008) but this cannot be used to gain insight into full legal

marriage. Most same-sex couples recognize a significant difference between full marriage and legal alternatives to marriage and prefer legal marriages to any other form of legal recognition (Badgett and Herman 2011; Gates, Badgett and Ho 2008). A majority of same-sex couples who had civil unions or domestic partnerships also said they would have married if they could have (Rothblum et al. 2008). We know that "beyond having the legal rights and obligations associated with marriage, the name "marriage" matters for same-sex couples" (Gates et al. 2008: 20).

Early survey studies were mainly speculative about the possible impact of marriage on same-sex relationships. Lanutti (2007) conducted a web-based survey with LGBTQ-identified individuals in Massachusetts immediately after same-sex marriage became legal there. She asked participants how legally recognized same-sex marriages *might* change their romantic relationship or the way they think about romantic relationships. Participants believed that marriage might make their relationships "seem more real," both to others and themselves. They also thought that it might "change their desires" by impacting what they looked for in potential partners and their desire for "traditional" romance in their relationships. Shulman, Gotta and Green (2012) similarly surveyed Californian same-sex couples awaiting the California Supreme Court ruling on same-sex marriage in 2008 about what impact they *anticipated* access to legal marriage would have on their relationships. Participants expected wide-ranging positive impacts on their own and their children's psychological well-being, their couple relationships, and social interactions with family and friends. Moving beyond speculation, the Massachusetts Department of Public Health conducted a survey in 2009 to celebrate the 5-year anniversary of legal same-sex marriage in Massachusetts and find out how marriage had impacted its same-sex residents (Ramos, Goldberg and Badgett 2009). Respondents in this survey said that getting married had made them "more likely to be out," and had made them feel "more committed" to their partners and "more

accepted" by their families and communities.

Only a handful of studies have provided more in-depth, qualitative data about how same-sex couples experience marriage. Kimport (2014) interviewed couples who gained temporary access to legal marriage during what was termed the "Winter of Love" in San Francisco in February 2004.[8] She used their stories to investigate how and when the practice of same-sex marriage reifies or disrupts marriage's meaning as a heterosexual practice, and to assess the relationship between marriage and heteronormativity. However, as these marriages were only briefly legal they do not provide insight into longer-term experiences of marriage, or offer any indication of the way same-sex marriage may have become institutionalized. Richman's (2013) research included interviews with both same-sex couples who were married during the "Winter of Love" and who married in Massachusetts during the first few years of it being legal. Her work is primarily focused on the reasons people get married and approaches the topic from a legal rather than a sociological standpoint. Nonetheless, her work offers some important preliminary insights into the longer-term marital experiences of same-sex couples. Her findings suggest that married same-sex couples felt a greater sense of permanence, commitment and security in their relationships, and believed that marriage helped their straight friends and acquaintances understand their relationships better.

Overall, the little existing research on same-sex marriage raises many more questions than it answers. We know very little about the longer-term impacts of marriage on LGBQ

[8] On February 12, 2004 the recently elected Mayor of San Francisco, Gavin Newsom, directed city hall to issue marriage licenses to same-sex couples. Same-sex couples were granted marriage licenses for four weeks until the Supreme Court of California issued a stay. On August 12, 2004, the California Supreme Court handed down a unanimous decision that the Mayor had exceeded his authority in issuing the licenses, and further ruled three to two to void all of the same-sex licenses that had been issued. This meant that the couples who had married were no longer married in the eyes of the law.

people's relationships. How do same-sex couples experience marriage after the initial excitement of gaining access to it dies down? We also know nothing about how unmarried LGBQ people experience the option to become legally married. All existing research has focused on LGBQ people who chose to get legally married, but how does gaining access to legal marriage impact LGBQ people who have not married? Moreover, existing research explores only the outcomes of marriage, not how it shapes them. What are the social and institutional mechanisms through which marriage impacts same-sex relationships? These are all issues my research was designed to address.

The Study

The findings in this study are based on survey and in-depth interview data collected from individuals in married and unmarried same-sex relationships in Massachusetts in 2012-13. All participants had been cohabiting with a same-sex partner for at least a year. Some of them already lived in Massachusetts before same-sex marriage became legal there, while others moved to Massachusetts only afterward. Their relationship histories and current relationship situations varied greatly, but what they all had in common was that they had gone from a position of not having access to legal marriage to now having access to it. In total, 116 people took part in the study. These included 66 women and 50 men; 70 of whom were legally married and 46 of whom were in unmarried relationships. They ranged in age from 23 to 69, and had been with their partners anywhere from 1 to 32 years. All participants identified as lesbian, gay, bisexual, or queer, and were predominantly White and highly educated. See Appendix B for more information on the demographic and relationship characteristics of the sample.

The people who took part responded to a call for participants for a study about "how lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender people have experienced gaining the right to legally marry and how it impacts their lives." I specifically called for participants in both married and unmarried same-sex relationships, and made it clear that it did not matter what their views on marriage were or whether they had any interest in marrying. Participants found out about the study in a number of ways. Some saw fliers that I handed them directly at LGBQ events, such as Pride parades, or saw fliers that I had posted at LGBQ friendly venues across Massachusetts, such as coffee shops, bars, or community centers. Some received emails about the study from organizations and list-servs that agreed to help me advertise it to their members. These included political, religious, and social organizations, such as MassEquality, the Metropolitan Community Church, and LGBQ specific book clubs, hiking groups, and baseball leagues.[9] Others found out about the study from people who had already taken part, or from family, friends, and acquaintances who had heard about the study and thought they might be interested.

To take part, all participants agreed to complete an online survey and to do an in-depth face-to-face interview with me. Surveys took on average of 30 minutes to complete, and interviews lasted from 45 minutes to 3 hours, but averaged an hour and a half. Interviews took place wherever participants felt most comfortable talking and believed they would have privacy, including participants' homes, coffee shops, restaurants, bars, community centers, libraries, and

[9] Although some participants went to LGBQ venues or events or received emails from LGBQ-related organizations, for the most part these were not people who were highly involved in LGBQ communities. Fifteen per cent of the sample said that they went to public places where LGBQ people socialize (such as coffee shops or community centers) weekly, and 43% said they went monthly. Six per cent of the sample said that they attended organized LGBQ events weekly, and 22% said that they attended them monthly. People who found out about the study via LGBQ organizations or groups frequently told me in the interview that, although they received emails from them, they had never actually attended their events. Moreover, only a few participants had been actively involved in the movement to win marriage equality. Their experiences of marriage therefore reflect those of "rank-and-file" LGBQ people, not activists.

parks. The survey and interview instruments both covered a wide variety of topics, including their relationship history, coming out experiences, commitment and marriage decisions, relationship practices and satisfaction, relationships with families and friends, and community involvement. Participants were also asked direct questions regarding their opinions on marriage, and how they thought having the right to legally marry, and being legally married, had impacted various aspects of their lives. I draw on both data sources throughout the dissertation, particularly when doing so provides additional insights, and greater elaboration and clarification of results (Small 2011). However, as a primarily qualitative researcher, I rely most heavily on the interview data, which was essential for understanding the mechanisms through which marriage shapes relationship experiences and for exploring meaning making - how LGBQ people assigned meaning to their actions and experiences and the ways they drew on marital norms and scripts to do so.

It was not my intention to produce statistically generalizable findings. As such, my findings do not necessarily speak to the experiences of all people in same-sex relationships. It is important to keep in mind the particular characteristics of the sample when considering the findings. The experiences of this sample – highly educated, predominantly White, cisgender, and coupled - should not be taken to stand in for any other group. In particular, socialization experiences, access to resources, networks, and marriage markets may differ for those with different amounts of education and those of different racial and ethnic backgrounds (Banks 2011; Moore 2011; Schwartz and Graff 2009; Streib 2015). We know that Whites are more likely to marry than African Americans, and Americans with higher income and education are more likely to marry than Americans with lower income and less education (Gibson-Davis et al. 2005; Goldstein and Kenney 2001; Teachman et al. 2000). Recent statistics also suggest these same

trends are true for same-sex couples (Gates 2015). Within my sample, I found no clear patterns by race/ethnicity or education, but research with greater proportions of non-White and non-highly-educated participants might show that the impact and experience of same-sex marriage varies by race and class quite substantially. As none of my participants identified as transgender this research also cannot speak to their experiences. I refer to "LGBQ people" throughout the dissertation, unless I am presenting direct quotes from participants in which they refer to a "LGBT" or "LGBTQ" community. My findings also do not speak to the experiences of single LGBQ people, or to those who are not in dyadic relationships, although they too are likely impacted by gaining access to legal marriage.

Lastly, it is important to note that at the time of data collection, same-sex couples who were legally married at the state level did not have their marriages federally recognized and did not have access to federal level marriage protections and benefits. In June 2013, just after I had completed data collection, the Supreme Court of the United States overturned the relevant section (Section 3) of the 1996 Defense of Marriage Act, and granted federal recognition to married same-sex couples (United States v. Windsor, 570 U.S. 2013). The fact that the LGBQ people in this study desired legal marriage and assigned it importance in their relationships even without federal recognition offers one indication of the power of marriage as an institution. Nevertheless, it is also possible that LGBQ people experienced marriage differently after they gained access to its federal benefits, and this should be kept in mind when interpreting my findings.

Overview of Chapters

Each of the four empirical chapters in this dissertation offers evidence of the institutionalization of marriage among LGBQ people. Chapter 1 focuses on people's decision-making processes around whether or not to get legally married. It examines the extent to which marriage has become an *expected* and *necessary* end-point in the relationships of same-sex couples. I compare the experiences of those were already in their current relationships before same-sex marriage became legal to those who started their relationships after marriage was already a legal option to demonstrate how the institutionalization process takes place over time and relies on both cultural and legal components. I also explore age-based differences in marital decision-making, and show how marriage is more firmly institutionalized among younger people in newer relationships.

Chapter 2 examines what happens after LGBQ people get legally married and analyzes how being married impacts their relationship behaviors and practices. I highlight significant differences between the relationship behaviors of married and unmarried participants and identify the mechanisms that shape them. I show that, although same-sex couples do not adhere strongly to norms about how to behave in marriage, taken-for-granted ideas about marriage and commitment ensure they follow expected marital relationship practices. These taken-for-granted ideas manifest themselves as "intangible" changes to the way they "feel" about their partners but have the power to shape their "tangible" relationship practices too, including how they argue, make plans for the future, and manage their finances.

In Chapter 3, I detail how LGBQ people assume marriage helps them to gain social legitimacy, and examine how their understandings of marital legitimacy impact their social interactions with heterosexuals. I focus on how marital legitimacy shapes coming out experiences and responses to prejudice and discrimination in everyday social interactions with

heterosexuals. I demonstrate that married and unmarried people experience the legitimating effects of marriage in different ways. I also explore the limits of marital legitimacy for LGBQ people. I do this by highlighting social and personal situations in which the presumption of legitimacy proves insufficient to make a real difference, including in public displays of same-sex affection and in precarious relationships with families of origin.

In Chapter 4, I shift attention away from the legitimating impact of marriage on interactions and relationships with heterosexuals to its impact on interactions and relationships within LGBQ communities. I explore the role that legal marriage plays in "normalization." Then I examine the consequences of normalization for people who do not conform to marital expectations, including those who are critical of marriage as an institution, who do not want to marry, and who are non-monogamous. I reveal the means through which legal marriage suppresses and softens critical views within LGBQ communities and results in stigma toward people in unmarried and non-monogamous relationships. However, I also show how cultural understandings of marriage as a "personal choice" help sustain open-mindedness about both normative and non-normative relationship choices.

The conclusion is divided into two parts. The first part provides an overview of what the findings tell us about the impact of marriage on LGBQ relationships and situates them in existing literature on same-sex marriage. The second part explores what these findings tell us about the institutionalization of marriage, and what we can learn from them about institutional processes more broadly. I highlight how the findings paint a less uniformly positive picture of the impact of legal marriage on LGBQ relationships than existing research suggests, challenge ideas within family sociology about the weakening institution of marriage, and offer insights on several issues in neo-institutional literature, including relationships between institutions, culture, and emotions,

conceptual definitions of institutional legitimacy, and distinctions between institutional access and adoption.

Taken together, the findings in this study show that the contemporary institution of marriage is far from de-institutionalized. The case of same-sex marriage illuminates the usually invisible mechanisms through which the institution continues to govern our relationships in powerful and profound ways. The formal rules and informal norms that once governed marital decisions and behaviors may have weakened, but more taken-for-granted cultural scripts have taken their place and ensure marriage retains its institutional force. Examining the experiences that LGBQ people have around legal marriage, and the meanings they attach to them, we can see the many ways that marriage shapes our desires, choices, and actions in intimate, family, and community relationships.

CHAPTER 1

First Comes Love, Then Comes Marriage:

Decisions to Legally Marry in Same-Sex Relationships

In this chapter, I focus on two core characteristics of institutionalization as "taken-for-granted" (DiMaggio and Powell 1991:9) and "rule-like" (Meyer and Rowan 1977:341) by examining the extent to which legal marriage had become an *expected* and *necessary* end-point in participants' relationships. Did participants take-for-granted that they would get legally married once it became available? Had legal marriage become "rule-like" as a compulsory part of their relationships? The short, simple answer is yes. Many of the participants spoke about marriage as something they assumed they would do. Its taken-for-granted quality meant that they often found it difficult to articulate why they wanted to marry or why it was important to them. Despite being a relatively new option, getting legally married had become essential for many participants. They saw marriage as necessary for feeling secure and confident in their relationships and could not imagine them lasting without the reassurance of marriage. For those who started relationships after marriage became legal, to not marry was "unthinkable" (Zucker 1977: 728) and "unimaginable" (Clemens & Cook 1999: 446), suggesting that a high degree of institutionalization had occurred.

Institutionalization is a process that takes place over time and can exist to differing degrees. As Zucker (1977) emphasized: "At any point in the process the meaning of an act can be defined as more or less a taken-for-granted part of social reality" (728). I compare the experiences of participants who were in relationships prior to legal marriage with those who

formed relationships after marriage became legal to explore in more depth when and how institutionalization occurred. Doing this allows me to distinguish the roles that cultural and legal components of marriage play in the institutionalization process. I find that some cultural aspects of marriage were already internalized and practiced prior to it becoming legal, but that the convergence of the cultural and legal components of marriage was a crucial catalyst for the institutionalization process.

Marriage is both a legal structure with formal rules and rights and a pervasive cultural idea and practice. It is *independent of the law* in the sense of being a cultural idea that is available to any well-socialized member of society. Because most LGBQ people are socialized in broader heterosexual families and communities, marriage does not need to be legal for to them to think about and aspire to it. Marriage is also independent of the law in the sense of being a ritual that couples enact to symbolize their commitment to one another. Even in the absence of legal recognition, same-sex couples have been engaging in marriage rituals through acts like proposals and commitment ceremonies for decades (Lewin 1999). In other words, some same-sex couples embrace marriage as a cultural form even when they cannot obtain it as a legal status (Hull 2006). Nevertheless, marriage is *dependent on the law* in the sense of being a set of material benefits and rights. Same-sex couples stand to gain important benefits and rights when marriage becomes legally available to them and this may change the meanings they assign to it and its importance for their relationships. Further, it is dependent on the law with regard to broader societal recognition. Private marriage rituals are not recognized in the eyes of the law, and only public, legal marriages have the power to help couples gain societal recognition and legitimacy (Ocobock 2013).

Many of the people who took part in this study had already internalized cultural ideas and

integrated symbolic practices of marriage into their relationships prior to its legalization. This means that having the option to marry legally was not a necessary precondition for LGBQ people imagining, planning, or even enacting marriage. Yet having the legal support and structure of marriage fundamentally changed their experiences of marriage. First, in the absence of a legal way of doing so, most participants chose not to participate in commitment ceremonies or other marriage rituals to symbolize their commitment. Marriage was therefore far from "rule-like" in social action. It took marriage becoming legal to prompt most marital decisions and actions. This was not simply due to the legal benefits and protections legal marriage offered. Rather, I find that the option to legally marry allowed LGBQ people to act upon pre-existing cultural ideas about love and commitment in a way that felt more real and meaningful. Legal marriage gave formal structure and definition to pre-existing cultural ideas, making marriage a more desirable option. Second, although cultural ideas about marriage permeated some LGBQ relationships before legalization, these ideas did not take on an expected, "taken-for-granted" quality until after marriage became legal. By increasing its cultural significance and value, legal marriage transformed marriage from an unformed idea and uncommon practice to an institutionalized relationship experience.

Evidence of institutionalization was not present to the same degree among all of the participants. This makes sense because institutionalization "is not simply present or absent" but is better conceived of as a "variable," with varying degrees of institutionalization possible in different groups (Zucker 1977:726). Those who formed relationships after marriage was legal were more likely to describe marriage in ways that were "taken-for-granted" and "rule-like" than people who had already been in relationships for some time before having the option to legally marry, although evidence of institutionalization was present in both groups. There were also

clear and related differences by age. Specifically, the major variation was between participants in their 20s-40s and those who were in their 50s or older. Although the vast majority of older participants did opt to get legally married, compared to their younger counterparts they were less likely to take marriage for granted and less likely to think it was as necessary for relationship success.

LGBQ People who were in Relationships before Marriage Became Legal

About half of the participants (59/116) were already in a relationship with their partner when marriage became legal in Massachusetts. Their experiences illustrate that cultural ideas about marriage were already structuring LGBQ relationships before it became an option to legally marry, but that legal marriage is a catalyst for marital action.

Non-Legal Marriage as a Pre-Existing Cultural Idea

Many participants described how they had imagined, planned, and experienced the ritual components of marriage even before they could marry legally. They already had marital aspirations and plans and some had commitment ceremonies and considered themselves married. For example, Maddy, a 32 year-old unmarried woman, was engaged to a previous partner when same-sex marriage became legal in Massachusetts. She stressed that legal marriage had not been a necessary condition for her marital aspirations:

> Now, I was always one that thought if you found the right person whether it was legal or not I'm going to somehow have some kind of a ceremony or something. Whether it was legal or not I was going to do it anyway because it's something I wanted to do. I wanted everybody to share that love with me, just like they do for straight people.[1]

[1] Maddy and her previous partner broke up before they got legally married and she was engaged to another partner at the time of her interview.

I asked her if she thought of the engagement any differently once she could legally marry and she said, "No, I just thought of it as a bonus [to get the legal protections we needed]." She added that when it become a legal option it also felt more socially "validating" and that *other people* had an easier time understanding and accepting their engagement. Here Maddy clearly distinguishes the parts of marriage that are dependent on the law - rights and benefits and social recognition - from cultural ideas and rituals of marriage, which existed independent of and prior to the law. Typically, it was people who had already had a commitment ceremony who expressed this idea that the legal components were simply a "bonus" or value-added part of marriage.

People who had commitment ceremonies prior to the availability of legal marriage considered themselves married. As Zoe, a 35 year-old unmarried woman, explained it:

> Not that it takes away from its significance. I think it's obviously a very significant time in Massachusetts' history and the history of the US. … But a lot of people were already married, you know? They had given their finger to the state [for not allowing them to marry legally] and married anyway, did their own ceremonies.

It is possible that some LGBQ people who have had commitment ceremonies were disinterested in legal marriage because they already considered themselves married but this was not true of the participants in this study. All of the participants who already had a commitment ceremony still decided to get legally married once it became available. They all wanted to take that extra step to make their marriages legal, but they also understood legal marriage as an extension of the cultural, ritual components of marriage they had already performed.

For example, Caroline, a 35 year-old married woman, started dating her partner in 1999, and got engaged to her in 2000, four years before it became a legal option to marry. They "started wedding planning pretty immediately," entered a civil union in Vermont in 2001 "as a

political statement" and then had a Holy Union Ceremony in October of that same year.[2] Caroline saw the Holy Union ceremony as "a chance for our community, our friends, and our family to come together in a way that anybody comes together for any wedding – to celebrate love and to celebrate hopefully a lifetime of two people making a commitment together." She had grown up "dreaming about a wedding" and when she got married it "meant what it would to anybody" – a celebration of love and commitment. By the time legal marriage became possible she had already been married a couple of years. In fact, it was because she and her partner already considered themselves married that they were able to make a very quick and easy decision to make it legal. They went to Cambridge City Hall on the first night it became legal to line up and get their marriage license. When I asked her why it was important for her to get legally married so quickly, she reflected:

> I mean we had a sense of the historical significance, so there was that personal feeling of 'we want to be a part of this' and then there was the part that 'they could take this away tomorrow' so we wanted to get it quick. And it was just we had been married, we considered ourselves married for three years and we felt like we'd been waiting for three years [to make it legal] but some couples had been waiting 60 years for this day.

Like others, Caroline had been swept up in the historical moment and wanted to be a part of it, and she was fearful of the right being taken away. But the decision to marry could be made easily, with little to no thought or discussion, because she already considered herself married to her partner.

People who already had a prior wedding ceremony, or who were already planning one before marriage became legal, described the decision to get legally married as something they

[2] Vermont was the first state to allow same-sex couples to enter civil unions in 2000. This resulted from the *Baker v. Vermont* lawsuit, which was decided by the Vermont Supreme Court on December 20, 1999. Holy Unions are formal, but non-legal, religious marriage ceremonies performed for same-sex couples.

"just knew" they would do. For Art, a 44 year-old married man, the timing of legal marriage happened to coincide with when he was already planning to marry his partner of 7 years. He noted, "Same-sex couples have decided to do their own ceremonies for years one way or another," and explained that he and his partner had "wanted to have a ceremony to formalize our commitment in front of people that we knew to say we planned our lives together." When marriage became a legal option in the midst of planning their wedding, Art and his partner did not need to discuss whether or not to legally marry. To emphasize this point, he recounted a "funny" phone conversation he had with his partner about marriage: On hearing same-sex marriage had become legal, Art immediately called his partner and teased him by saying in a serious tone, "I think we have an important decision to make about marriage." Sounding worried and unsure, his partner responded, "We do?" Art then replied jokingly, "Well, I didn't want to presume!" Of course, it is the fact that he could presume they would get legally married because they had already made that decision that made the phone call funny. Art acknowledged that being able to marry legally did increase the "symbolic importance of it" because now they had the "full sanction of the state" but stressed, "I would have done it anyway and it would have been very symbolically important to me anyway."

Clearly legal marriage was not a necessary precondition for imagining, planning, or even getting married. And it was because marriage was far from a new cultural idea or experience to participants that so many were able to make seemingly quick and easy decisions to get married when it did become a legal possibility. The fact that marriage already permeated LGBQ relationships as a cultural idea could suggest some degree of institutionalization had already occurred prior to it becoming legal. However, marriage was not yet a pervasive practice. Even though many participants who had relationships before marriage became legal had already

thought about and discussed getting married only a small proportion - twelve of the seventy married participants (17%) - had commitment ceremonies.[3] It took legal marriage for most to act on marital ideas and aspirations and make the decision to marry.

Legal Marriage as a Catalyst for Marital Action

The vast majority of participants did not have commitment ceremonies prior to gaining access to legal marriage. Rather, for most, gaining the option to legally marry was a necessary catalyst for getting married. Using 2010 US Census data, Badgett and Herman (2011) provide evidence that same-sex couples see alternatives to marriage, such as Civil Unions and Domestic Partnerships, as very different to legal marriage and the take up rates of these varying legal statuses vary widely. They show that it was only in states where same-sex marriage was legal that same-sex couples married in large numbers. I also find that legal marriage inspired widespread action among a group of people for whom marriage had mostly been only an idea or vague plan up until that point. It was as if marital desires that lay dormant sprung to life once it became a legal option. Some considered commitment ceremonies or civil unions in the past but came to the conclusion that they felt "second-rate" or "not real" and so never went ahead and got married that way.[4] For example, Jen, a 41 year-old married woman, had been proposed to repeatedly by her partner of 18 years, but she always said no because she did not see the point in

[3] Unfortunately no data exists on the proportion of same-sex couples who have non-legal commitment ceremonies and so there is no way to know for sure just how pervasive the practice is. However, in my sample only a very small minority of participants got non-legally married.
[4] To be clear, those who had commitment ceremonies did not regard them as "second rate" or "not real" – these marital experiences were meaningful to the people who had them, and they considered themselves married. However, ambivalent and negative feelings about non-legal marriage were common among others.

"spending a bunch of money on a ceremony that's just pretend." Then, once it became legal she proposed to her partner.

Others were less scathing in their disregard for commitment ceremonies. More often they said that they were already considering marriage before it became legal but had just not taken any definitive steps to turn those marital ideas and plans into action. Matt, a 42 year-old married man, told me that he and his partner just "never got around to getting married" until it became legal. He got together with his partner in 1994 and they started talking about marriage early on in their relationship. He told me, "Marriage was definitely always part of the discussion for sure. We had talked about having a commitment ceremony years before gay marriage was ever a blip on the cultural radar." I was curious, then, about why they had "never got around' to getting married. Matt offered several reasons, including his "disillusionment with the Catholic church" (which cut off the option of having a church wedding), that they "got busy with other things," and "that they didn't have a lot of money to have a big party." And so, he said, "Marriage was just kind of on hold." By contrast, when marriage became legal he said that they immediately knew that they "had to do this as soon as possible."

Gaining access to legal marriage also prompted Hannah, a 39 year-old married woman, to take more definitive action. Before marriage was a legal option, she and her partner "talked about the possibility of having some sort of commitment ceremony" and started to meet with rabbis to see if they could find one who would marry them. But their plans were still "all very vague and unformed." In fact, when a Rabbi had congratulated them on their engagement Hannah's reaction had been to ask her partner, "Are we engaged?" Laughing at herself, she recognized "obviously if you're showing up at a Rabbi to talk about the possibility of getting married they assume you're engaged!" Yet she admitted that she had been unsure about their

status. Gaining access to legal marriage made what they were doing "more concrete" and helped them more formally decide, "We do want to do this." She explained:

> I definitely think that the timing of marriage equality helped solidify that, clarify it. I guess having access to it had, you know --. It sort of changes your perception of what the options are. I mean I know some couples have commitment ceremonies anyway but you know then you're totally kind of creating your own thing and it's very clear it's different, whereas now you [think] 'oh it's legal, you could do it.'

For Hannah, marriage was a "vague" and "unformed" idea until it became legal. This kind of language was very common among participants. In thinking about marrying before it became legal, they described their marital ideas and plans as "unclear" and "uncertain." When it became legal, marriage became more "concrete" and "defined."

People who were already living in Massachusetts at the time same-sex marriage became legal gained access to it right away, but not everyone who took part in my research was living in Massachusetts at that time, and so they gained access to legal marriage later. As such, it was not the date marriage became legal but rather the moment of gaining access to legal marriage that catalyzed decisions to marry. Jake, a 34 year-old man, moved to Massachusetts in 2007, and proposed to his partner just two weeks after getting there. He said:

> [The idea to get married just] popped into my brain. I don't know if it was one of those things in the back of my brain just because we could, because we were in Massachusetts. It was one of those things that yeah, we can do this and we never thought we would be able to do it [legally], so why the fuck not?

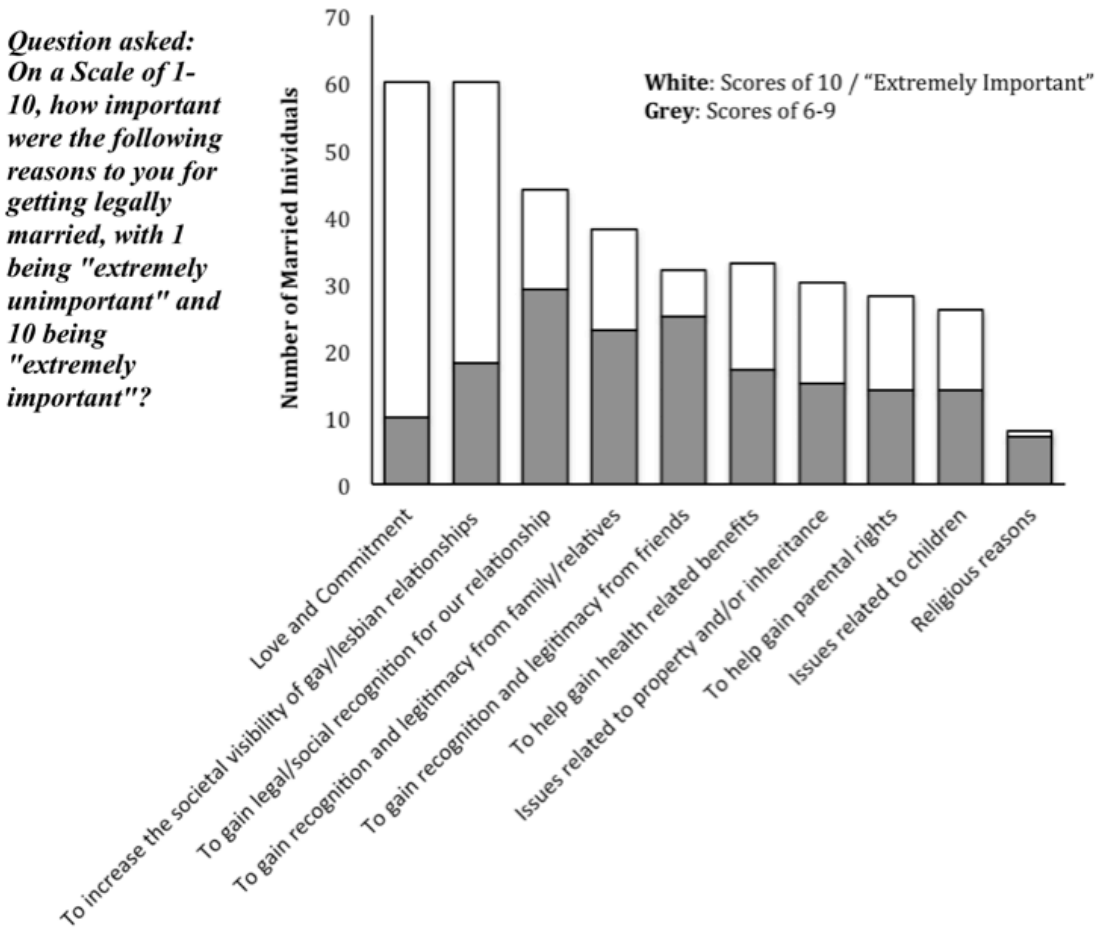
He said that, although they had not talked about marriage seriously until moving to Massachusetts, they were probably already "at the point when we got engaged where we would have talked about a commitment ceremony or whatever else anyway." He did not "feel like there was ever any question that we would [marry]" but "because we had the option to do it legally we both felt strongly that it was the natural choice."

Like Jake, some participants felt they probably would have married eventually, even if they had not gained access to legal marriage. I cannot know how many would have married without the legal right, but my findings show that very few actually did so without it. Moreover, it is clear that gaining access to legal marriage greatly impacted the timing and speed of marital decisions. Most participants needed legal marriage to act on their marital desires. However, this was not usually because they required legal incentives to marry. Certainly, same-sex couples needed legal protections and benefits. Several participants told me horror stories about what the lack of legal protection had meant for their friends and acquaintances and said that they spent years worrying what would happen to their partners and children in the event of an accident or their passing away. Yet this need for legal protection was not a major driving force in most of their decisions to marry.[5] The legal and financial benefits of marriage ranked low in importance compared with "love and commitment," which was by far the most commonly given reason for getting legally married (See Figure 1).[6] There were also no statistically significant differences in the importance that different groups of participants placed on "love and commitment" as a reason for getting married – men and women, old and young, those with and without children, and those in short and long term relationships all regarded it as key to their marital decisions.

[5] It is important to note that at the time of my research in Massachusetts same-sex marriages were not federally recognized and so their legal gains from marriage were still somewhat limited. It is therefore possible that had there been more at stake legally legal and financial reasons would have featured more prominently in participants' reasons for marriage. However, very few people ever mentioned the lack of federal recognition specifically as a reason to hold off on marriage. Moreover, the fact that so many same-sex couples got legally married *despite* the lack of federal recognition only emphasizes that they did not need it to be associated with legal benefits and incentives to do it, and that it was the additional symbolic weight of legal marriage that mattered.

[6] Heterosexuals also state that "love" is the main reason for marrying. In a 2010 Pew Research Survey, 93% of married heterosexuals and 84% of unmarried heterosexuals said that love was a very important reason to get married, and men and women were equally likely to say this (Cohn 2013).

Figure 1: Reasons Married Individuals Gave for Getting Legally Married (N=70)



Even those participants who stood to gain no legal benefits at all told me that it was *legal* marriage that had made them want to marry. Steven, a 36 year-old man, was not yet living in Massachusetts when same-sex marriage was made legal. At the time, his home state of California did not recognize same-sex marriages performed in other states and so, as Steven explained, "as far as the law, at that point we weren't gaining any rights because we weren't living in a state that recognized it." Nonetheless, on hearing the news that it had become legal in Massachusetts, he immediately decided to propose to his partner. He said that they wanted to marry because they were "madly in love with each other" and wanted "to show our full commitment to one another." Like others, he said it "probably would have been our intention [to get married] anyway," but when it became legal, he felt like "all of a sudden there was this potential for us to be married," and so he acted on those intentions.

Matt and his partner (who had just "never got around to getting married" until it was legal) were both lawyers and well aware of the legal benefits and protections they would gain from legal marriage. Yet legal gains from marriage were not central to their quick decision to marry either. Instead, Matt also primarily attributed their decision to marry to "love":

> I'd say that it [legal benefits] was a factor but it wasn't *the* factor. I mean I wanted to get married of course because I was in love with him and I wanted to make that statement to the world that I was in love with this person and wanted to create a family of my own with this person, become bound to him in a public forum. I do think it was hastened by my clinical [legal] knowledge of what was at stake but a lot of it too was that like giddy silliness of just wanting to be with this guy forever and ever, and that was the main overriding thing for sure.

Even in the few cases where legal gains from marriage were the most important reason for marrying, participants still made sure to emphasize that love and commitment were central factors in their decisions to marry too. Sara, a 38 year-old married woman, told me that the main reason she decided to get married when it became legal was so that her partner could be on her

health insurance. She explained, “we kind of knew in our hearts that we would always get married actually, but that [needing health insurance] was the catalyst.” Here again we see legal marriage as a catalyst for marital decisions, but for Sara the legal benefits played a more central role than was typically the case. Yet Sara was quick to clarify, “But that aside, I wanted people to know how serious we were and I wanted her to be legally bound to me (laughs) I didn’t want to us to break up, and I loved her. I love her so much!” Then, embarrassed by her sudden outburst of love for her partner, she rather sheepishly added, “I don’t know, sorry, it’s sort of a dumb answer.”

The fact that legal marriage catalyzed decisions to marry is somewhat of a puzzle because if love and commitment, not legal gains, were primary reasons for getting married then why did it take it becoming legal for most participants to do it? Wouldn’t we expect to see larger numbers of participants marrying for love even without legal recognition? One possible explanation is that the legal gains from marriage were more important than participants were willing to say. Participants may have framed their decisions to marry as *primarily* about love and commitment in order to adhere to social and cultural expectations about why people should marry. Perhaps they felt it was somewhat taboo to say they got married for legal and financial reasons. Certainly, Sara seemed to feel the need to let me know that instrumental factors were not the *only* reason she married. At the same time though, her outburst of love for her partner seemed genuine and full of emotion. These kinds of emotional statements were common and suggest that participants were not explaining their marital decisions with reference to love and commitment because they felt they *had to*. They really believed that legal marriage was the *ideal* means of expressing love and commitment.

I argue that being able to get married legally provided a means of enacting deeply internalized aspirations for LGBQ people, even if they did not know they already had them. Swidler's (2001) analyses of the way in which people draw on culture helps us make sense of this. She suggests that people have cultural ideas "on file" as parts of their repertoire of knowledge and experience, or cultural imaginations (37), but that they only draw on them when an appropriate situation arises. Believing that they were marrying for love and commitment depended on being able to get legally married because it was legal marriage that made the "love myth" plausible. As Swidler (2001) explains, "institutions, or the capacity for action that institutions create, may help make ideas real" (157). Being able to enact cultural ideas that they had "on file" therefore often triggered very emotional reactions. We can see this in the feeling of "giddy silliness" Matt described. Before he had the possibility to legally marry he had been very focused on the legal importance of marriage, but now the idea that he could marry his partner made him "giddy" with emotion because he could show that he would love him "forever and ever."

When participants spoke about love and commitment as reasons to legally marry, they also referred to marriage as a means to express love and commitment in a *socially recognized* way. They understood that only legal marriage offered them the chance to have other people recognize their love and commitment to one another. As such, participants often described legal marriage as a "public statement" or "representation" of their love and commitment that others would understand. Legal marriage gave LGBQ people the means of performing love and commitment in a way that was new to them, but which they knew was already culturally validated and socially recognized. Steven's comment that when marriage became legal "all of a sudden there was the potential for us to be married" speaks to this point. He explained, "We

wanted to show our *full* commitment to one another. It's kind of like in education with a terminal degree, that's your terminal relationship status and you can't go any higher than that!" Having the option to legally marry therefore allowed people to act upon pre-existing cultural ideas about love and commitment in new ways that felt more real and meaningful to them. The few participants who already had commitment ceremonies described legal marriage as a kind of added "bonus," an extension of something they had already done. By contrast, most others conceptualized legal marriage as a qualitatively different opportunity. It was not regarded or experienced as just one way of showing commitment among many equal possibilities; rather, it was the ultimate show of commitment. No matter how committed participants may have already felt to their partners, legal marriage offered them a way of demonstrating it in a different, socially recognized, way.

Heather, a 31 year-old married woman, captured how legal marriage altered the meaning of love and commitment for LGBQ people when she said:

> I think mentally there's a different meaning to the relationship, just to say yes we made the commitment to each other in terms of the love relationship but we also made a legal commitment to each other where we put down on paper that we were together, that we were legally bound to one another and we take that seriously. So it's sort of that combination of the legal piece with the love piece that I think almost cements that – they are one and the same now.

Her notion that the "legal piece" had combined with the "love piece" and became "one and the same" paints a vivid picture of the convergence of legal and cultural components of marriage. Legal marriage did much more than offer legal protections and benefits. It gave LGBQ people a way to express and enact cultural ideas about marriage as the ultimate show of love and commitment.

LGBQ People who Began Relationships after Marriage Became Legal

Half of the participants had the option to legally marry from the beginning of their relationships. As every new same-sex relationship in Massachusetts (and other states where it is legal) now starts with the potential for legal marriage, this group's experiences illuminate the ways marriage has become institutionalized among a new generation of same-sex couples. I find far greater evidence of institutionalization among participants who started relationships after marriage became legal than among those who were already in long-term relationships. Specifically, marriage had a much more "taken for granted" and "rule-like" quality (DiMaggio and Powell 1991:19-22; Meyer and Rowan 1977:341) among this group. Marriage was widely expected as the end-point for their relationships, and was necessary for them to feel secure and confident with their partners.

Marriage "Has Become Kind of Expected"

For the vast majority of those with the option to legally marry present from the start of their relationships, getting married was something they simply assumed they would do with their partners at some point in their relationship. Erin, a 36 year-old married woman, replied to a question about why she and her partner decided to get married by saying she "just felt like this is what you do." This sentiment that marriage is just "what you do" if you love someone and are committed to them was echoed again and again by participants in newer relationships. Brianna, a 31 year-old married woman, said "It just seemed like the next logical step [to get married] cause we had the house, she had her degree, the next logical step was for us to get married." I asked her if she could explain this a little more, and she added "Just cause with life it's like progression. If you're with somebody that you love and you wanna do it, then you might as well get married."

As Meghan, a 31-year-old who was engaged to her partner, put it: "In Massachusetts marriage has become kind of expected."

Clara, a 29 year-old married woman, had always expected to get married, and her experiences of deciding to marry were "pretty typical" of those who came of age after marriage was already legally available, as she herself recognized. Marriage had become legal in Massachusetts when she was in her senior year of college, and so she explained "I sort of was thinking of it as just a thing I would do, it was always something I saw myself doing."[7] She did not question that marriage would be available to her and, unlike older participants who were already in relationships when it became legal she did not ever fear that the right would be taken away. She started dating her partner in 2008, and they decided to get married in 2010. She saw their decision to marry as resulting from a natural "progression from dating to being serious to moving in together to getting married." In fact, by the time she and her partner moved in together "it was sort of like we were assuming we would eventually get married." As such, when her partner proposed to her it did not come as much of a surprise. Clara admitted that she "knew we'd be getting married in the next couple of years" and that she had been "expecting her to propose in the next six months or so."

We can clearly see the extent to which marriage has become taken for granted by looking at unmarried participants and their marital expectations. Unmarried participants were younger than their married counterparts (65% were under the age of 40, compared to 38% of married participants) and most (73%) had got together with their partners only after marriage became legal. The vast majority saw themselves getting legally married in the future. Seventy percent thought it was "likely" or "very likely" they would legally marry their partners, while only 16%

[7] Clara had also got engaged to a previous girlfriend but they broke up before getting married.

said it was "unlikely."[8] Twenty-two per cent of those who said they were likely to marry their partners were already engaged to them. An even greater proportion (40%) had already exchanged rings with their partners to symbolize their commitment. Before having the right to legally marry some same-sex couples exchanged rings to show commitment because they could not get married. However, for these unmarried participants, rings were a precursor to marriage rather than an alternative to it. They made it clear that these were "promise rings" exchanged near the beginning of the relationship, showing that marriage is now incorporated into same-sex relationships at an early stage. As such, most of the unmarried cohabitors in my study are best characterized as pre-marital; they held qualitatively similar marital beliefs as their married counterparts and expected to marry.[9] The main reason given for not being married was simply that they were waiting until the appropriate time or stage in their relationship or life to do it.

For many of the unmarried participants, marriage was so taken for granted that it was difficult for them to articulate why they wanted to marry or why it was important to them. When I asked Catherine, a 26-year old woman who had been with her partner a year and a half, why she wanted to get legally married, she replied, "I've never really thought too much about why it's important to me to get married, I think it's just because I always imagined I would." Jeff, a 26 year-old man who had been with his partner 4 years, similarly said, "Given my 'Leave It To Beaver' background, I just kind of would like marriage to be part of my future at some point,

[8] An additional 14% said they "don't know" how likely it is. My interviews with these people suggest ambivalence characterizes their feelings more than disinterest or opposition to marriage. Moreover, ambivalence more often reflected feelings about their relationship or life-stage than marriage per se.

[9] Some scholars conceptualize unmarried cohabitation as qualitatively different than marriage, with the assumption being that unmarried partners are less committed than their married counterparts (Waite and Gallagher 2000). However, increasingly family scholars distinguish between non-marital cohabitors (defined as those who cohabit as an alternative to marriage) and premarital cohabitors (those who cohabit as a precursor to marriage) (Brown and Booth 1996; Stanley et al. 2004).

that's what I've known my entire life." He recognized that marriage was what he had known both because his parents had been married for thirty years and also because he himself had had access to it for his whole adult life. Jeff saw marriage as only a matter of time, an obvious end point in the natural progression of his relationship with his partner. He reflected:

> It stands to reason that marriage is the eventual next step in our relationship. If you're in your late 20s or early 30s and you've been together for 6, 8, 10 years then this is the next logical step. This is what you do when you've been with somebody for that length of time and you don't intend to break up from them at any point.

It was also hard for many unmarried participants to even imagine a future without marriage. For instance, Michelle, a 29 year-old unmarried woman, said she and her partner had only talked about marriage "abstractly" and yet could "not imagine that we'd be together for another 5, 10 years and not get married."

With marriage as an expected end-point to their relationships, other experiences in these participants' lives and relationships became understood as steps towards marriage and were evaluated according to their likelihood of advancing it. Marriage was the lens through which they understood and imagined their relationships. Like most Americans today, participants who started their relationships after marriage became legal regarded marriage as a "capstone" (Cherlin 2009). It was seen as a status to be built up to - the last brick to put in place when everything else in their relationship, and life, was already in order, and the crowning achievement of their relationship. Although the vast majority of unmarried participants expected to marry, most were also not willing to rush into it. Those who got married quickly once legal marriage became available tended to be people who were already in long-term relationships.[10] By contrast, those in newer relationships seemed very aware of waiting until the "right time" to

[10] A Boston Globe Survey conducted in the first week after same-sex marriage became legal in Massachusetts also found that at least half of those couples applying for marriage licenses had been together a decade or more already (MacDonald and Dedman 2004).

marry. They took for granted that they would marry, but they were still "working towards" it and would marry once they felt their relationships were ready. These ideas are also expressions of taken-for-granted cultural scripts about marriage but they relate to "prosaic" as opposed to "mythic" love (Swidler 2001). They include the idea that "the kind of love that leads to marriage" should not depend on irrational feelings but "on compatibility and practical traits that make persons good life partners" (Swidler 2001:114). The people who started relationships after marriage became legal believed that it took time to make sure the practical elements of a relationship were in place and to ensure they were truly compatible with their partners.

Some expressed these ideas of marriage as a capstone by suggesting that marriage was literally a matter of timing – of having to go though other steps along the way to get there. Travis, a 26 year-old man who was engaged to his partner of 2 years, saw everything he and his partner had done as a "step in the right direction" toward marriage. He said, once they had moved in together and "tested the waters" and were "successful in that arena then the engagement came." For others, it was simply about getting to the right age. Catherine thought that the only thing holding her back was her age, explaining that she was "just still too young for it now" but that she'd be open to thinking about it "in 6 months or a year." Erica, who was 24 years old, also felt too young to marry her partner. Her partner had proposed to her impulsively after an argument when she was 22 and she had initially said yes, but she called it off after a couple of weeks because she "felt very young, very 22 and not ready." Jess, a 31 year-old woman, described it more as an issue of maturity, the need to be "absolutely sure that as grown adults they would be able to stick with it and figure things out" when things got difficult.

Other unmarried participants had more specific things they wanted to accomplish before getting married. Achieving particular schooling and career goals before marriage were especially

important, and these were directly connected to ideas about marital success. They wanted to have stable, secure careers so that they would be able to contribute fully to marriage. Ryan, a 29 year-old man, felt that it was important he was in a secure, stable place with his career so that he could "uphold his end" of the marital bargain:

> I want to make sure that if I'm going to make a commitment to him then I'm making a financial commitment to sustaining a lifestyle. And so I figured that once I'm in my thirties or once my career has found a steady financial stream I could count on [I'd be able to do that]. I didn't want to be married and struggling with stability, because to me marriage represents stability. Marriage will come when I have stability – marriage is kind of the icing. I don't see it the other way around, that I'm going to get married and *then* it's going to be stable. I want to be in control of my own destiny and know that I got to wherever I am in my life for me and that I'm choosing to share that with someone else.

Seeing marriage as a financial as well as relationship commitment, young unmarried participants also stressed fiscal responsibility. Whitney, a 23 year-old woman, said she would not consider marrying her partner until her student loans had been taken care of because they have to "be fiscally responsible to each other," and she did not want "money to become an argument for us." Likewise, Jeff, a 26 year-old man, told me that marriage "depends on where we are with our careers" because he would never consider marriage until he could be sure he would never be in a position where he would have to worry about contributing rent or falling behind on a house payment.

For a few, the issue was more about being able to save up and afford the kind of wedding they wanted. Anna, a 30 year-old woman, said that getting married "depends on financials because our families don't come from tons of money and we'd have to pay for a good portion of it ourselves, and obviously buying a ring and stuff is expensive." Similarly, for Alexander, a 33 year-old man, waiting to get married "was purely practical" because they could "not afford to spend that kind of money at the moment." He said they would get married just "as soon as we can afford to make it nice." This belief that marriage should occur when one is financially secure

or can afford to have a wedding has also been found to be common among heterosexual cohabitors (Smock, Manning and Porter 2005). However, this is usually a characteristic described of working class couples. For the most part, participants in this study could not be described as working class, but their young ages did make their financial and professional situations less secure. Whatever the reason for waiting to marry, it is clear that most unmarried participants saw themselves as working towards marriage, and that they fully expected to get there.

Needing the Reassurance of Marriage

For most participants who had formed relationships after marriage became legal, marriage was necessary for them to feel secure and confident in their relationships. They usually needed some reassurance that their partners wanted to marry in order to trust the longevity of the relationship and invest in it. These participants did not consider marriage to be an inevitable outcome or "objective fact" (Zucker 1977) of their relationships that they could simply rely on to happen without any reassurance.[11] Nonetheless, it was taken for granted enough that only very minimal reassurance was needed for them to feel secure that they were working towards marriage. Very few described having serious conversations with their partners about whether they wanted to marry. Instead, they frequently described casual conversations about marriage and weddings they

[11] One of the key facets of institutionalization is "transmission" – "the process by which cultural understandings are communicated to a succession of actors" (Zucker 1977:729). With a high degree of institutionalization, "the actor doing the transmitting simply will communicate them as objective fact, and the actor receiving them will treat them as an accurate rendition of objective fact." However, it is not necessarily the case that heterosexuals view marriage as an "objective fact" for their relationships either. In this way, marriage may be no more institutionalized among heterosexuals than it is among LGBQ people.

had, so that without ever really seriously discussing it they could be confident marriage was something they both wanted.

Michelle, a 29 year-old woman, described how she and her partner of a year and half would say things like "how do you feel about marriage as an institution?" or "would you be open with your parents about it if we got married?" so that they could discuss marriage generally or hypothetically without ever having to say they both wanted to marry one another. She recognized that her partner "will just kind of casually say things about marriage, I think mostly because she just wants to know that I'm committed to her." Sometimes her partner would even ask her more directly "you're going to marry me, right?" but it would be said so nonchalantly that it could be answered reassuringly without expressing any kind of definitive commitment. It was this kind of casual, hypothetical talk that explains why Ryan, who had been with his partner 5 years, could be "planning to get married" despite never having had a serious conversation with his partner about it. He said that from early on in the relationship "we had started talking about marriage in the hypothetical sense, like conversations about what kind of lives we would want for ourselves, and we kind of talked about it vaguely from the perspective of *us* and kind of alluding toward marriage." More recently when they had those kinds of casual conversations one of them might ask a follow up question of "so we're serious about this, right?" or "we're thinking on the same page, right?" - "just as kind of more of an assurance that it will happen."

A couple of unmarried participants who were not very interested in marriage also told me that they would have casual or hypothetical conversations about it with their partners. For example, Ruby, a 33 year-old woman, said that she and her partner will "dabble in conversations about it," discussing what kind of wedding they would want if they did get married and she described these conversations as "fun." But she believed these conversations were a way of

ultimately reiterating why they do not want to marry. Nonetheless, I think it is possible that they were using these conversations as a means of feeling one another out without having to express an interest in marriage more explicitly. Either way, examples of unmarried participants not interested in marriage also engaging in causal conversations about it emphasize just how common marriage talk has become in same-sex relationships.

Unlike romantic portrayals, proposals were rarely unexpected surprises and usually occurred in the context of already having reassured one another they wanted to get married. For example, Sophie, a 27 year-old woman, confessed that they had "been talking about it [marriage] ever since we had been together [in 2008]" so that by the time her partner proposed 2 years later it was "completely expected." Likewise, Chris, a 32 year-old man, who got together with his partner in 2007, commented that although they had "never sat down and had a discussion about marriage" they had "talked about it from time to time so that at a certain point in our relationship we had kind of chatted about it or mentioned it enough that we knew it was both something we had to do." When his partner proposed to him on vacation he experienced it as a "thrill" but he had also known that it would happen at some point. Despite the expected nature of marriage, most of those who started relationships after marriage became legal believed a formal proposal was still necessary and felt some pressure to create a "grand gesture" or "special moment." Kaitlyn, a 29 year-old woman, started dating her partner in 2005 and from early on they had talked about when the right time for marriage would be (after law school) and how to pay for it (with some parental help). When those things came together, her partner gave her "the green light to propose," and she remembered feeling "God now how am I going to surprise her? She knows it's coming! Crap!" Yet in recounting the story of her proposal, Kaitlyn gave a more romantic portrayal, saying that her partner "had no idea" it was going to happen and experienced

it as a "big surprise." In this way, even if getting married was already expected in the larger schema of their relationship, participants often sought to create particular moments that could be experienced and remembered as romantic surprises. Another participant, Ryan, explained, "the proposal is expected, it is just kind of a formality, a moment that we can look back on when it finally happened."[12]

We know that a dominant, powerful wedding culture and industry shapes desires for grand, romantic gestures around getting married (Howard 2006; Ingraham 2008; Otnes and Pleck 2003), and there is a great deal of evidence that it influenced participants' marital desires in this study, too. However, these findings highlight that we can see evidence of the dominance of marriage not only in the big symbolic gestures but also in the small, frequent, and private, moments too. It is the same romantic wedding culture that led participants to expect grand gestures *and* encouraged them to have frequent, casual conversations about marriage. As a romantic ideal, we rarely encounter portrayals of couples making formal, careful decisions about whether or not to get married or even having serious discussions and negotiations about marriage with their partners. Rather, we are led to believe that we should just know that we want to get married, and if our partners love us and are committed to the relationship then it should be safe to assume they will want to marry us too. Integrating casual conversations about marriage into relationships at an early stage is a mechanism LGBQ people in this study had developed to ensure that marriage was a goal for their relationship and that they were on the same page with

[12] However, sometimes the fact that they had already had so many casual conversations about marriage made it difficult to decipher a proposal from the everyday conversations they were already used to having. Some participants recounted amusing stories in which their partners had misinterpreted their attempts at proposals as yet another casual, hypothetical conversation. This was especially true when there were no obvious cultural markers, such as ring boxes or getting down on one knee.

their partner. It is because marriage is expected and taken-for-granted as an ordinary relationship goal that it could be mentioned casually or hypothetically without seeming presumptuous or pushy. Most never had to have a more serious conversation about getting married because casual conversations evolved into unspoken decisions to marry or one partner could eventually propose confident enough that the other would say yes.

On the other hand, when unmarried participants did not gain the necessary reassurance of marriage from their partners this often resulted in a loss of confidence, and even the demise of the relationship. If their partners did not want to marry they interpreted this as a sign that they were not committed to the relationship. Esteban, a 34 year-old man, started dating his partner after marriage was already legal in 2007. He was eager to get married and started "bringing up the words of marriage and engagement" soon after they moved in together, but every time he did his partner "would have a panic attack, get crazy and start to hyperventilate a bit!" Esteban understood why his partner was nervous about marriage - because it was the longest relationship he'd ever been in, because he came from a family of divorce, and because he was worried about having to tell his family they were getting married – but he still felt "offended" and "upset." Justifying his feelings, he told me:

> I was envisioning marriage as an option and so I was also thinking 'I don't want to be in a relationship that is not going in that direction. If this is something where he doesn't feel he can commit to me then maybe I don't want to be in the relationship.' And this was also in the context of me having a lot of friends and colleagues who were getting engaged and married and I just felt like 'oh my god what's taking so long?! If it's not going to work out then I want to be single so I can pursue a relationship with someone who does want to make lifelong plans with me.'

Esteban tried to be patient with his partner and, luckily for him, his partner eventually came around to the idea and even proposed to him (they married in 2011). However, Esteban said that, had his partner not ever come around to marriage, he would not have stayed in the relationship.

Many others still experienced marriage as a source of tension in their relationships. Thirty-eight percent of unmarried participants had arguments with their partners about marriage, and for 17% these arguments occurred once every few months or more.

Most unmarried participants perceived their relationships as not worth investing time and energy into if they could not be sure they would transition to marriage. Maria, a 25 year-old woman, talked to her partner about marriage when they started thinking about moving in together because she "didn't want to start living with someone if it wasn't going anywhere." Likewise, Anna, a 30 year-old woman who had been with her partner for a year and half, stated, "If [my partner] wasn't interested in marriage then I'd definitely be more hesitant to move things forward." Some participants also told me that they had broken up with previous partners over marriage. Raul, a 48 year-old man, had been living with a previous partner when marriage first became legal in Massachusetts, but his partner was not interested in getting married and he had been "heartbroken." He said that "everything was fine other than that" but he could not help thinking "okay then so then what am I doing with him? Cause I thought we were on the same track." Putting it very bluntly, he told me, "That was the beginning of the end, literally. For me, marriage ended that relationship."

Variations in Marital Interest and Importance

Existing research on marriage with heterosexuals highlights gendered differences in the importance that men and women place on marriage (Owen, Blakemore and Lawton 2005), with men more likely to say they do not want to marry than women (Cohn 2013). More women in same-sex relationships have married in Massachusetts than men (Ramos et al. 2009). In general, the unmarried LGBQ women in this study also placed more importance on marriage than the

men did: 79% of unmarried women said it was important that they legally married their partner in the future, compared to 52% of unmarried men. However, gender did not emerge as a dominant factor shaping marital decision-making in the interview data. Instead, age-based differences in marital decision-making were much more visible. Because LGBQ people have not always had access to legal marriage, it makes sense that the age they are when they gain access to it is a major determinant of the importance they place on it. The major variation I found was between those in their 20s-40s and those who were in their 50s or older. Just 36% of participants aged 50 and above said that it was "important" to them if they legally married their partners in the future, compared to 76% of those under age 50.[13]

The findings that marriage had become an expected and essential relationship experience also did not apply equally to younger and older participants. Those who were in their 50s and older did not expect to marry or take-it-for-granted in the same way as their younger counterparts, and marriage was less important for their relationships. Those in their 20s-40s had gained the right to legally marry at an age when marriage could still fit into a fairly typical life-course trajectory. They were therefore better able to envisage it as a normal part of their relationship progression. Maggie, a 40 year-old woman, had not regarded marriage as "traditional" for her same-sex relationships growing up and had assumed it was something that would not apply to her. But when she gained access to marriage in her late thirties she was still at an age when marriage could be incorporated into her life plans fairly easily, and so she adapted her way of thinking about relationships:

[13] Neither differences by gender or age were statistically significant in the analysis of survey data. However, this is likely because the relatively low numbers of unmarried participants in the study (n=46) make statistical differences by gender and age groups difficult to detect.

> When I was younger I thought that if I was with a woman then that would have to be some nontraditional thing, more a hippie thing, right? I think with our generation when we were younger, like in our twenties, you would think about whether you were going to marry a woman and what that would be like and it didn't seem traditional. But by the time I was in my thirties I was like 'I can totally get married and have the very picket fence idea of a very nuclear family.' I was like 'no I can have a regular, normal relationship' and it can be just what you imagine as a little kid only with a woman.

Maggie started dating her partner in 2009 and married her a year later. Like so many others who formed relationships after marriage was legal, she believed marriage was "what the relationship was about" and was "just kind of what you do." By contrast, James, a 57 year-old man, had been almost 50 when he gained access to legal marriage and he believed that "marriage is for the younger generations," particularly those who are "still young enough to have children." He admitted, "I'd definitely be in a different frame of mind about it if I were younger."

Another reason the age at which one gained access to marriage mattered was because older participants were more likely to have been in prior heterosexual marriages and long-term same-sex relationships, and these relationship experiences often put them off getting legally married to their partners. For some, the failure of previous relationships led them not to trust that marriage would work for them. For others, it was simply that having already experienced marriage, they felt less desire or need to do it again. For example, Angie, a 51 year-old woman, said that because she had been in two previous heterosexual marriages she had "been there, done that," and "couldn't feel excited" about getting married again.

Older participants were also more likely to associate legal marriage with straight culture and a rejection of, or antithesis to, the alternative relationship structures and practices they felt their generation had created. Ted, a 51 year-old man, situated himself as "sitting between two generations" and "in the middle of this generational divide" over marriage. He explained:

> The younger side of me says, 'okay, I want all the things that heterosexual couples have and why can't we be there same?' And then the other side of me that is sort of the older

> generation is like, ‘well we can have relationships without this thing called marriage so we may as well do it our own way and live with it.’

Similarly, although Bob, a 49-year old man, was still technically a younger participant by my classification he situated himself with the older generation, and did not think marriage was “all that important.” He argued:

> I really feel like, well, we've done this on our own, and it's our own commitment. It's our world, in a way. We love each other, we've already committed our lives to each other - and we did that in the midst of society telling us to fuck off. I can't get too excited about society now saying okay, you're alright.

Bob’s disinterest in marriage stemmed both from a celebration of his generation’s ability to create successful relationships outside a marital model and a more visceral reaction from being excluded from the institution for so long.

Although older participants were more often disinterested in marriage than their younger counterparts, their partners did not always feel the same way. In fact, regardless of age, it was far more common for one partner to want to marry while the other did not than for both partners to be disinterested in marriage. Unequal interest in marriage therefore caused tension among both my older and younger participants. The key difference was in how older and younger participants dealt with it. Older participants were much better able to overcome differences of opinion about marriage with their partners than their younger counterparts. This is because for older people, marriage was usually less important than their partner’s happiness or the stability of their relationship. As I show, younger participants described unequal interest in marriage as a problem that had or could make them question the viability and future of their relationship. By contrast, older participants were sometimes hurt by their partner’s disinterest in marriage but did not discuss it as something that threatened their relationships or commitment to one another.

Dennis, a 53 year-old man who had been with his partner for 22 years, wanted to get married but his partner did not. He had suggested both a commitment ceremony and legal marriage but his partner had refused both. Over time Dennis had come to terms with the fact that his partner was "really not into" marriage. He accepted that "unless we're both into it then I don't want it and with time it's becoming less important to me." Having already been together for 22 years Dennis could be confident that their "commitment is solid" and "move past" his desire for marriage. Likewise, Terrence, a 51 year-old man who had been with his partner 25 years was still hoping to get married but said he could be content with the commitment they already had. He explained that his partner, who was nine years older than him, "was at the stage of being told 'you're not good enough' for so long that he's lost interest in marriage," while he still liked "the idea of having one more commitment." He thought his partner might eventually come around, but if he didn't then he would still be "very content" and could "live without the piece of paper."

Interestingly not only were older participants more willing to forego marriage for the sake of their relationships but they were also willing to get married to please their partners, while this was rarely true of younger participants. In other words, personal disinterest in marriage could be overcome in order sustain the relationship. Several older participants who disagreed with their partners about marriage told me that either they or their partners had eventually agreed to marriage to keep the other one happy.[14] Harriet, a 64 year-old woman, had been with her partner since 1977 and was "ecstatic" when marriage became legal because "she had wanted to be married forever." She saw legal marriage as an opportunity to both make "a political statement" and a "commitment before our friends and the community that we love each other

[14] I am not suggesting here that they were not subsequently happy to be married, but just that they had married primarily to please their partners.

and want to be together." But when she suggested they get married her partner "poo-pooed it" and was not interested. Harriet's partner had previously experienced a short-lived marriage to a man and did not want to go through something like that again. She had also "grown up in the 50s" when being a lesbian was "very repressed and hidden" and so for her "to be married felt like exposing herself" and she was "loathe to do that." They did eventually get married in 2008, when Harriet started a new job that required them to be married for her partner to get her health insurance. It is possible that her partner needed to gain something tangible from marriage in order to do it, but Harriet suspected this was not really what pushed her into it, stating, "In many ways she did it to please me and to kind of shut me up about marriage."

For Linda, a 54 year-old woman, it was her partner who was pushing to get married, while she "didn't feel like it mattered." Linda had previously come out of a 20-year relationship in which her partner left her very unexpectedly and so she was not yet ready to make another commitment. But when her partner surprised her by proposing she agreed, in large part to please her partner. She said, "It was important to me only because it was important to [my partner]. It meant a lot to her to be able to get married." Similarly, Dianne, a 52 year-old woman, "did not see the benefit of getting married." She felt they already had "everything we needed," while her partner saw marriage as an obvious choice, reasoning, "if there's no barrier to marriage, why wouldn't we get married?" Dianne told me that marriage was "the one thing that we've ever really argued about." Yet again she eventually gave in, admitting, "I knew that it was really important to [my partner] and if it's important to her then it's important to me." Likewise, Bill, a 61 year-old man, was not very interested in marriage but had been persuaded to marry by his partner. When marriage had become legal, he and his partner "toyed with the idea and talked about it." Then, over time, he realized "it just wasn't a priority to me as much as it was to him,"

and so he stopped thinking about it. However, when his partner unexpectedly proposed to him, he found himself willing to do it to please him.

Despite a much higher level of disinterest in marriage, my older participants were significantly more likely to be legally married than younger participants.[15] In their analysis of the 2010 US Census data, Badgett and Herman (2011) also found that most *newly married* same-sex couples were over 50 years old. This makes sense because older LGBQ people are more likely to be in long-term relationships when they gain the right to legally marry and therefore feel able to marry fairly quickly, while younger couples are more likely to be in relatively new relationships and feel they need to wait for the right time. However, my findings demonstrate that rates of marriage cannot be used to infer how interested in marriage different groups of people are, nor can they be taken as simple indicators of the institutionalization of marriage among LGBQ people. Although there are higher rates of marriage among older LGBQ people, marriage appears to be significantly less institutionalized among this group. Older people were much less likely to express the expected or taken-for-granted quality associated with institutionalization in their descriptions of marital experiences, and their relationships were more important to them than getting married per se.

Conclusion

My findings suggest that some degree of institutionalization had already occurred prior to legal marriage. Many participants had already incorporated cultural ideas about marriage into their relationships. They dreamed about marriage, they planned for it, and some even enacted it.

[15] The correlation between age and marital status was statistically significant in my data (Pr = 0.005), with younger participants more likely to be unmarried and older participants more likely to be married.

Legal marriage certainly did not introduce the idea to them. Moreover, it is clear that they already accorded legal marriage a status that they did not apply to other non-legal options. However, the process of institutionalization was hardly complete. When social practices are institutionalized they are "rule-like in social thought and action" (Meyer and Rowan 1977:341). With regard to action, only a relatively small minority of participants actually had commitment ceremonies before marriage became a legal option. Others decided that they were "second-rate" and decided against doing it. Still others just never "got around" to acting on their marital desires and plans. Gaining the option to legally marry was usually a necessary catalyst for them getting married, regardless of how much they had already imagined or discussed it. With regard to thought, although cultural ideas about marriage permeated some of their relationships beforehand, these ideas were not expressed in an expected, taken-for-granted way until after marriage was legal. Those participants who started relationships with legal marriage available to them were much more likely to exhibit these characteristics. Like most Americans today, those who formed relationships after marriage became legal regarded marriage as a "capstone" (Cherlin 2009). Not only did they expect to marry, they were actively working towards it and understood other experiences in their lives and relationships as steps towards marriage. Without the prospect and reassurance of marriage, these participants could not trust in their partner's commitment or the relationship's longevity and saw little point investing in it. Not marrying their partners was "unthinkable" (Zucker 1977:728) and "unimaginable" (Clemens and Cook 1999:445). Marriage has become the gold standard for expressing love and commitment among same-sex couples who formed relationships after marriage became legal. These findings provide evidence of a high degree of institutionalization.

There were, however, some important age-based differences in my sample. Marriage was less important for older participants, who were more likely to prioritize their relationships and their partners' happiness than marriage per se, and more able to understand and accept commitment outside a marital model. The LGBQ people aged 50 and older who took part in my research came of age in a fundamentally different cultural climate than those who were in their 20s, 30s, and even 40s. They had differing relationship histories (including prior heterosexual marriages), had created alternative relationship scripts for their same-sex relationships, and had been less open about them. All this contributed to their lesser interest in marriage and the lower importance they attributed to it. However, now that LGBQ people have access to legal marriage at younger ages we should expect these age-based variations to become less prevalent over time.

Previous research has stressed the importance of legality for same-sex couples in terms of the "practical and legal concerns" (Reczek, Elliott and Umberson 2009:752). By contrast, my findings show that it is not anticipated legal gains that drove most participants' decisions to get legally married. Instead, I find legal marriage prompted many LGBQ people to marry because it offered them a means of enacting cultural scripts they had already internalized about legal marriage as the ultimate, ideal expression of love and commitment. My findings provide empirical support to Hull's (2006) theory of law as an influential cultural structure. As she argues, "the law of the state has a unique cultural force that paradoxically both transcends and connects with the specific rights, benefits and protections afforded by legal marriage" (3). Over time, with greater degrees of institutionalization occurring, other acts, such as having non-legal weddings or even not marrying at all, become meaningless and unthinkable (Zucker 1977:728). In other words, legal marriage shapes decisions around marriage not only by offering rights and protections, but by increasing its cultural significance and value among LGBQ people as well.

Legal marriage interacts with and reinforces cultural processes, shaping conceptions of what is possible, desirable, and even necessary. In many ways, my findings also align closely with Richman's (2013) findings about why LGBQ people get married. However, while she argues that "purely personal motivations were at the heart" of LGBQ people's decisions to marry (171), I argue that the emphasis on love and commitment are reflections of taken-for-granted cultural scripts, and are better conceptualized as *institutional* forces than personal motivations.

CHAPTER 2

From Norms to Feelings:

Understanding the Influence of Marriage over Relationship Behaviors

In the last chapter, we saw that legal marriage was institutionalized among LGBQ people in the sense of being a taken-for-granted, expected, and even necessary relationship outcome. This chapter shifts attention to what happens after LGBQ people get legally married. Cherlin (2004) theorized that there would be no clear norms to govern the behavior of married same-sex couples, arguing, "lesbian and gay couples who choose to marry must actively construct a marital world with almost no institutional support" and their marital practices would have to be created "through discussion, negotiation, and experiment" (851). The kinds of marital norms that are typically thought to govern marital behavior include assumptions that marriage involves two adults living together in the same house, pooling resources, managing housework and market work, reproducing, and socializing children (Lauer and Yodanis 2010; Waite et al. 2000). They also include assumptions about sexual exclusivity and, at least at the onset, the permanence of commitment. There is little empirical evidence that any of these assumptions are weakening among heterosexual couples. Heterosexual married couples still overwhelmingly live together and pool their income and property, raise or wish to raise children together, and expect and practice monogamy (Abma and Martinez 2006; Ellickson 2008; Treas and Giesen 2000; Whisman, Gordon and Chita 2007). However, it is possible that same-sex couples are not governed by these same norms when they get married.

On the surface, my findings offer some support to the idea that same-sex couples are not

governed by the same marital norms as heterosexuals. Nothing in participants' survey responses or the narratives they gave about marriage suggests that they believed strongly in marital norms or felt any need to adhere to them. Opinions about appropriate marital behaviors varied widely among my participants with regard to key areas that have typically been defined by strong norms, such as that marriage should be a lifetime commitment, involve shared finances, and be monogamous. Almost equal proportions of my participants agreed (38%) and disagreed (35%) that "Marriage is a lifetime commitment and should never be terminated except under extreme conditions," and another fifth had no opinion on the matter. With regard to appropriate financial practices, although far more of my participants agreed (42%) than disagreed (4%) with the idea that "married couples should pool all their property and financial assets," almost as many (37%) had no clear opinion, neither agreeing nor disagreeing. When asked their opinion on the statement that "Couples that live together should always be monogamous," more of my participants disagreed (37%) than agreed (27%), and over a third (36%) had no opinion on the matter.[1] In the interviews, married participants also regularly insisted that nothing "tangible" had changed about their relationships after getting legally married, suggesting that they felt little pressure to change their relationship practices in order to adhere to marital norms.

Participants did not report any obvious moral imperative or social pressure to adhere to particular marital behaviors, and yet for the most part they were practicing the kind of relationship behaviors culturally and socially expected of marriage. If this was not the result of marital norms, then what was driving these marital behaviors? My findings demonstrate that norms are not the only mechanism through which marriage shapes relationship behaviors. Instead, just as cultural scripts connecting marriage and commitment had driven participants'

[1] Participants were not asked directly about *marital* monogamy, but there were no significant differences in the opinions of my married and unmarried participants with regard to monogamy.

decisions to get legally married, so too did they govern their marital behaviors. In describing and explaining the kinds of relationship decisions they made and the ways they experienced their relationships post-marriage, participants once again drew on widely accepted cultural ideas about marriage, love and commitment. They articulated these cultural ideas as changes in the ways they *felt* about their relationships. In other words, cultural scripts were so taken-for-granted that participants experienced them as very personal changes to their emotions. This makes sense because cultural scripts about contemporary marriage typically emphasize that it is based on deeply private and personal emotions.

In this chapter, I focus on these affective changes as a means of examining how being married impacted participants' relationship practices, even in the absence of clear marital norms for how to behave. I describe how the seemingly "intangible" changes they experienced also often had a large impact on the ways participants behaved in their relationships. "Intangible" changes influenced more "tangible" ones. Specifically, the new and increased feelings of commitment, trust, and security that being married gave participants shaped the way they planned for the future, argued, and resolved relationship problems. Looking at a more concrete empirical example, changes to the ways they felt about their relationships also directly shaped how participants managed their finances.

Distinguishing Tangible from Intangible Relationship Changes

In the survey, I asked participants about specific areas of their relationships and how they thought marriage had impacted them. Participants generally felt that getting married had not made any difference to how much they argued, how much time they spent together or socialized with friends, how monogamous they were, how much sex they had, or how they expressed

affection. I also found no significant differences by marital status with regard to these particular relationship behaviors. In most areas, there were a wide variety of relationship behaviors in both married and unmarried relationships and no clear patterns by marital status. Likewise, in the interviews when I asked my married participants whether marriage had changed their relationship in any way, most also told me that it had not. For such a big life-course event, most people's lives simply continued very much the same as they had before. As Andy, a 32 year-old woman who married her partner after dating 4 years, said:

> The actual marriage didn't have much of an impact. It's not like the sky opens. Nothing changes. It was such a gradual transition from living together to being married that the transition from the day before we got married to the day after we got married felt like nothing.

She explained that they had "already gone through the big transitions that people talk about" and "they were already really used to each other," so the day-to-day experiences of their relationship continued much as they had before. Sara, a 38 year-old woman who had been with her partner for 5 years before getting married, agreed, "It really didn't change anything day-to-day in our behaviors."

Almost all participants were already living with their partners prior to getting married, and many had been living with them for a long time. Among heterosexual couples in the United States cohabitation tends to be unstable and short-lived. About a half of first and second time cohabitations end after only a year, and very small proportions of cohabitations last more than 5 years (somewhere between 10% and 15%) (Lichter and Qian 2008).[2] In large part, this is because heterosexual couples transition to marriage early in the relationship. On average, married heterosexual couples live together for 22 months before getting married (Goodwin, Mosher and

[2] About half of heterosexual cohabitations (48%) do transition into marriage, but those that do not tend to be unstable and end quickly (within two years) (Heuveline and Timberlake 2004).

Chandra 2010). By contrast, the married LGBQ people who took part in this study had been living with their partners for an average of 6 years before marrying them. It is therefore unsurprising that the routines of their daily lives and relationship patterns were already very well established. As Steven, a 36 year-old man who had been with his partner 7 years prior to marriage, put it, "the foundation had already been laid."

There was also a feeling among some participants that getting married *shouldn't* change anything practical about their relationships because couples should already have everything about the day-to-day aspects of their relationships figured out before getting married. For example, Andy said that she and her partner had already discussed what they wanted their relationship to be like before they got married because she felt that there shouldn't be any "big surprises" afterwards "where all of a sudden it's like 'you want to do what?!'" That nothing changed was almost a point of pride for some. Jake, a 34 year-old man who had been with his partner for 4 years before marrying him, believed "the fact that the dynamic and the way that we operate in our day to day life didn't change meant that it was right, it's a good sign." For him, the relationship was already working successfully and so all the marriage did was to "lock in" what they already had. These kinds of feelings make sense given the belief younger LGBQ people expressed about waiting until the right time to get married (Chapter 1) and with cultural ideas about marriage as the "capstone" (Cherlin 2009). If you believe you have waited until everything in your life and relationship is already well established before marrying, then it makes sense to see no need for it to change afterwards.

However, despite the regularity and consistency with which my married participants insisted nothing had changed about their relationships, most also described profound changes to the ways they *felt* about them after getting married. In the survey, 87% of married respondents

said that marriage had made their relationship "better." It was just as common for participants to describe how their relationships had "improved" or "gotten better" after marriage as it was for them to tell me that "nothing had changed" about them – and usually the same participants said both. At first this seems like a contradiction: how could the same participants believe that marriage had not changed their relationships and that it had made it better? Other research with LGBQ people about how they imagined access to legal marriage *might* change their relationships also identifies contradictory expressions of this sort (Lannutti 2005, Shulman, Gotta and Green 2012). My findings illuminate that at least part of the answer lies in the distinction between tangible and intangible relationship changes.

Several participants referred to this distinction between tangible and intangible changes very directly. Tom, a 57 year-old man who was with his partner for 14 years prior to getting married, said:

> It's very hard to put it in any kind of tangible, concrete ways, to give you an example. It's hard for that because we didn't change kind of who does what or anything, but being married feels completely different than not being married.
>
> AO: Can you say a bit more about how it feels different?
>
> [Pauses]. Well it's a huge step to be married; it's a huge step to have a husband or a wife. It's saying, 'we want to be together forever and we've made this choice and now we've had this ceremony.' It's an intangible feeling but the moment it happened we felt different. You know one day you are two people who are living together and the next you're a married couple. It's really different.

In his response, Tom articulates several dominant themes in cultural scripts about marriage – that it is an important step in the lifecourse, the final step in a relationship, indicates a permanent commitment, is a public statement, and a personal choice. Other participants used language like an extra "weight," "cover," "cement" or "solidity" in their descriptions of intangible changes to the ways they felt about their relationships. When I asked Hannah, a 39 year-old woman who had

been with her partner 7 years before marriage, whether she thought being married had changed her relationship she responded, “I mean, it did and it didn’t, right? I mean on a day-to-day I don’t think it really changes it much. But it does give this sort of weight to it at times, right?” Similarly, Nick, a 40 year-old man who had been with his partner 9 years before marriage, replied, “There is some way that it impacted my thoughts and thinking and feeling about my relationship but not how we related or engaged with each other.” He went on:

> [Being married feels] almost like a reinforcement, sort of like that extra cover. I’m trying to think of something less morbid but the only example I can think of right now is how you have a coffin and then a vault. You just have this extra encasing and wrapping up of the thing that you already had.

Gail, a 56 year-old woman who had been with her partner 24 years before marriage, put it this way: “Nothing changes in your day-to-day life. So in our lives it's hard to know what difference it's made, but I guess there is some kind of intangible way in which I feel it has made us more solid.” Participants who described the extra “weight” to their relationships often also said that the change was difficult to describe. They experienced it as an emotional change that was hard to put into words. After all, what does it mean to say that one’s relationship is more “solid” or has “more weight” to it?

My findings suggest that these feelings were directly connected to the perception that their relationships were more committed and secure because they had married. As I showed in Chapter 1, having a partner who expressed a desire to get married could increase LGBQ people’s feeling of commitment and security even before they got married. Yet here we see that married participants also felt a distinct transformation in their feelings of commitment and security after getting married. As they explained, it is one thing to say you will marry someone and another to actually do it. There is something important about actually taking that step. Lizzie, a 48 year-old woman who had been with her partner 4 years before marriage, thought that getting married says

to the other person "Okay, you take this seriously – you said you're doing this and now you're really doing it." When I asked married participants if they thought being legally married had changed how committed they were to their relationship, two-thirds (68%) thought it had.[3] These findings corroborate previous studies on same-sex marriage. In the Health and Marriage Equality in Massachusetts (HMEM) Survey, 72% of married gay men and lesbians agreed they were more committed to their partners after marriage (Ramos et al. 2009). Married couples in interview research conducted by the Wellesley Center for Women also said they experienced "an unexpected qualitative deepening of commitment" on marrying (Schecter et al. 2008:413).

I also find that unmarried participants were significantly less likely to believe in the power of marriage to increase commitment. Less than half of unmarried people (46%) agreed that "marriage makes couples more committed to one another," compared to 74% of married people.[4] This finding means that although most of my unmarried participants also believed in the cultural ideal of marriage as a means of expressing commitment and wanted to get married, they were much less likely to believe in the power of marriage to *change* their commitment levels. At least for my participants, change seemed to be something that had to be personally experienced to be believed in.

Supporting the idea that feelings of increased commitment resulted from the experience of marriage, several married participants told me that they were surprised by the added commitment they felt. Harriet, a 64 year-old woman, had been with her partner 31 years prior to marriage and was taken aback by how different marriage felt to her. She said:

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[3] As so few respondents answered "maybe" I combined those who said "yes" and "maybe" here, as both indicate feeling that how committed they are to their relationship has changed, albeit with differing degrees of certainty. There were no statistically significant differences by age, gender, or relationship duration.

[4] Chi Square analysis shows marital status to be statistically significant at the < 0.05 level ($Pr = 0.036$).

> I didn't expect there to be this change, however after the marriage ceremony I felt *really* (emphasis in original) strongly committed to our marriage and to making my life with her. And I thought I had felt that way all along but I--. The feeling changed profoundly once we got married because I had said "for better or worse and richer or poorer," or whatever, and that took a leap of faith on my part. And I thought look, this is a serious relationship' (laughs). You're in it now, really in it. So yes I felt this profound change and she said she also felt a change.

Despite being with her partner 31 years before marrying, Harriet still felt such a "profound change" in commitment. Ricardo, a 52 year-old man who had been with his partner for 24 years before marrying him, described something similar. He thought that marriage is just "an experience you've got to have for yourself" to understand how it changes your relationship. He remembered some of his "straight friends saying that it feels different" but he didn't believe them until he experienced it. He said: "There's no way to describe that feeling other than there's really sort of like a spiritual bond that sort of cements the two of you … we were surprised but we couldn't describe it. Like we just knew that something had changed." Even those who had already made other significant commitments to one another, such as purchasing joint property and having children, still felt an unexpected change in their commitment levels on marrying. In this way, the act and experience of getting married could make people feel more committed and secure, even if nothing else about their relationships changed.

Interestingly, there were no strongly felt and shared norms about marriage as a lifetime commitment among my participants. Recall that when asked whether they agreed or disagreed with the statement, "Marriage is a lifetime commitment and should never be terminated except under extreme conditions" more of my participants disagreed (42%) than agreed (38%).[5] They did not feel more committed because they believed that being married meant that had to stay

[5] 19% neither agreed nor disagreed. There was no statistically significant difference by marital status.

together. Rather, they believed that something about the meaning of marriage would intrinsically make them more likely to stay together. They were well aware of high divorce rates and many saw divorce as a possible option and outcome, and yet they still thought marriage carried with it a higher level of commitment. Even those who had been divorced felt this way. Angie, a 51 year-old woman who had been with her partner 2 years before marrying her, said, "*because* I've been married before I feel that being married is different than just even being in a partnership or even in a live-in relationship; there is something about being legally married that really is much more of a commitment to each other." Their awareness of the temporary status of many marriages did little to dislodge the feeling that marriage made them more committed. This makes sense because we know that people do not necessarily change their cultural ideas based on experience (Swidler 2001). As Swidler (2001) explains, "Despite its fragility, the institution of marriage makes plausible the arguably most implausible element of the traditional love myth: the ideal that true love lasts forever. … [It] makes the mythic image [of love as everlasting] true experientially, whatever the facts" (121-3). This is also why when marriages end people reevaluate them as not having been based on "real" love after all.

In addition to feeling more committed, married participants also told me that they felt more confident and secure in their relationships. Commitment and security are two sides of the same coin. Not only did they feel more committed to making the relationship work, but they also trusted that it would work out more. Simply believing that marriage represented a higher level of commitment gave them more confidence and security in the relationship. Referencing the common idiom about heterosexual marriage being a "ball and chain," participants sometimes joked that the added security they felt came from the knowledge that it would be harder for their partners to leave them, "even if they wanted to," and that they had successfully "trapped" their

partners now. But in reality they saw marriage very much as a personal choice. That their partners had chosen to marry them meant that they had no desire to leave. The added security and trust came from the symbolic gesture that marrying signaled, which was that their partner was serious about the relationship. Heather, a 31 year-old woman who had been with her partner 2 years before marrying her, welled up with tears as she told me how before she got married she "didn't feel there was that level of commitment" and was always doubting the relationship, but now she can always fall back on the knowledge that in "getting married she was saying to me, I want to make that commitment."

The added security and trust marriage afforded them meant that married participants less often doubted their partner's commitment or questioned the stability of the relationship than they used to. Vanessa, a 37 year-old woman who had been with her partner 4 years prior to marriage, told me that she didn't "notice any big difference in how we treated each other" but what had really changed was that she "felt more secure." She confessed, "Before I think I did feel less secure about our relationship in that there wasn't this bigger thing tying us together. I think that I always had in the back of my head when we were just dating that she might just change her mind and leave. I don't have that at all now." She also told me that she'd noticed a difference between her married and unmarried friends – that unmarried friends would talk about "contingency plans for what they'd do if they break up" while her married friends never did. In a similar way, Tony, a 69 year-old man who had been with his partner 3 years prior to marriage, said:

> [Before we were married] I always questioned like 'what's going on?' And now it's like there's this whole set of questions that never have to be considered. It's like, okay, we're married. Of course we can get divorced, but we don't have to think about that now. We can think about it when it becomes an issue. So there's just less uncertainty and less questioning.

Eva, a 38 year-old woman who had been with her partner 2 years before marrying her, recognized that "it's not a guarantee that we're going to make it," but she said that what had changed was that "Now I just don't worry about it. It's the confidence of knowing 'okay, that's taken care of.'" Even if divorce was still something they believed was possible for the future, they no longer had to think so much about their relationship ending or factor for it in their relationship decisions. For married participants, doubt and questioning were no longer ordinary parts of their relationship experiences because by getting married their partners had demonstrated their commitment to them in the way that they believed to be most absolute. As a show of commitment, there was little else these participants could have hoped or asked for.

Several participants stressed that the added commitment and security they felt after getting married did not necessarily mean that they had felt insecure and untrusting of their unmarried relationships. However, even in these cases, there was still something different and additional that being married made them feel. Austin, a 48 year-old man who had been with his partner 11 years prior to marriage, stated:

> We were already pretty firmly committed to spending the rest of our lives together before but if there was any doubt marriage might have quelled that. If there was ever any doubt that he was not going to stay with me forever, now it's completely erased in my mind. I feel more secure - I have to say that.

Chris, a 32 year old man who had been with his partner 5 years prior to marriage, also said, "I mean even before we were married we talked about how we're kinda together for the long haul but I guess it just seems even more so that way now." Not everyone believed that marriage should have a monopoly on commitment. Robert, a 51 year-old man who had been with his partner 4 years prior to marriage thought that it was "unfortunate that the only way to show commitment really is through marriage." Nonetheless, he acknowledged that, even though he might wish there were alternative ways to express it, nothing shows commitment in quite the

same way marriage does. He explained, no matter how long you've been with someone before you get married, "when you're dating someone, that's all you're doing is dating. You can be as close as you want and say it as much as you want but still there is nothing that really binds you to each other that shows that you're committed." As the ultimate show of commitment, getting married demonstrated that their partners were "not going anywhere" in a way that simply saying it before could not have conveyed.

Connections between Tangible and Intangible Relationship Changes

Although my participants had a difficult time identifying "tangible" changes in their relationship behaviors post-marriage, the "intangible" changes they described also directly shaped the ways they behaved. In other words, marriage produced changes in the ways they *felt* about their relationships, and these affective changes in turn also influenced the ways they *behaved*. Intangible changes in the ways they "felt" did not impact all kinds of relationship practices and behaviors. There is little evidence in my data that feeling more committed and secure had any impact on how often participants went out and socialized, how they divided domestic labor, or how monogamous they were. But for those relationship practices and behaviors that were more closely connected with ideas about commitment changes to the ways they felt had a significant impact on how they behaved. Put differently, married participants not only *felt* more committed; they also *behaved* as if they were more committed. First, married people were significantly less likely to report "seriously considering" ending their relationships than their unmarried counterparts.[6] 72% of married participants said that they had "never" seriously considered it, compared to only 48% of unmarried participants. On the flip side, 36% unmarried said they had

[6] Chi Square analysis shows marital status to be highly statistically significant at the < 0.05 level ($Pr = 0.009$).

considered it more than twice, compared with just 12% of married participants.[7] Married participants were only about 1/5th as likely to seriously consider ending the relationship than their unmarried counterparts (See Table 1). In addition, marital status remained the only statistically significant factor influencing how likely they were to consider ending their relationships when a range of other factors, including age, gender, income, education, having children, and how long the couple had been together were also taken into account. Relationship duration did not act as any kind of proxy for marriage. Those who were in long-term unmarried relationships were no less likely to consider ending their relationships than those in short-term relationships. Moreover, married people were not necessarily less likely to consider ending their relationships because they were more satisfied with their relationships than unmarried participants - there were no significant differences in satisfaction by marital status. In fact, a slightly higher proportion of my unmarried participants said they were "extremely satisfied" (60%) than married participants (57%). This suggests married participants were less likely to consider leaving their relationships regardless of personal satisfaction with them.[8]

[7] It is possible that the wording of the survey questions may have shaped these results in some way because unmarried participants were asked "How often have you seriously considered ending your relationship since living with your partner?" whereas married participants were asked "since you have been legally married?" It is therefore possible that married people had considered it less because they were basing their answers on a shorter time frame (time since marriage) than unmarried participants. However neither relationship duration nor cohabitation duration came up as a statistically significant driver of these responses, suggesting it is not at play and that marital status would still be significant regardless.

[8] I do not intend these findings to suggest that the additional commitment to stay in married relationships is necessarily a positive attribute. As the findings on satisfaction suggest, married relationships are not inherently of better quality than unmarried relationships simply because they may be more committed. My findings do not relate to relationship quality; rather they shed light on the differences in feelings and behaviors between married and unmarried same-sex couples that may influence relationship stability.

Table 1: Odds of Seriously Considering Ending Relationship

	Odds Ratio	*Std. Err.*	*z*	*P>z*	*95% Conf. (Lower)*	*95% Conf. (Upper)*
Marital Status	0.173	0.096	-3.15	0.002	0.058	0.516
Rel. Duration	1.355	0.339	1.22	0.224	0.831	2.212
Gender	0.508	0.250	-1.38	0.169	0.194	1.332
Age	1.015	0.025	0.61	0.542	0.968	1.064
Children	1.324	0.737	0.5	0.615	0.444	3.943
Education	0.821	0.305	-0.53	0.595	0.396	1.701
Income	1.199	0.140	1.56	0.119	0.954	1.507
_cons	0.541	0.737	-0.45	0.652	0.038	7.798

My interview data also offers support for the finding that married participants were less likely to seriously consider ending their relationships, as they frequently told me that they were less likely to give up on their relationships now they were married. For Liam, a 33 year-old man who had been with his partner for 2 years before marrying him, marriage made him less likely to "cut bait" when things got tough. He reflected:

> Like any couple there are periods of ebb and flow in how you feel about a person, and marriage for me has provided a certain level of stability that I'm thankful for because when maybe there's been some sort of a valley moment when I question things, you know we've had a fight or things are not quite as good as they are sometimes, I do think 'but we're married.' And when you're married you get through these periods and remind yourself that it hasn't always been this way and it won't feel this way again before long. And then I'll see him in a certain light a few days later and I'll think 'wow, I'm just glad that I don't give up because this is right.'

Some of my participants who had children with their partners also told me that marriage had made them more committed to staying in the relationship. Grace was a 48 year-old woman who had been with her partner for 10 years before getting married. She and her partner had adopted a child two years after getting legally married. During the interview Grace shared with me how difficult parenting had been and how it had changed her relationship with her partner, but she said that being married had made her more committed to staying together. She admitted:

> There are times when the parenting is so hard and it just takes such a toll on us and I just want to pack up and not leave a forwarding address, but then I remember that we have made this huge commitment to each other [to be married]. And I don't know if I would feel differently if we weren't married, but we are married and that means something to us.

For Grace, it was marriage and what that meant to her, not the shared responsibilities of having a child, that made her want to stay with her partner when things got tough.

Several participants gave me specific examples of drawing on the extra commitment of marriage in efforts to stay together. For instance, Art, a 44 year-old man who had been with his partner for 6 years before getting married, told me that they had a "major relationship crisis" about five years after they got married and "came very close to getting divorced." He thought that "the fact that we were legally married probably made the difference between our separating and not" because "it meant that the glue there was a bit stronger." He said, "Obviously that wasn't the only reason we stayed together – that would be crazy," but still:

> In those moments when we were very close to splitting there was a bit more of a bond between the two of us, and it's sort of weightier when it has legal force, and there would have been a lot more to go through to actually divorce one another. You know if there was no legal structure to it we could have just separated and that would be that. So yeah, being married was pretty significant actually in that respect.

Here again we see the legal and cultural components of marriage intersecting (see Chapter 1), as Art's explanation highlights both the personal "bond" that marriage gave them and the extra legal and practical barriers to divorce. Giving a more comical example, Keith, a 41 year-old man who had been with his partner for 4 years prior to marriage, relayed an incident when he and his husband had "a really big fight" the year after they got married. During the argument his husband "made some comment like, 'well, you know, we're just so different and maybe it was the wrong decision to get married.'" The idea that they get divorced was so ridiculous to Keith that it helped diffuse the situation. He responded dramatically, "Oh, hell no! I'll tell you right

now, I am going to die before I get divorced. No, no, no, I didn't go through all that bullshit to --. Are you kidding me?!" At which point, they just both "burst out laughing!"

In the survey, participants said that marriage had not changed how much they argued, but in the interviews they told me that it had changed *how* they argued. During their first big fight after getting married Keith had been outraged at the mention of divorce, but he said that since then their style of fighting had changed:

> We fight with the expectation that we will work to resolve it. Breaking up is not an option, right? Taking an afternoon to blow off some steam is an option, but there's never a moment where I'm like, "alright, we're getting divorced, I'm out of here, I can't do this!" We fight differently because there is a kind of higher stakes to the outcome.

Many others also told me that leaving was not something to be threatened lightly anymore and that they fought differently with their partners since getting married. Brianna, a 31 year-old woman who had been with her partner for 8 years before marrying her, recounted:

> I feel like before when we would fight we would just threaten each other to break up. I think before we felt like it was more expendable as a relationship but now that's not even a threat anymore. Every once in a while those threats come out but not like it used to be. Before it was like "Fine, leave me, whatever, I don't care!" (said with mock shouting), but now we sit down and talk about things, cause I feel like it's solidified us more. I used to think of it as just a piece of paper, like 'That's just a piece of paper, whatever' but now I realize that it comes with rights and all sorts of things.

Angie (quoted earlier) said that if one of them walks out after a fight now they know for sure that "we're going to come back and we're going to work it out because it's not so easy to walk away." She added, "there isn't a sense of transiency anymore and I think that definitely changes the relationship, it really does."

The added commitment and security that married participants felt also often changed another aspect of their relationships: how they talked about and made plans for the future. For some, marriage changed how long in the future they would look and make plans for, and the feeling that they could talk to their partners about longer-term futures together. This was most

often true for participants that had been with their partners less than five years before getting legally married. Eva, who had been with her partner 2 years before getting married, explained that "it's easier to see the future" and talk about things like "where we want to live, about whether or not to have children, or making plans for where to spend Christmas holidays" when you're not "having to worry about 'well that's if we're together.'" Similarly, Esteban, a 34 year-old man who had been with his partner 4 years before marriage, told me:

> Now I don't look at this as temporary, I look at this as permanent. So it changes, I feel, the way that I plan and see my future. We're sort of planning and investing together. We're talking about kids. We're talking about where we live, would we buy a home and where? Retirement. Would in-laws or family members ever move in with us? This is like the rest of our lives. We don't know what'll happen tomorrow but we're thinking in a 30-40-year sort of perspective rather than what are we doing next week. And I think being married sort of creates that.

Andy, a 32 year-old woman who had been with her partner 4 years before marriage, described it as "not having to tip-toe around anything because I can just assume that we'll be together." This meant she didn't have to worry about bringing up subjects like "what to do about our retirement plans in case it sounds too presumptuous!" However, this finding also applied to some participants who had been with their partners for much longer before getting married. For example, Jo, a 32 year-old woman had been with her partner 10 years before marriage, also told me that before she and her partner married their future plans were usually limited to "the next years of the lease when I guessed we'd be living together again" but now "because it feels very settled and very safe there is definitely a lot more long term planning." For example, she said that now they had conversations about "what do we want our lives to look like? Should we travel more? What about our jobs? Who would take care of kids? And things like that."

In these ways, the added commitment and security my participants felt post-marriage also impacted the ways they said they behaved in their relationships too – making them less

likely to consider ending the relationship, changing the ways they fought and resolved relationship problems, and allowing them to make plans for a longer-term future. In addition, I found that the "intangible" changes they described also impacted more concrete relationship practices. Next, I focus on the case of financial practices to show how affective shifts also shaped very practical and material relationship decisions and behaviors, such as whether to have a joint account or property.

The Impact of Affective Relationship Changes on Financial Pooling

Social norms and expectations about marriage have always shaped the management of money (Coontz 2005; Zelizer 1989, 1995). In the mid-twentieth century, money pooling became popular as a response to an ideology of companionate marriage (Zelizer 1989). Two people were supposed to become "one" with marriage and having joint finances symbolized the idea that the activities of both spouses were of the same value irrespective of their financial contributions. In their classic study of American couples, Blumstein and Schwartz (1983) found that financial pooling seemed like "such a natural part of marriage" to their participants that they "could hardly imagine living any other way"; it was "unconsciously assumed" (98). Yet that was over three decades ago, and today marriage is thought to be in a new, increasingly "individualized" institutional stage (Amato et al. 2007; Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 2002; Giddens 1992). Spouses are less likely to become one interdependent unit or to sacrifice their own individuality for socially defined roles within marriage. Nonetheless, empirical research continues to show a strong connection between marriage and pooling money (Heimdal and Houseknech, 2003; Kenney 2004; Pahl 2008; Treas 1993; Vogler 2005). In the United States, 83% of heterosexual married couples pool all of their money (Lauer and Yodanis 2011). Among the LGBQ people

who took part in this research, financial practices also stood out as the one area that differed significantly by marital status. It was also the only relationship practice that a significant proportion of participants (52%) believed had changed pre- and post-marriage. By highlighting the important role *feelings* play even when marital norms hold less sway, these findings help shed light on why financial pooling remains so common among married couples.

In general, couples tend to adopt an all-or nothing approach to finances, either pooling all their accounts or keeping them all separate, and family scholars believe this reflects the extent to which they imagine their relationships as a shared, long-term enterprise (Lauer and Yodanis 2011). My participants also followed this pattern, with over two-thirds having an "all" or "nothing" approach to financial management. They tended to say they either had "both joint savings and checking accounts" (45%) or "no joint accounts" at all (34%), with fewer adopting partial pooling by having only a joint checking account or a joint savings account (21%).[9] Within these "all or nothing" approaches, there were very clear differences in the way married and unmarried people managed their finances. Married participants were much more likely to pool all their money with their partners than unmarried participants: 59% of married participants said they had both a joint checking and savings account, while only 20% said they had no joint accounts. These figures were almost opposite for unmarried participants, with only 22% saying

[9] Participants were asked: "Do you and your partner have a joint checking or savings account?" They could respond either "Yes, a joint checking account only," "Yes, a joint savings account only," or "Yes, both joint checking and savings accounts." Most of those who only had one joint account said it was a checking account. In the interviews, these people told me that joint checking accounts were used primarily to pay household expenses. This supports the idea that partial pooling is a strategy designed to aid in practical components of household management and is not a reflection of ideas about the relationship (Ashby & Burgoyne 2008; Lauer & Yodanis 2011).

they had both joint checking and savings accounts, and 51% saying they had no joint accounts.[10] There was likely much variation in the particular ways of organizing their finances within pooled or separate arrangements, but that married and unmarried participants had such broadly different arrangements suggests that they conceptualized their relationships differently.

In addition, married participants were also much more likely than their unmarried counterparts to own joint property with their partners and have the property be in both names. 62% of participants said they owned their own place of residence, while 38% did not, but these figures differed significantly by marital status - with 77% of married people owning their place of residence compared to just 39% of unmarried people.[11] Income and age were the main determinants of whether my participants owned their own place of residence. However, among those who owned their own place of residence, whether the property was in *both names* was strongly linked to marital status. 79% of married people who owned their own property said that it was in both names, compared to just 39% of unmarried people.[12]

Married and unmarried people often look different on a range of other variables, such as education, income, age, having children, and relationship duration, and these might help explain the link between marital status and financial arrangements. However, as others have found for heterosexual couples (see for example, Hamplova 2009; Lyngstad, Noack and Tufte 2010; Vogler and Pahl 1994), differences by marital status could not be attributed to these other

[10] Chi Square analysis shows marital status to be highly statistically significant at the < 0.05 level (Pr = 0.000).
[11] Chi Square analysis shows marital status to be highly statistically significant at the < 0.05 level (Pr = 0.000).
[12] Chi Square analysis shows marital status to be highly statistically significant at the < 0.05 level (Pr = 0.007).

factors.[13] In fact, considered alongside these other factors, only marital status remained a significant predictor of whether participants had joint accounts (significant at P = 0.004 level), with married people over four times more likely to have joint accounts than their unmarried counterparts (see Table 2). With regard to owning joint property, again differences by marital status remained statistically significant even when other possibly relevant factors, including education, income, age, gender, having children, and relationship duration were taken into account, with married participants over ten times more likely to have a home in both names (See Table 3).

Table 2: Odds of Having Both Joint Checking & Savings Accounts

	Odds Ratio	*Std. Err.*	*z*	*P>z*	*95% Conf. Interval (Lower)*	*95% Conf. Interval (Upper)*
Marital Status	4.377	2.233	2.89	0.004	1.610	11.897
Rel. Duration	1.497	0.657	0.92	0.357	0.634	3.537
Cohab Duration	0.769	0.357	-0.57	0.571	0.309	1.910
Gender	0.946	0.448	-0.12	0.907	0.374	2.394
Age	1.123	0.255	0.51	0.609	0.720	1.751
Children	0.814	0.446	-0.38	0.708	0.278	2.383
Education	1.586	0.597	1.23	0.22	0.758	3.316
Income	1.035	0.111	0.32	0.75	0.839	1.276
_cons	0.042	0.059	-2.26	0.024	0.003	0.656

[13] Family income is a factor related to money management (Vogler and Pahl 1994). One limitation of my data is that I only measured one person's individual income (the participants) and so I could not account for differences in family income. It may be that having a large income gap between partners is more relevant for how couples manage money.

Table 3: Odds of Having Property in Both Names

	Odds Ratio	*Std. Err.*	*Z*	*P>z*	*95% Conf. Interval Lower Bound*	*95% Conf. Interval Upper Bound*
Marital Status	10.360	8.680	2.79	0.005	2.005	53.518
Rel. Duration	1.457	0.825	0.66	0.506	0.480	4.419
Cohab Duration	1.392	0.863	0.53	0.594	0.413	4.691
Gender	0.850	0.595	-0.23	0.816	0.216	3.352
Age	0.747	0.233	-0.94	0.349	0.405	1.377
Children	0.171	0.141	-2.14	0.032	0.034	0.860
Education	1.571	0.833	0.85	0.394	0.556	4.440
Income	1.086	0.167	0.54	0.593	0.803	1.469
_cons	0.110	0.251	-0.97	0.334	0.001	9.696

This point does not, however, mean that same-sex couples had put their lives on hold in the absence of access to legal marriage. Regardless of marriage, the longer participants had been together the more likely they were to have joint accounts and property in both names (see Tables 4 and 5). In fact, participants who had been with their partners just 5 years were already much more likely to have combined finances than those who had been together less, suggesting that even without marriage it did not take people long to commit to their partners financially. In addition, the longer participants had already been living with their partners before marrying the less likely they were to think that getting married had made any difference to their finances (See Table 6).[14] For people in short duration relationships, marriage may have occurred at a point in their relationship when how they organize their finances was still open to a high degree of change, whereas people who had already been living together a long time (over 10 years) may already have had their finances figured out and did not change them as much. Blumstein and Schwartz (1983) found that how long gay men and lesbians had been together had a significant

[14] Chi Square analysis shows how long they had been cohabiting to be statistically significant at the < 0.05 level (Pr = 0.036).

impact on their attitudes towards financial pooling; the longer they had been together they more likely they were to favor pooling – and the effect of relationship duration was far more pronounced for their gay and lesbian participants than their heterosexual ones (95). However, my findings suggest that with the availability of legal marriage, relationship duration will diminish in importance for LGBQ people's financial practices. Indeed, when it is considered directly alongside marital status, relationship duration becomes a far less significant determinant of financial practices (Tables 2 and 3). Relationship duration stills play some role, at least for purchasing joint property, but once legal marriage is taken into account getting married becomes more important for taking these steps, regardless of how long couples have been together.

Table 4: Joint Accounts by Relationship Duration

Relationship Duration	*Both joint checking & savings*	*No joint accounts*
1-4 years	16%	59%
5-10 years	64%	14%
11-20 years	54%	29%
21+ years	54%	31%

Pr = 0.045

Table 5: Owning Property in Both Names by Relationship Duration

Relationship Duration	*Property in one name only*	*Property in both names*
1-4 years	91%	9%
5-10 years	22%	78%
11-15 years	12%	88%
16 + years	15%	75%

Pr = 0.004

Table 6: Changes to Financial Practices by Cohabitation Duration

Cohabitation Duration	*Yes/Maybe*	*No*
1-4 years	88%	12%
5-10 years	63%	38%
11-20 years	24%	76%
21+ years	17%	83%

Pr = 0.036

Explaining Differences in Financial Practices by Marital Status

It is possible that the greater proportion of merging finances in married relationships results from self-selection, whereby those people most likely to merge finances are also those especially likely to get married. Others have found that although heterosexual cohabiting couples are less likely to pool finances than married couples, those with intentions to get married are more likely to do so than couples without marriage intentions (Blumstein and Schwartz 1983; Lyngstad et al. 2010). However, my data offers little support for this kind of selection effect for same-sex couples. Unmarried participants who said they were "very likely" to get married were no more likely to have joint accounts or property in both names than unmarried couples who said they were not very likely to get married. Marital intentions did not shape financial practices in the same way as *experiencing* marriage. Rather, my findings suggest there is something transformative about the experience of marriage itself. To be clear, not all married participants changed their finances after getting legally married. However, over half (52%) told me that marriage definitely had or might have changed the way they organized their finances.[15] Changes to financial behaviors after marriage were also discussed much more frequently than any other kind of relationship practice in the interviews.

[15] As so few respondents answered "maybe" I combined those who said "yes" and "maybe" here, as both indicate feeling that the ways they managed their finances had changed, albeit with differing degrees of certainty.

Another possible explanation is that marital norms with regard to pooling have remained strong even as other marital norms have weakened. It's worth noting again that in the survey a fairly substantial minority (42%) agreed with the statement, "Married couples should pool all their property and financial assets," suggesting some adherence to financial pooling as a social norm. In the interviews, some married people also appeared to explain financial pooling as resulting from adherence to marital norms. These participants described financial pooling as a norm both in the sense of a norm behavior – something they assumed all, or at least most, other married couples do - and as an expected behavior - something they felt they *should* do as a married couple. For instance, Chris, a 32 year-old man who was with his partner 5 years before marriage, said that how he and his partner managed their finances was the "one practical thing that changed after we got married." They had always had separate bank accounts but then "decided to merge our finances and open a joint bank account" after they got married. When I asked him why they had made that decision, he responded: "I guess it just seemed like a natural step once you're married to do that. I mean we don't know any married couples who have separate finances." Merging finances just seemed like what they were meant to do as a married couple. Similarly, Rachel, a 30 year-old woman who had been with her partner 4 years before marrying her, told me that they had only "talked more about sharing bank accounts" after getting married but could give no other reason than because "I guess it just sort of seemed like the thing to do." Bill, a 61 year-old man, had been with his partner much longer prior to marriage (17 years), but he too seemed to be swayed by marital expectations for how to behave. He told me that before they got legally married they had kept separate bank accounts and his partner paid him rent, but then when they got married they "agreed to just pool them together" and now his partner was also on the deed to the house. When I asked him why their financial arrangements

had changed he responded, “that it’s just the way a lot of couples do it,” suggesting they were just following the norms they witnessed among other married couples.

The prevalence of pooled financial practices among married participants then resulted, at least in part, from institutional pressures based on informal expectations regarding how to behave. However, these kinds of norm-based explanations were far from common or dominant in my analyses of the interview data. More often married participants described changes to their financial arrangements as based on the added commitment and security they felt in marriage. Others have argued that heterosexual cohabitors' propensity towards independent money management can be attributed to insecurity regarding the future of their partnership and the lack of protection for joint investments (Brines and Joyner 1999; Vogler 2005; Winkler 1997). Financial pooling was also thought to be too risky for unmarried same-sex couples who could not “count on the courts to help them divide up their property in the event they break up” (Blumstein and Schwartz 1983:97). However, the findings of this study suggest it is the additional emotional security, not legal security, of marriage that shapes attitudes toward financial pooling. Neither unmarried nor married participants attributed financial decisions to legal protections. As the relevant portions of the Defense of Marriage Act (Section 3) had not yet been repealed when I conducted my interviews, my participants still lacked many of the federal benefits and protections of marriage, and many exhibited insecurity and uncertainty about their legal status. As such, they were not drawing on the security of legal protections in decisions to merge their finances. Instead, they drew on new *feelings* of security that they gained from being married.

Blumstein and Schwartz (1983) argued that financial pooling was a “question of trust” and a “fundamental part of the commitment process” (108). They recognized that for

heterosexual couples trust was produced automatically on getting married (105). By contrast, they argued that for same-sex couples who could not get married there was "no institutional understanding that it [the relationship] symbolizes a lifetime commitment," and the "issue of permanence" is therefore "something same-sex couples discuss and negotiate over a period of time." Without legal marriage "gay men and lesbians must first get to know their partners and do not pool until they are convinced of the durability of their relationship;" the "longer same-sex couples live together the more they want to pool incomes" (105). I found that with the availability of legal marriage relationship duration now plays much less of a role in same-sex couples' decisions about financial pooling. Just as Blumstein and Schwartz found for heterosexual couples, marriage now produces trust "automatically" for same-sex couples. Not only did participants not require longevity to trust their partners if they were married, but getting married could produce additional trust even for those who had already been with their partners a long time. The feelings of trust and security that were produced automatically through marriage were central in my participants' explanations of financial pooling, while relationship duration was rarely mentioned.

Brianna, a 31 year-old woman who had been with her partner 8 years before marriage, told me that even though they had already bought a house together they had largely kept their finances separate before marriage. But "then after we got married we said, 'we need to make our own account, we need to combine everything,' and now it's just all on one account." When I asked her why she had kept their finances separate before, she said "Cause you never know what will happen, and so we were both a bit cautious before." Not having the commitment and security of marriage had acted as a barrier to more complete financial pooling, despite already having made the commitment of purchasing a house together. The decision to pooling finances

also emanated from a "greater sense of joint partnership" in married relationships – the idea that all decisions should be jointly discussed and planned - but this was also dependent on the feelings of greater commitment and security. For example, Clara, a 29 year-old woman who had been with her partner 2 years before marriage, said "we didn't combine all of our finances until we got married, so that was a change" and she explained:

> Well knowing that we've committed to living our lives together and planning our lives together changed the way we looked at the future, obviously. So we did already have a joint bank account that we established when we moved in together that we would both put money into it every so often and pay our house and groceries and stuff out of but I think it just seemed like it was a good time to combine them more when we got married. At that point we made a plan in terms of saving to buy a place to live, and when we would have kids and how much that would cost and saving for that. With financial planning that makes a big difference knowing that you're committed to doing it all together. … Now any [financial] decisions really we make together – so how much to put away every month - and we have a condo fund and a family fund that we're trying to build up, for saving money to have babies and vacations and that sort of stuff.

Similarly, Jo who had talked about how marriage helped her plan for a longer-term future with her partner, also told me that before they were married she and her partner had essentially "lived together as roommates" with all their finances "completely separate." But since getting married there was "joint financial planning that didn't happen before" and "much more clear [talk about] 'how much do we have and what is our plan?'" When I asked her why she thought they hadn't done that before getting married, she replied, laughing, "Because I would never do that before getting married! I mean, like, how many people end up breaking up or somebody cleans out an account and walks out. I just think it's stupid [to do that before marriage]. You're setting yourself up for a bad situation."

Some had begun their relationships by moving into houses that their partners already owned and had either paid them rent or not contributed directly to the mortgage payments. Then, upon getting married, they reevaluated who owned the property and how to contribute to it

together. Gretchen, a 51 year-old woman who had been with her partner 3 years prior to marriage, told me that before they married she was not on the deed to the house but she had paid half the mortgage, while her partner took care of all other costs associated with the house, such as taxes. After they had got married they had refinanced and added her name to the deed, essentially giving her "half the house." She elucidated, "It wasn't until we married that I became invested in the house and we agreed of course that I would pay half of everything." When I probed whether she thought this could have occurred without marriage, she paused for a long time to think and eventually said "yeah, I think possibly it could have had we kept staying together," but suggested it would have taken much longer to get there without it. Similarly, Talia, a 47 year-old woman who had been with her partner 8 years before marriage, said:

> I think it did change when we got married. There's a sense of a real partnership now. Like I had never paid any rent or any mortgage - I just moved in. We had a balance of things that I took care of and that she took care of and it just seemed more of a balancing act, but now it feels like we're in this together and we make sure that we have an equal interest and an equal level of investment I guess.

Giving some examples, she told me that they had decided to have wills drawn up and that her partner had added her to the deed to the house, saying that "now there's a different approach to legal entanglements." She also informed me that her partner had recently changed jobs and now "makes half what she used to make," which was a "whole new dynamic" for the relationship. She's been "very happy to be able to say 'this doesn't matter' and that it doesn't have to be such a 'you do this and I'll do that' and tally it up and make sure it's equal anymore." But she added, "I'm not sure I would feel that confident doing that if we weren't married. I like that we're just really in this together."

Lauer and Yodanis (2011) argued that how people think about and approach marriage is reflected in how they manage their money. Married people have differing understandings of what

marriage means, especially with regard to whether they view marriage as a permanent, life-time commitment or not, and this could also influence their financial practices. By contrast, I found that whether or not married LGBQ people believed marriage was permanent or not played little role in their financial decisions. My findings show that the new feelings one gains through the experience of being married are not necessarily dependent on how one understands marriage as an institution. Married participants could hold fairly individualized views of marriage and still experience greater feelings of commitment and security from marriage. And it was these *feelings* of greater commitment and security they gained by marrying, not particular understandings of marriage as an institution, that shaped their financial practices. These findings help demonstrate that marriage continues to have a strong impact on relationship behaviors, even though marital norms have weakened.

Conclusion

I found little evidence that my participants adhered to strongly held norms about how to behave in marriage, offering some support to the idea that marriage is "de-institutionalized" (Cherlin 2004). They held varying opinions about key elements of marriage, such as whether it was a lifetime commitment, should be monogamous, and involve shared finances. Moreover, in many regards, the relationship practices of my married participants did not look significantly different from those of my unmarried participants, suggesting no clear patterns in the behavioral norms married and unmarried people followed. As such, it is not surprising that my participants repeatedly told me that getting married had not led to any "tangible" changes in their everyday relationship practices. Yet my findings also paint a more complex picture, showing that weakened norms do not mean that marriage no longer impacted relationship behaviors.

Participants repeatedly made a distinction between "tangible" and "intangible" changes to their relationships after getting legally married, whereby being married could make them *feel* very differently about their relationships even if little else changed about them. In particular, participants discussed how being married made them feel more committed and secure in their relationships. I showed how particants also drew on these feelings in the ways they planned for the future, argued, and resolved relationship problems. By detailing how changes to *feelings* also influenced changes in relationship *behavior,* I highlighted alternative mechanisms through which the institution of marriage impacts relationship practices when norms are weak.

In order to further demonstrate how marriage shapes relationship behaviors through altered feelings, I focused on the case of financial practices. The significant differences that are routinely found between married and unmarried participants in the area of financial practices suggest that marriage is not completely de-institutionalized. Yet explanations for the high prevalence of financial pooling among married couples that have focused on the power of shared marital norms fail to explain why financial pooling remains so common in marriage in an era of increasing marital individualization. My findings help show that feelings of commitment and security that accompany marriage may play a much more central role than shared norms in explaining the continuing prevalence of financial pooling. Other scholars have emphasized the role of security in financial practices, but have tended to attribute this largely to the legal protections that come with marriage (Brines and Joyner 1999; Le Bourdais and Lappierre-Adamcyk 2004; Vogler 2005; Winkler 1997). However, at the time I interviewed my participants, there was no federal recognition for same-sex marriage and they had therefore gained only marginal financial protections. My participants did not describe the additional security they felt as resulting from legal protections.

Others have suggested that merging finances in marriage is a means of *demonstrating* commitment and trust in an era in which it can no longer be so assumed. The idea is that ‘‘trust is disembedded from the institution of marriage’’ (Giddens 1992:121) because marriage no longer guarantees the commitment of spouses to and continuation of the relationship. As such, trust needs to be demonstrated and worked on between the individuals through a process of mutual self-disclosure. Pooling money is one way married couples symbolize trust to their partners (Lauer & Yodanis 2011:681). By contrast, my findings show that even when people no longer believe in marriage as a life-long commitment, the very act of marrying produces additional trust and security between partners. Rather than a means of demonstrating trust in a less secure union, financial pooling results from the commitment and security that the institution of marriage continues to produce automatically. In other words, pooling finances is not a response to the weakening institutional character of marriage, but rather demonstrates its continuing institutional strength and the way it still shapes our relationship practices.

In this way my findings offer new support to the findings of Blumstein and Schwartz’s (1983) study of American couples over three decades ago, and the central role they attributed to “trust” and “commitment” in explanations of why couples do or do not pool finances. However, Blumstein and Schwartz (1983) highlighted the importance of relationship duration for same-sex couples in the absence of access to legal marriage, whereas I found that legal marriage has now become much more central in the process of financial pooling for same-sex couples. Moreover, they predicted that same-sex couples “offered a glimpse of what the future may hold for married couples” because “today married couples are coming to realize that the impermanence of ‘couples life’ also applies to them.” As such, they believed that couples would increasingly come to question the “traditional concept of putting all their resources together.” Alternatively, my

findings suggest that even though many have come to accept the impermanence of marriage as an institution this has not diminished its power in producing the kind of trust and security necessary for behaviors such as financial pooling. Being married still has a unique power in the way it makes people feel *automatically* more committed and secure, and this power also applies to same-sex couples.

Cherlin (2004) argued that one of the core ways contemporary marriage remains distinctive is in the way it produces "enforceable trust," although he recognized that this was weakening (855). The idea of "enforceable trust" locates the added security people gain from marriage at the level of institutional *norms.* It suggests that people feel more secure in marriage because they expect the trust they place in it to be "enforced" by others like family and friends, and that social norms against divorce operate to hold people more accountable to the public promises they make in getting married. However, as Swidler (2001) argued, "the informal but once powerful sanctions that supported marriage as a set of enforceable social obligations have largely dissolved. Love relationships are increasingly matters of individual choice, and no authoritative power – kin group, community, or law – forces individuals to do what is right" (156). Rather than a result of "enforceable trust," my findings suggest that the added security one feels in marriage is automatic and intrinsic to the very meaning of marriage. It results from the taken-for-granted belief that marriage *is* the most absolute form of commitment. The institution of marriage continues to shape relationship behaviors then not as the result of norms about what one *should* do in marriage but less directly through taken-for-granted cultural scripts about what marriage means, which in turn change the way people *feel* about their relationships. While the process is different, the end result, however, may be the same. Behaviors that were previously compulsory in marriage, such as financial pooling, have been re-invoked through a process that

on the surface appears to be more personal and individual. In other words, today's *feelings* may simply be yesterday's *norms* rebranded. The particular relationship between cultural scripts, feelings, and relationship behaviors warrants more attention. Nonetheless, the significant power that marriage continues to have over relationships should at least caution against calling it "de-institutionalized."

CHAPTER 3

The Sources, Consequences, and Limits of Marital Legitimacy for LGBQ People

The legalization of same-sex marriage in Massachusetts was not dependent on widespread, or even majority, public support. In fact, when the Massachusetts Supreme Judicial Court first ruled to legalize same-sex marriage, less than half of Massachusetts's residents (48%) supported same-sex marriage, and in the weeks that followed approval rates actually declined (Phillips 2004). By the time I conducted my research in 2012, approval rates in Massachusetts had risen to 58% (Public Policy Polling 2012). Some research has shown that support for marriage equality grows more rapidly in states where same-sex couples can legally marry than in states that exclude them from marriage (Flores and Barclay 2015). However, it is unclear what role, if any, the legalization of same-sex marriage played in increasing approval rates in Massachusetts. Proponents of same-sex marriage have argued that marriage could result in greater social acceptance for same-sex couples and help to combat the discrimination that they and their children face (Meezan and Rauch 2005). Researchers have also found that gay men and lesbians and their families expect legal marriage to help them achieve greater acceptance from heterosexuals (Goldberg and Kuvalanka 2012; Lannutti 2007). Yet the findings in this chapter show that the legitimacy marriage confers on same-sex relationships impacted the way participants approached social interactions with heterosexuals, regardless of whether heterosexuals accepted or supported them. Rather than supposing marriage helps LGBQ people by influencing changes in heterosexual attitudes towards them, I find that it changed LGBQ people's attitudes toward heterosexuals. The feelings of greater legitimacy that came with marriage empowered participants to be more out and confident in their everyday social

interactions with heterosexuals, be it with colleagues at work, acquaintances at their child's school, or strangers serving them in their local communities.

Moreover, I find that both married and unmarried participants experienced the legitimating effects of marriage, albeit in somewhat varying ways. Married participants *assumed* that marriage gave their relationships greater legitimacy and this gave them greater confidence to come out as lesbian/gay. In particular, they believed that simply using the words "husband" and "wife" could convey information to others about their relationship that would automatically grant them legitimacy. Unmarried participants agreed that *being married* was something that would help them to achieve a unique kind of legitimacy. However, both married and unmarried participants alike experienced simply having the right to legally marry as empowering in social interactions with heterosexuals. Having the right to legally marry represented external, societal validation, and this gave them a feeling of "equality" and "citizenship" that helped them to feel more confident of their place in society and challenge any prejudice and discrimination they encountered. In large part this was because the idea that their relationships were now legitimated by society *in general* made them care less about what any individual heterosexual they interacted with thought about them.

At the same time, however, I found that the legitimating effects of marriage had clear limits. First, most participants thought that marriage had not changed how much prejudice and discrimination they faced, only how they dealt with it. Second, the feelings of confidence and empowerment participants described did not extend to public displays of affection. The legitimacy gained from marriage did little to protect them from possible harassment and violence, and did not make them feel safe to openly show affection in public. Participants could

draw on the feeling of legitimacy to demand better treatment and respect from people they encountered in public, but not to counter verbal or physical attacks.

Lastly, the feelings of confidence and empowerment that participants described in their social interactions often did not extend to more personal, family relationships. Rather than helping them to come out to heterosexual family members more easily, many participants thought that marriage forced a level of visibility with which they felt uncomfortable. Instead of giving them more confidence to demand respect from family, marriage often highlighted their inability to gain real acceptance from them. When it came to their heterosexual family relationships, the presumption of legitimacy proved to be insufficient to make a real difference. Ultimately, these limits help to demonstrate the conceptual distinction between legitimacy and acceptance. Legitimacy did not depend on heterosexual acceptance, but nor did it help achieve it.

The Assumption of Legitimacy

In the neo-institutional literature, legitimacy is seen as both an outcome of institutionalization and something that contributes to it (Jepperson 1991:149).[1] As such, we can look to feelings of legitimacy as further evidence of the institutionalization of marriage among LGBQ people. Institutional definitions of legitimacy focus on the "the degree of cultural support for an organization" (Meyer and Scott 1983:201). This is not the same as social support. Rather, legitimacy emanates from the degree to which a social practice fits with pre-existing cultural norms and ideas. Some go a step further, arguing that an organizational form is legitimate when it has so much cultural support that its existence and prevalence are *taken for granted* (Hannan

[1] Jepperson (1991) points out that illegitimate elements can also become institutionalized, such as organized crime, political corruption, and fraud (149). As such, one should be wary of too close a conceptual connection between institutionalization and legitimacy. Nevertheless, legitimacy remains a core property of institutionalization in the neo-institutional literature.

and Carroll 1992). What definitions of legitimacy have in common is the idea that legitimacy is "a generalized perception or assumption that the actions of an entity are desirable, proper or appropriate within some socially constructed system of norms, values, beliefs and definitions" (Johnson, Dowd and Ridgeway (2006:57). Rather than resting on *actual* social support, legitimacy is *presumed* to adhere to particular social entities or practices. In this sense, legitimacy is a problem in the construction of social reality. It consists of the construal of a social object as consistent with cultural beliefs, norms, and values that others are presumed to share. Institutional definitions of legitimacy also highlight its collective nature. "When one says that a certain pattern of behavior possesses legitimacy, one asserts that some group of observers, as a whole, accepts or supports what those observers perceive to be the behavioral pattern as a whole" (Suchman 1995:574). Put another way, "legitimacy depends on apparent, though not necessarily actual, consensus among actors that most people accept the object as legitimate" (Johnson, Dowd & Ridgeway 2006:57). These understandings redirect attention away from external measurements of actual social support for same-sex marriage to the perceptions of legitimacy that LGBQ people have themselves, and highlight that the legitimacy one gains from marriage is assumed rather than actively given or experienced in particular interactions.

My findings offer much evidence for this kind of legitimating effect among married participants. Married participants took for granted that marriage gave their relationships greater legitimacy because they understood marriage as a behavior consistent with cultural norms, beliefs, and values shared in society. The legitimacy they felt was not dependent on particular shows of heterosexual support for same-sex marriage, but rather stemmed from a belief in the level of cultural support for marriage in general. They understood marriage to be universally respected and therefore believed that being married automatically gave them legitimacy in the

eyes of others. They took-for-granted that the legitimacy of marriage was powerful enough to extend to their relationships, even in the absence of full societal support for same-sex marriage or LGBQ relationships. This meant that whatever reservations they understood specific people, or groups of people, to have about same-sex marriage, their perception of legitimacy related to the way society rewarded marriage more generally.

A large proportion of married participants listed "gaining legal/social recognition for our relationships" and "gaining recognition and legitimacy from family/relatives" as important reasons for why they had wanted to get married (71% and 61% respectively). This suggests that they anticipated increased legitimacy to be an outcome of legal marriage. They also said that, after getting married they felt like their relationships were more recognized and validated by others (71%). Legitimacy then was both a reason for and a perceived outcome of getting legally married. When married participants spoke about legitimacy in the interviews they typically *assumed* that others gave them greater legitimacy as result of marriage - meaning they did not provide specific examples of such experiences. Legitimacy was something that they just felt to be the case; it was understood as a fact of marriage. Exemplifying this kind of thinking, Angie, a 51 year-old woman who had been with her partner two years before marrying her, told me:

> I feel like marriage really legitimizes our relationship in other people's eyes, so it's like people take us more seriously as a family, as a couple. And that makes us feel more secure and comfortable because we know that in the eyes of other people out there were legitimate.

But when I asked her, "Has anything in particular happened to make you feel your relationship is seen as more legitimate by other people?" she responded, "I think it's just the fact of being married." The assumption that marriage grants legitimacy meant that, when pressed, interviewees often gave responses that had a circular logic. They thought that marriage made other people see them as more legitimate because that is just what marriage does. Stefan, a 38

year-old man who had been with his partner three years prior to getting married, told me that being married made him "feel like straight people are taking us more seriously." But when I asked him, "What makes you think that?" he responded simply "because now they recognize marriage and the state recognizes marriage."

It was also common to hear participants say that they thought other people "saw" or "looked" at them differently now that they were married. Raul, a 48-year-old man, married his partner two years after they began their relationship. He said, "I think it's how people look at us as a couple together. It's different when you bring your husband or wife home [to see family] than when you bring your boyfriend or girlfriend, or when you bring them to the company party. I mean I sort of feel the same way." He meant that because they were now married, other people viewed their relationship differently – as more serious and more legitimate. That is how he viewed heterosexuals who were married, and so he could only assume other people saw married LGBQ people in the same way. Unmarried participants also drew distinctions between married and unmarried couples and assumed other people did the same. Daniel, a 35 year-old unmarried man who had been with his partner 5 years, considered:

> If we got married the only thing it might change with my family would just be their perceptions of our relationship. I'm assuming here, because --. Like, I think about the way that I think of friends of mine that are in a relationship versus friends that are married. I do think about them differently, not that it's really my right to, but I just evaluate their relationships internally, like okay, they're married, so that means something different than people who have decided not to get married. I assume that my family and other people will view our relationship differently if we were married. I don't think it would change the relationship that I had with them or the way that they treat [my partner] and I. It would just be the way that they internally view us.

Daniel assumed his family and others would grant their relationship more legitimacy because he himself drew those kinds of distinctions between married and unmarried relationships. Nate, a 40

year-old married man, simply said: “Marriage is just a frame of reference for others, which is legitimized.”

The comments participants made also highlight that this feeling that marriage brings with it more legitimacy was not connected to how specific people saw or treated them in actual interactions. Rather, it was a sense of having greater legitimacy with all people, or with people in general. They understood marriage to be universally respected and therefore believed that the very fact of being married gave them legitimacy in the eyes of “people” or “society.” Erin, a 36 year-old woman who had been with her partner 3 years before marrying her, stated: “I would say that the best part about being married is actually the societal recognition, the idea that people see us as married and legitimate.” Dianne, a 52 year-old woman who married her partner after fourteen years together, similarly said:

> Being married was like walking through a door [laughs] and then on the other side you're a part of the real world. So on the other side before we got married we thought we were living in the real world, but actually when you're married people treat you differently, they accord the relationship greater respect … So I think it does add legitimacy to the relationship, so that now everybody else has to take it seriously too, and it didn't really seem that way before.

Others talked about having legitimacy with the whole “world.” Anna, a 30 year-old unmarried woman who had been with her partner a year and a half, was considering getting married. When describing why getting married was important to her, she told me, “I think to the rest of the world it [us getting married] may make the relationship seem more legitimate. I think there’s a different status that the world perceives when you’re married.” Jamie, a 29 year-old woman who married her partner after 7 years together, made the same point when she said: “A lot of people don’t see a relationship as solid and important if you’re not married. Marriage validates our relationship to the outside world in a way that I think is important.” When I asked her if she

thought that validating effect extended beyond the confines of Massachusetts, she replied, "Yeah, absolutely. *Everyone* understands what marriage is."

Close attention to the language participants used in discussions of legitimacy reveals that although they usually described the change as something occurring in others (to the way other people saw or treated them), the change was more of an internal one. It was a feeling, not an experience they had with someone else. For example, Lizzie, a 48 year-old woman who married her partner after 4 years together, told me, "By being married in this state there is absolute legitimacy that says I'm just able to walk into a hospital and be like 'I'm married to her. And no I don't have my marriage certificate with me and yes we have different last names but we are married.'" But when I asked her if she had ever experienced that situation in a hospital, she responded "No. No. *I just felt like well I'm married,* you know? There is that validity. I think of it as social credibility" (emphasis added). Austin, a 48 year-old man who had been with his partner 11 years before getting married, also generally said "People react differently to me saying husband or spouse than they do boyfriend." Yet when I asked him "What is different about their reaction?" his response showed that it was only really his feelings that had changed. He said, "Well most people my age are married and they think--. *I feel like they think* I'm more stable because I have a spouse. I'm wearing a wedding ring. I'm more part of society. *It makes me feel like they feel* more comfortable with me when they know that I'm married" (emphasis added).

Whether or not marriage makes other people view or treat same-sex relationships differently is not a question I can address with my data. However, my findings highlight that legitimacy is not the same as acceptance and support. Legitimacy is also not dependent on acceptance and support. One does not need to experience legitimacy as actively given by others,

but only to feel its existence. Moreover, as I show next, the assumption and feeling of legitimacy that accompanies marriage can have a significant impact on the way LGBQ people approach their social interactions with heterosexuals.

Using the Legitimacy of Marriage to Come Out

One of the most common things I heard from participants is that being married helps LGBQ people come out as in a same-sex relationship to heterosexuals in everyday social interaction. Using marriage to come out was a widespread, well known, and much discussed phenomenon among the people in this study. As such, participants often relayed stories of other people coming out post-marriage, in addition to their own personal coming out stories. Caroline, a 35 year-old married woman, remembered:

> All these reports started coming out about these couples who'd been together for so many years and who were pretty sure their neighbors knew they were married, all of a sudden were having the conversations with their neighbors 'yeah, this is my wife, we've been together since 1973!'
>
> AO: But they'd never had those conversations with other people before?
>
> Right. And their neighbors didn't recognize them as being married, they recognized them as like two ladies who lived together and who knows what's going on in that house. It changed things so dramatically.

Relaying a more personal story, Brianna, a 31 year-old married woman, told me about a friend "who was kind of living in the closet" and who wouldn't tell people about her girlfriend, but "now she's like 'I'm getting married!' and she tells everybody about it." This made her feel that "Marriage helped people be able to be more true to themselves." Instead, I suggest that it helped LGBQ people to convey normalcy to others. Marriage gave people greater confidence to come out and certainty of being respected because they believed it helped them appear more like

everyone else. Mikey, a 38-year old unmarried man who had been with his partner 2 years, captured this when he stated:

> A lot of my friends have said this – that in their workplaces if they get new co-workers, if you start a new job or whatever, that there was always a hesitancy around coming out, but [now] a lot of people feel like if they are married it's not a problem. You just say it, because now you are just like everybody else.

His comment that marriage made LGBQ people "just like everybody else" highlights the normalcy and legitimacy others attribute to marriage.[2] It is the idea that marriage is a behavior that conforms to culturally shared ideas and norms, and the legitimacy this provides, that seemed to give some of the LGBQ people in the study the confidence to come out.

Simply saying that they were married was believed to convey information to others that should grant them and their relationship legitimacy. Being able to use the terminology of "wife" and "husband" played an important role in this process. Legitimate social entities are known and understood to everyone, and require no explanation or justification; they are simply taken-for-granted. Married participants assumed that everyone understands what the terms "wife" and "husband" signify, and believed that if they used these terms their relationships would require no other explanation. The terminology of "wife" and "husband" therefore assisted them in coming out to heterosexual acquaintances and strangers. Participants told me that before they were legally married they had a difficult time knowing how to refer to their partners in social situations, and this complicated the process of coming out. Some opted not to come out at all because they did not have what they felt to be an easy, legitimate way of talking about their relationship. In fact, even those who had had commitment ceremonies and considered themselves married found it difficult to come out without the legitimacy that legal marriage afforded them. By the time Ricardo, a 52 year-old man, legally married his partner in 2004, they had been

[2] I explore the theme of normalization and its connection to marriage in more depth in Chapter 4.

together for 22 years. He and his partner had taken part in a "wedding demonstration" as part of ACT UP (AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power) in the mid-1980s,[3] which they had "taken seriously" as a wedding. They had bought rings for the occasion and afterwards considered themselves married. Yet without the legal backing of marriage, Ricardo had still felt unable to come out at the school where he worked as a teacher. He remembered:

> It was the September [after the wedding demonstration] when the students saw my wedding band. All the girls were really kind of like, "You got married? When? You didn't tell us!" And they were hurt. But I wasn't about to come out. Later that day there were like six girls in my office grilling me about it. Other people really do pick up on those things [like wearing a wedding band] but we didn't have a vocabulary. We didn't know how to come out.

Vanessa, a 37 year-old woman who married her partner after 4 years together, was also a teacher who had not felt able to come out to her students before getting legally married. She told me how being legally married made her feel "more confident being out now," and explained: "I feel more confident being able to say 'this is my wife.' Now I'm very out with my students, and I have no problems saying 'blah blah blah my wife' and I didn't do that when it was 'my girlfriend' or 'my partner,' I didn't do that at all."

Other people said that before they were married the available language felt insufficient to effectively convey the manner of their relationship to others. They did not try to hide that they were in a same-sex relationship but they could never be sure that the other person had understood their attempts to come out when they used ambiguous terms, such as "partner." A lot of participants had problems with the word "partner" because they thought it did not effectively convey that they were referring to someone with whom they were in a romantic relationship. They were especially concerned that other people would mistakenly think they were talking about a business partner. For women, the term 'girlfriend' also presented a similar problem.

[3] Ricardo could not remember the exact year this wedding demonstration had occurred.

Brianna, a 31 year-old married woman, pointed out: "'Girlfriend' is such a general term. 'Wife' is different. 'Wife' is this is who I'm with, but 'girlfriend' could be like my friend." Even if they were understood as indicating a romantic relationship, terms like 'girlfriend' and 'boyfriend' failed to effectively convey the seriousness of the relationship to others. Patrick, a 50 year-old man who had been with his partner 15 years prior marrying him, described:

> There's always been this difficulty about what you call your significant other, because "boyfriend" doesn't sound serious for someone you've spent so long with and "significant other" is awkward. There are no good words for it. And you hear different people use a lot of different words. And all of a sudden, we're married, there's an obvious word – 'husband.' It's just easier to explain.

Erica, a 24-year-old unmarried woman who had been with her partner for 3 years, bemoaned that even getting engaged had not resolved the problems she had with terminology. She had started using "fiancée" specifically to overcome the concern that "girlfriend" did not convey the seriousness of her relationship, but found that other people just "presumed [her fiancée] was a man." Jamie, a married 29 year-old woman, felt the same way: "Saying 'my fiancée' is remarkably unclear cause you can't be like 'no my fiancée with an extra e!'" Essentially, until they were married participants felt that no good terms existed for letting other people know that their relationship was both same-sex and serious. But they had no doubt at all that the language of "wife" and husband" achieved both. As marriage was assumed to be a legitimate social entity, married participants felt assured that their relationships would be understood in the way they wanted without further explanation.

Using the terminology of "wife" and "husband" also did some of the work of coming out as being in a same-sex relationship. Specifically, participants told me that they could now use these terms to come out without mentioning sexual identity or having to say the words "lesbian" or "gay." The only thing directly stated was now their marital status, and sexuality could be

inferred without being explicitly stated. Jenny, a 41year-old woman who had been with her partner 2 years before marrying her, explained:

> I mean it makes it very easy to be out if you can say 'This is my wife.' You don't have to say 'Well, I'm gay.' Now you can just introduce someone very casually, just like straight men and women probably don't think oh, I'm gonna come out as straight when I introduce so and so as my husband or my wife. And to be able to do the same thing is very nice. It doesn't require any explanation.

In essence, what Jenny was describing was a shift in responsibility, away from LGBQ people needing to do the work of explaining their sexuality and to heterosexual listeners needing to do the work of figuring it out.

Sara, a 38-year old woman had moved to Massachusetts in 2004 after same-sex marriage had been legalized but did not get married until 2007. She recalled how hard she had found it to come out to her boss, whom she described as "very conservative." Before she got married she had therefore decided to refer to her partner of 5 years as her "roommate." By contrast, she told me that after she got married she felt able to come out because she could just bring up her wife casually in regular conversation. Now, she said: "When people at work ask, 'What did you do over the weekend?' you can just say 'My wife and I did whatever,' and you can come out that way. I can just say it and come out without being like 'Hey I'm gay,' so it just makes conversation easier." Other participants had similar experiences. Tony, a 69-year old man who married his partner of 3 years in 2011, told me that because he did contract work he felt that he had to come out repeatedly, every time he started a project with new people. But he also believed that coming out had "been facilitated by marriage." He explained, "it's because I just say, oh, my husband, such and such, when they're talking about their wife or their kids and we're already in that mode." Talking about one's husband or wife is a "mode" of conversation that people regularly employ and which everyone understands. As such, married participants did not have to

purposefully think about how to start a specific conversation about their sexuality or how to bring it into conversation. Mentioning a husband or wife could be easily accomplished in routine social interactions. Moreover, they could come out in a more culturally respected way by using the language of "wife" and "husband" as a kind of proxy for "lesbian" or "gay." The result was the same, as LGBQ people would still be coming out as in a same-sex relationship, but they felt more comfortable doing it this way because marital terminology is so culturally respected, while talking about a gay or lesbian sexuality is not. What had been a remarkable and risky conversation had become a more quotidian, safe one.

To be clear, coming out did not instantly become easy for everyone who got legally married. Some married participants emphasized that having the confidence to come out had still taken time, effort, and even bravery. Casey, a 41 year-old man who had been with his partner for two years before marrying him, said that he had "insisted" that he and his partner use the term "husband" to refer to one another as soon as they got legally married. But he also admitted that this "took a long time to get *totally* comfortable with, years even." It was because he understood that using the term "husband" meant he would be coming out as in a same-sex relationship that made it so difficult for him to say it. It was not like saying "husband" just rolled off his tongue now; rather, he had to make a conscious decision to say it in conversation and overcome the anxiety he felt in doing so. He remembered "totally random [situations], like when we'd stop at a rest stop or restaurant or something, and there is a reason to reference my husband - getting comfortable with that took some time." Still, he thought that before they were married they would have just "avoided the topic" of their relationship altogether, and he appreciated that the language and legitimacy of marriage had helped him to be more out.

For those participants who did not like the terminology of "wife" and "husband," coming out was not as easily achieved. For instance, Beth, a 58 year-old woman who had been with her partner 10 years before marrying her, told me that she doesn't like the term "wife" and chooses to use the more gender-neutral term "spouse" whenever she can. However, she also recognized the power that the term "wife" had for helping her to come out, and even though she did not like it she therefore made a conscious effort to use that term whenever she was with heterosexual people. She said: "If I'm with queer folks, you know, I normally say spouse" but "with straight people saying wife has more political value and it makes coming out easier [so I will use it]." Theresa, a 68 year-old woman who married her partner of 15 years in 2004, also didn't like the word "wife" but, unlike Beth, she chose not to use it at all. Instead, she opted to use the term "spouse" or tell people "I'm married." She felt that even without using the gender specific terminology, talking about marriage in a general way also allowed her to come out more easily. Echoing what other participants thought about the word "wife," she said:

> It makes coming out easier because I can use the term married and I do as a way of getting it into the conversation, whereas before I had to figure out a way of getting 'I'm a lesbian' into the conversation. I just don't even how to do that anymore because I can do it through the marriage.

However, her choice to use the word "spouse" meant that she had to follow it up with additional information to make it clear she was with another woman, and the process was therefore more difficult. She exclaimed: "So I'm always saying "my spouse" and then someone will say "he" and I'll say "no, I'm married to a woman" and I have this conversation over and over and over again!" Her experience shows that while gender-neutral discussions about "marriage" and "spouses" help with coming out because they are easier topics of conversation than sexuality, only gender-specific terms like "wife" and "husband" do all the work of coming out for LGBQ people. It is worth noting that almost all examples of participants expressing discomfort with the

words “wife” and “husband” were women, which means that women likely face additional barriers to coming out than men do. This is most likely because their feminist backgrounds (or at least awareness) informed their feelings and they associated these gendered words with patriarchal marriage and inequality. The only man who expressed a clear dislike of these terms considered himself a feminist.

Logistically, the terminology of marriage made coming out easier because it conveyed information that everyone could easily understand and did not require any direct reference to a marginalized sexuality. But it also allowed people to come out in a way that they felt was more likely to garner acceptance. Participants expected the information that they were married to gain them respect from others. When I asked Patrick, a 50 year-old man, if he felt any differently in his interactions with heterosexuals now he was married, he replied:

> There’s a little more confidence. There are certain settings like if I have to give a next of kin or something like that where you wonder if they’re going to accept your answer, if being gay is going to be a problem. And all of a sudden, you get to say, “This is my husband” and it just be authoritative, that’s it.

The authoritative nature of marriage, and the respect participants felt it called for, meant that married people felt less apprehension about whether heterosexual people would recognize their relationship. Married participants often believed that heterosexuals were less likely to question or challenge their relationship now they were married and that they had to be less prepared for a fight. For instance, Dianne, a 52 year-old woman who had been with her partner 14 years before getting married, thought that when you are “able to say “wife” then heterosexuals can’t flinch anymore.” Similarly, Eva, a 38-year woman old who married her partner after dating 2 years, said:

> You know if I say “my wife” people shut up pretty quickly. They don’t argue gay rights with me. If I were to say, “I feel like gays and lesbians should have the right to marry”

> people might argue with me, but if I just say "my wife" nobody argues with that. There's no argument to be made.
>
> AO: Why do you think that is?
>
> Because I'm not sharing a belief, I'm sharing a fact. It's a done deal, there's nothing left [for them] to say. It does feel like we are more legitimate in the eyes of other people. I mean it's not why I got married but it was certainly a benefit.

As this quote – and others - suggest, married LGBQ people in this study believed that the high social status and legitimacy of marriage would trump the perceived lower social status and illegitimacy of being in a same-sex relationship. To be clear, they did not necessarily believe that heterosexuals were any more accepting or supportive of same-sex relationships than they had been previously; rather, they believed that marriage guaranteed them some degree of respect regardless of how others felt about same-sex relationships. And, as I show next, participants did not only expect better treatment, they also felt they could demand it – and this was true of both married and unmarried people.

Feeling Empowered in Social Interactions

Social psychologists point out that internalized homophobia is the counterpart to sexual prejudice among heterosexuals (Herek 2009). Because LGBQ people have grown up in a heterosexist society they may have internalized sexual stigma as part of their value system and self-concept. Indeed, many participants in this study referenced what they saw as their own "homophobia" and acknowledged that their feelings of self-worth had depended on how others perceived and treated them. Heather, a 31 year-old woman who had been with her partner for two years before marrying her, reflected, "I think when people perceive you a certain way, you perceive yourself that way sometimes to an extent, or absorb some of that negative feeling or limitation that people prescribe [*sic*] to you." But she went on to say, "I think for a lot of people that was just gone

[when marriage became legal], it's sort of like whether you agree with us or not this is the legal ability that we have." Heather's perception was well borne out by my data. Participants told me that they felt higher self-esteem after marriage became legal, and that they found themselves caring much less about what other people thought about them because they now had a changed legal status that allowed them to feel more confident of their place in society. Caroline, a 35 year-old woman who married her partner after 10 years together, put it like this:

> The best thing is just the feeling of equality that changes within you when you realize that the place where you live recognizes your relationship as just as valid and just as equal as your neighbor's relationship, or your brother's, to straight people all over. It [marriage] changed things so dramatically for us internally, and it really was a sense of now we can stand up tall, now we can walk around in the world and just know that we are equal.

The changes Caroline felt were internal transformations in response to external societal validation, and the result was that she could "walk around" and interact in the world in a new way. Others also use language like being able "stand up tall" or "hold their heads up high" to describe the changes they felt. For example, Liam, a 33 year-old man, exclaimed: "Just talk about a dignity and confidence booster! I mean I really think it was emboldening just to know you could get married if you wanted to. I just feel like [LGBQ] people hold their heads higher."

Some psychological and health research has found that same-sex couples in legally recognized relationships report lower levels of stress and internalized homophobia than same-sex couples not in recognized unions (Riggle, Rostosky and Horne 2010; Wright, LeBlanc and Badgett 2013). However, this emphasizes the effect of having one's relationship legally recognized rather than the effect of living in a state that recognizes same-sex relationships more generally. Other psychological research has shown that being *denied* access to equal rights has a negative impact on LGBQ people's mental health (Gilbert and Kertzner 2006; Mays and Cochran 2001). By contrast, my findings show that having access to legal marriage positively

impacted feelings of self-esteem, belonging, and citizenship, and that these feelings extend to unmarried as well as married people.

Having the right to get legally married gave participants a feeling of equality that changed the way they understood their relationship to others. They often described these changes with reference to citizenship and belonging. This was how Linda, a 54 year-old woman who was with her partner for 5 years before marrying her, articulated the change:

> I had no idea how contingent I felt until SJC [Supreme Judicial Court of Massachusetts] announced their equal marriage decision. It felt like 'oh my god, we really are complete citizens of this country.' It just felt in some profound way that 'I'm a complete human being and I am completely recognized as a human being for being who I am for the first time in my life.' I was really amazed at the power it had. And that was the first time I thought 'this is also really changing how I feel about my relationship to society and to a state that I thought was pretty cool to start with!' And that whole feeling of being a citizen, of belonging in the world, doesn't go away.

Although she herself was married, Linda was not arguing that *being married* had changed the way she felt about herself; rather gaining the right to legally marry had. It did not require getting married to experience transformations in feelings of belonging and citizenship.[4] Demonstrating this point, unmarried participants also talked about altered feelings of belonging and citizenship that resulted from having access to legal marriage. Zoe, a 35 year-old woman who had been with her partner for 9 years had no interest in getting married, but she also felt that "having that right is really important for not feeling like a second-class citizen!" Jess, a 31 year-old unmarried participant who had been with her partner for 8 years, told me that she was taken aback by what a difference having legal marriage meant to her in terms of a "sense of allowance and recognition," and thought that it was a feeling that "heterosexuals really take for granted."

[4] As the feelings participants described stemmed from the legal equality and rights they gained and not necessarily also from their marital status then there is little reason to think that they would not also be shared by LGBQ people who are not in relationships. Unfortunately, however, I cannot speak to whether these findings also extended to single people or not, as all participants were coupled.

Corroborating this idea that one did not need to get legally married to experience transformations in feelings of belonging and citizenship, the survey results showed that a greater proportion of unmarried participants (64%) than married participants (57%) said they feel "like more of a full citizen/member of society now same-sex marriage is legal."[5]

Married and unmarried participants alike were also careful to point out that these new feelings of citizenship and belonging were not about marriage per se. At first, Gail, a 56 year-old woman who had married her partner of 24 years, had been "astounded" by "how emotional" she felt when same-sex marriage became legal in Massachusetts. She said that she had not understood her reaction because she had never cared that much about marriage. But she "realized that it's not about marriage, it's about being seen as fully human" and then she understood why she felt so emotional about it. This distinction led Ryan, a 29 year-old unmarried man who had been with his partner 5 years, to argue: "For us [LGBQ people] it's not just about marriage, it's about validation, it's about leveling the playing field." Being able to get married was understood and experienced as a symbol of true equality. However, it was not just about having formal equality on paper or knowing they were entitled to the same legal rights as heterosexuals. Instead, participants articulated a deeper and more profound feeling of equality that impacted how they saw themselves and their place in society. Josh, a 40 year-old man who married his partner after 7 years together, encapsulated this when he said: "It's not just about marriage. But

[5] There were no significant differences by age in how participants answered this question, suggesting that young and old alike felt like more of a citizen/member of society after same-sex marriage became legal. There were also no obvious patterns by age in the interview data, with participants of all ages mentioning this kind of impact on their feelings of self-esteem, belonging, and citizenship. Nonetheless, one might expect that internalized homophobia would be stronger among older LGBQ people and that gaining marriage rights might impact them more than very young LGBQ people who have, in general, grown up in a more accepting environment.

it's not even just about equal rights either. It's about being able to interact with heterosexuals in an equal way."

The internal changes participants felt in response to external societal validation had a significant impact on the way they approached social interactions with heterosexuals. In particular, participants frequently said legal marriage made them care less about what heterosexuals thought of them. When I asked Michelle, a 29 year-old unmarried woman who had been with her partner a little over a year, how much prejudice and discrimination she faced because she was in a same-sex relationship, she responded: "I think in the past I felt it more and now I don't feel it as much. I don't know if that means that's necessarily changed or if I just don't give a shit what people think anymore!" Michelle recognized that even if she still faced just as much prejudice as she had before same-sex marriage became legal the way she felt about it had shifted. In fact, a majority of participants told me that they experienced "about the same" degree of prejudice and discrimination after marriage had become legalized as they had before hand (62% of married and 56% of unmarried participants). What had changed, they said, was that individual experiences of prejudice now had less of a negative effect on them. Liam, a 33 year-old married man, explained:

> It's not that we think everybody condones it [same-sex marriage] or thinks it's great, but we feel safe in the knowledge that we've got that legal right. Now [when I interact with heterosexuals] I feel like I'm just like you, my relationship is just as real as yours, and the people who matter have said so.

His reference to the "people who matter" highlights that legitimacy comes from formal agencies and structures, not the average Joe you might interact with on the street. Liam's statement inferred that he intrinsically understood that external legitimacy came from the people at the top with power, in this case the members of the Massachusetts Supreme Judicial Court who made

same-sex marriage legal. Moreover, the implication was that the average Joe heterosexual had to accept their decision.

Others shared the view that anyone who disagreed with same-sex marriage or LGBQ relationships had to either keep their opinions to themselves or change them quickly now that same-sex marriage was supported by the state. For instance, Josh, a married 40 year-old man, told me that he had little patience for continuing public debate over same-sex marriage. Like Liam, he felt that the decision had already been made by the people who matter, and that "it's not about right or wrong anymore, it just exists." This gave him more confidence to be out and not worry as much what other people thought of him. Specifically, he said: "I used to be really private but now I just put it all out there because Massachusetts has had gay marriage for a decade." I mean come on people [get over it]!" For Josh, and others, heterosexuals needed to keep up with the new reality of same-sex marriage or be on the wrong side of history.

Participants also reported that the external societal validation they felt in response to same-sex marriage legalization empowered them to challenge prejudice and discrimination they did face and to demand better treatment from heterosexuals. In their words, they were no longer willing to just wait for heterosexual acceptance. Their state leaders had said their relationships deserved respect and equal treatment and, by the time I interviewed them almost a decade later, they were not willing to accept anything less. From what they told me, it was clear that they were not trying to convince heterosexuals to change their view of same-sex relationships. Rather, heterosexuals' views didn't matter as much to them anymore. Whatever they might think of them or their relationship, heterosexuals needed to treat them with respect. Married and unmarried participants alike reported that they now approached their interactions with heterosexuals with almost a fierce, fighting kind of spirit.

Art, a 44 year-old married man, said that he thought LGBQ people in Massachusetts "feel much more of a sense of ownership and belonging" now and that this "makes a difference by itself," regardless of whether or not they get legally married. I asked him, what kind of difference it made, and he responded:

> I expect to be accepted now [laughing loudly], whereas before I might have been a little bit tentative depending on the context. Now if someone gave me any grief, say in an official position, I would be like "what on earth is wrong with you?!" It wouldn't be like 'Oh, I have to deal with homophobia' [sounding resigned to it]. Now it would be like "What is wrong with you?!" [sounding incredulous].

In this way, Art makes clear that the difference having access to legal makes is not in reducing the prejudice LGBQ people face but rather in making them less tentative in the ways they deal with it. Similarly, Ruby, a 33 year-old unmarried woman, suggested that having access to legal marriage helped her partner to be less sensitive about the prejudice she experienced. She shared a story with me about how, shortly after moving to Massachusetts in 2010, her partner had come home and told her that a school bus of children had passed her walking and one of them had called out "Dyke! Fucking dyke!" at her. Ruby said that this kind of experience was common for her partner because she had a more masculine gender presentation. She said before moving to Massachusetts, "this was the kind of thing that used to upset her more" but in this instance her partner had "looked at them and instead of being frustrated, she thought 'What is wrong with you?! Do you know where you are?! You are living in the past and you don't understand what's happening!'" That her partner had "such a different gut response" to the prejudice delighted Ruby. She reflected, "I feel like something about living in this place has created this incredible--. I don't know if it's armor or if it's just a different way of thinking, where there is less sensitivity to that kind of ridiculous malice."

Some participants also told me that they were less nervous about showing affection in public now they had the right to marry. Terence, a 51-year old unmarried man who had been with his partner 25 years, told me that although he hadn't felt scared to show affection in public for years, "before it would always be a little bit fleeting." By contrast, he said, "Now with the laws changed you have that sense of empowerment. And it's just really nice cause I really feel like we can hold hands, we can kiss in public, or whatever." Being able to more confidently engage in public displays of affection (PDA) was directly connected to caring less what others thought of them and feeling more empowered to demand respect. For instance, Becky, a 37 year-old unmarried woman who had been with her partner 3 years, said:

> Being a lesbian is so easy here, and I can't help but believe that the legalization of gay marriage has helped fuel that. It gives me a certain boost in helping me to claim my citizenship rights in this cultural way. I [feel like I] belong here in these public spaces as much as anybody else, and so I can put my hand on my partner's knee, or kiss her, or whatever, and expect that the people around me are not going to give me trouble.

Just like Art, Becky also "expected to be accepted" now – and if she wasn't then she was more than prepared to fight back. Similarly, Kaitlyn, a 29 year-old woman who married her partner after 4 years together, described how she thought that having the right to marry had "emotionally affected the community" because now you could "walk down the street holding your wife's hand or something and not worry about it." When I asked her why she thought they did not need to worry about it anymore, she replied, "It's legal here, so you have to accept it." In her mind having the law on their side meant that other people could not get away with expressing disapproval anymore.

The Limits of Legitimacy

Although I frequently heard how much more "out," "confident" and "empowered" having marriage rights had made participants, there were also some clear limits to what marriage could achieve for them. Next, I focus on two areas for which the additional legitimacy gained through marriage made little difference to interactions and relationships with heterosexuals. The first example demonstrates the limits of legitimacy in impersonal social interactions with heterosexuals, and the second example shifts focus to show the limits of legitimacy in more personal relationships with heterosexual family members.

Continuing Concerns Over Public Displays of Affection

A large proportion of participants (83%) said that they felt safe showing affection with their partner where they lived, but as the interview data makes clear this does not tell us much about how safe they felt with PDA more generally as, for the most part, participants had purposefully chosen to live in places where they felt they would be safe. The interview data also shows that PDA was a fraught and uncertain issue for most participants, and one that gaining marriage rights had done little to improve. Certainly some participants said that the new sense of empowerment they felt after gaining the right to legally marry extended to PDA, as I showed above. However, in the survey a large majority (80%) said that marriage had *not* impacted how affectionate they were with their partner in public. In part, this was just because some people were just "not the kind of person" who would show PDA anyway, and so marriage had not changed that. Like Brianna, a married 31-year old woman, put it: "Well I just don't think we'd do that anyways, we're not really affectionate." However, I also found widespread reluctance to show affection in public because of continuing concerns about safety. There was a disjuncture

between the general rhetoric of increasing openness and empowerment and a continuing unwillingness to show affection in public. Participants were very cognizant that having marriage rights would do little to protect them from harassment, and remained vigilant not to put themselves in unsafe situations.

Even if they had never experienced anything to make them think others disapproved of their PDA, many participants were not willing to risk it. In other words, the fear they felt might not be a direct result of prior negative experiences, but could result from a more general, preemptive concern about their safety. Maria, a 25 year-old unmarried woman who had been with partner for 2 years, confided in me that whenever she and her girlfriend held hands in public she feels like other "people were staring" and it makes her "scared." She acknowledged that no one had ever actually said anything to them and that she was not even sure that other people were staring disapprovingly. Nonetheless, she did not "want to have to deal with someone saying anything" and so it was just easier to refrain from PDA. Jess, an unmarried 31 year-old participant, also remarked: "I always fear what has been unfounded, which is that someone's going to be horrible." A general consciousness about one's surroundings and safety was a pervasive, continual part of participants' daily social interactions. Jo, a married 32 year-old woman, explained it like this: "You're always aware when you're out, thinking okay, am I in a place where holding hands or if I kiss her, are we safe? I think that continues to always be in the back of your mind a little bit. You're still aware of it and it's something you think about." Similarly, Jake, a married 34 year-old man, described how "you always sort of assess who is around you and adjust yourself accordingly." He said, even though most of the time he felt safe, "there is some level of at least keeping yourself aware all the time."

Even the small minority of participants who told me that they had become more open about PDA after gaining the right to marry remained careful and deliberate about when and where to be visible. In analyzing the data, I noted how they would start off by telling me how much safer they felt showing affection but then later qualify their answers to emphasize their continuing caution. Ollie, an unmarried 32 year-old man, initially said that after same-sex marriage became legal he had felt more desire and even *need* to show affection with his partner of 8 years in public: "I'm not really like that [into showing PDA] but it's weird because now whenever we go to Target or Stop and Shop I get this weird 'I need to touch you and hug you' feeling, and I do it a little bit more now and I feel comfortable doing it." But then he paused and qualified:

> But actually obviously I don't feel *that* (emphasis in original) comfortable because when I do it I definitely am cognizant of what I'm doing. So I don't know that I'm comfortable. You will do it, but you're very aware of it. We always kind of joke about it, like we'll turn around a corner and there will be some Bro [stereotypically young masculine heterosexual male] down the aisle and [my partner] will shoo me off real quickly, and then we have a laugh about it. I think that's just our own hang ups.

Similarly, Terence, the unmarried 51-year old man who had told me that after same-sex marriage became legal he felt "empowered" to hold hands and kiss in public in a less "fleeting" way also later added:

> I mean maybe we do have some uncomfortable moments. You're not really sure if it's more you being uncomfortable or someone else being uncomfortable, but we are always careful to some extent if we were traveling, or if we feel like we weren't in a safe environment. Then we would try to be a little bit more invisible.

In this way, the changes participants experienced as a result of marriage were limited and relative. Although they may have felt more confident and empowered to be out than before, there was still a shared feeling of discomfort and fear. Moreover, participants were well aware that they were significantly less safe and empowered than heterosexuals, and often lamented their

continuing inequality. For instance, Josh, a married 40 year-old man, told me that he would not ever take his children out and walk around holding his husband's hand because that would make them too much of an "eye magnet for people." He also made sure to point out, "If I was straight and I was walking around my neighborhood with my spouse and kids, I'd be OK with that." Ollie had also commented, "I'm sure when [heterosexual] people are out shopping and they reach out and touch their partner they're not even thinking about it."

In addition, it was common to hear participants make distinctions by place, identifying certain locations where they felt confident to be out and demonstrative and others where they did not. In other words, although marriage rights applied equally across the whole of Massachusetts, the feelings of confidence and empowerment one gained from them did not. Esteban, a married 34 year-old man, described:

> Generally it's just more comfortable in Massachusetts because there are enough people there who support us [LGBQ relationships] that if someone says something to you then there are going to be other people around who will likely verbally support you in that altercation. But I know there are places where you better not show affection. I mean you do it at your own risk. Like Southie [South Boston] or even Dorchester [a neighborhood in the South of Boston], where it might not be safe to walk around holding hands.

There was a fair amount of agreement about which parts of Massachusetts, and more specifically which parts of Boston, were safe for LGBQ people to express affection and which were not. Within Massachusetts as a whole, areas like Northampton, Boston, and Cape Cod were considered particularly safe for LGBQ people, but within Boston there was much variation. Many others agreed with Esteban that the South of Boston was one of the least safe places in Massachusetts for them. Susan, a 48-year old unmarried woman, said, "For the most part, I think Massachusetts is safe but there are sections of it, like in Southie, Chelsea, places like that, that it wouldn't be." To demonstrate just how specific location-based feelings of safety were, several people identified Jamaica Plain as a neighborhood in Boston that was very safe for LGBQ

people, but did not feel that Roxbury, which was "just on the edge of Jamaica Plain," was. For instance, Abbie, a 30 year-old unmarried woman, distinguished: "In Jamaica Plain it feels very safe and natural. But in Roxbury, which is on the edge of JP, I think we hold hands less."

These stated differences in comfort and safety by geographic location likely related, in part, to perceived differences in support for same-sex relationships by racial/ethnic minorities as the places they cited as less safe tended to be places with higher proportions of racial/ethnic minorities living in them. Specifically, they have high proportions of both Catholic Irish immigrants and African Americans. I suspect that perceptions of lower support for same-sex marriage among both these groups played some role in their feelings of fear and discomfort. Polling data routinely shows that support for both same-sex relationships and same-sex marriage is significantly lower among African Americans (Hunter 2013). Michelle, a 29 year-old unmarried woman, referenced race directly when she said, "Boston is a very segregated place culturally and racially, economically, so really there are pretty clear lines about where you feel comfortable and where you don't." She confided: There are certain places I still feel very on edge, where my skin crawls waiting for people to say something [negative]." However, most participants alluded to race and class-based differences in perceived support without stating them explicitly.

Feelings of safety in regard to showing public affection were also shaped by gender identity and expression. In the survey, there were significant differences by gender in how safe participants felt showing affection where they lived, with significantly fewer men feeling as safe as women.[6] Other research shows that gay men face greater verbal and physical harassment than lesbians (Herek and Berrill 1992:25) and men in this study also more often expressed that they

[6] Chi Square analysis shows gender to be highly statistically significant at the < 0.05 level ($Pr = 0.002$).

felt at risk of physical harassment. Yet comfort levels with PDA were not based only on gender identity – gender expression also played a role. People who described themselves as gender conforming had experienced less harassment on the basis of their sexual identity and, therefore, reported feeling more safe to engage in PDA. Again, this corroborates existing research that shows that the gay men who are targeted for harassment are often those who fail to look sufficiently masculine or who show affection in public (Stop Street Harassment 2014). Participants often discussed this issue by referencing differences between themselves and their partners. Eva, a 38-year old married woman, told me that it was easier for her to feel comfortable with PDA than her spouse because her spouse would most likely be the one who would get attacked for it if they did encounter any harassment. She said, "They're gonna beat her up and not me cause she's the butchier one. So she's the one that she thinks men get angry with more." Similarly Larry, a 42 year-old unmarried man, explained that his partner of 15 years was the "masculine, all-American football player" and had not experienced what it was like to be "more effeminate in a male culture." For most of his life his partner had "not had to even think about things like safety," and so they had very different comfort levels with PDA.

In addition to impacting who felt safe showing affection, gender also influenced the kinds of places participants would show affection in. Existing research shows that homosexuality is used as a disciplinary mechanism to police masculinity (Pascoe 2011), and so it is not surprising that spaces typically considered very masculine were considered especially unsafe to express affection for gay men. Some men mentioned gyms as particularly masculine spaces and therefore unsafe. Cody, a 36 year-old unmarried man, said: "I think overall [the place where I live][7] is so fantastic for gay people. It's totally fine to show affection here. But I wouldn't do it at the gym.

[7] I have deleted the name of the town to help secure the participants' confidentiality.

The gym is bad. It's more testosterone there." Others mentioned sporting events as too masculine for safe displays of affection. Charles, a 61 year-old married man, gave a particularly poignant example of this. He said:

> Think about that thing they have at hockey games – the Kiss Cam. You know, where it goes around and hones in on a couple until they kiss. I bet you've never seen a gay couple kiss. Never ever, ever. I guess we will be truly liberated when it stops on two men and they kiss.

His example of the Kiss Cam also offers a striking barometer of LGBQ people's ability to be truly out and open in public and the limits of what marriage rights could do for them.

Lastly, how willing participants were to show PDA also was shaped by age and relationship duration. Older participants had more difficulty with PDA than younger participants, and in large part this was to do with their longer histories of feeling that they had to be closeted. They told me how difficult it was for them to change their behavior after having lived for so long needing to be closeted in public. Tony, a 69-year old married man, explained simply, "Because it wasn't safe for so long, showing affection in public is not something I do." He had got used to having to restrain himself from showing affection in public and couldn't imagine it changing now. Patrick, a 50 year-old married man, went a step further, arguing that because he had not done it before he did not even have much desire to do it now:

> I mean there are places I think that it's safe now, but it's more not having a history of doing that because I was uncomfortable at first and in the eighties I think you're more likely to get assaulted doing that sort of thing. It's easier to get away with now and I have seen people walking down the street, same-sex couples holding hands and such. But I'm just not used to that. And having never done it, I don't really miss it.

By contrast, some older participants told me that although it was difficult, they were trying to adjust their way of thinking about PDA. When I asked Charles, who gave the Kiss Cam example, whether he and his partner would show affection in public, he replied that he was "still getting over that" but hoped he would feel more comfortable over time. It seemed ridiculous to him that

they could be legally married and still not feel like they could show affection: “I mean, we're married, what the hell?! I feel like I should be able to show affection more freely that I've lived before.” He admitted that even hugging or kissing in front of the kitchen window still made him uncomfortable, but he said that he was “working on getting okay with it.”

Feelings of comfort with PDA also depended on how long participants had been in same-sex relationships for and how accustomed they were to a certain way of acting. Angie, a 51-year old married woman, had only come out as a lesbian in 2005 after same-sex marriage was already legal and she felt confident, even eager, to show PDA. By contrast, according to Angie, her partner had “been a lesbian all her life and had lived through that period of time in the 70s and 80s and 90s when it wasn’t cool to be gay or to be out and had taken a lot of grief about it, a lot of antagonism and name-calling and harassment,” and she was therefore still “very uncomfortable about it.” Participants with longer histories of being in same-sex relationships were also more likely to have experienced verbal and physical harassment, and even if those experiences had happened decades ago they remained emotional barriers to PDA. For instance, Robert, a 51 year-old married man, relayed a “horrible incident” that had happened to him in the mid-80s, which had left him feeling “incredibly humiliated.” Although it had occurred over twenty years ago and he knew that Massachusetts was much safer now, the memory of it was enough to prevent him showing PDA with his husband. Taken together, these findings show that how safe participants felt engaging in PDA was a complex, nuanced issue – with location, race, age, sex, and gender all playing a role. Even if gaining the right to marry had, in general, made participants feel more confident and empowered to be out and open, the issue of PDA helps demonstrate the limits of legitimacy in helping LGBQ people to feel more at ease in public social interactions.

Reluctance to "Rock the Boat" with Families of Origin

The general feelings of "confidence" and "empowerment" participants described also often did not extend to more personal relationships. In particular, family relationships proved more resistant to change than more casual social relationships. Survey results showed that a small majority of married participants (58%) did feel they could talk more openly about their sexuality with their family now that they were married.[8] However, interview data paints a more complex picture. Rather than helping them to come out more easily to family, many participants thought that marriage forced a level of outness with which they felt uncomfortable. Rather than giving them more confidence to demand respect from family, marriage often highlighted their inability to gain real acceptance. Moreover, while participants increasingly did not care what strangers or acquaintances thought of them, they usually remained concerned about the views of their family members.

For the most part, participants considered themselves as "out" to most members of their families of origin. Yet they often described marriage as like a "second coming out" because telling family members about their marriages reopened what could be hard conversations about their sexuality and relationships. Whereas getting married helped first time coming out experiences to heterosexual acquaintances and strangers, it often created second coming out experiences with family members. By putting the topic back on the table, marriage acted as a catalyst for an otherwise stalled coming out process. For the most part, participants did not expect their getting married to make any difference to family members who had previously rejected them; marriage could not force rejecting family members to suddenly accept and support

[8] 22% disagreed and 20% had no opinion.

same-sex relationships. However, they often expected marriage to challenge already supportive family members to give their relationship greater recognition and respect. Some participants experienced this positively – as an opportunity to be more out and demanding of their family members. For example, Andy, a 34-year old woman who had married her partner after 4 years together, told me:

> I grew up in what I perceived to be a very conservative Catholic family so I was pretty afraid of coming out both to myself and to my family ... [When I first came out] my parents were not excited about it but they were also not terribly negative. They were vaguely supportive but more just overwhelmed. They didn't know how to talk about it or anything like that, and they continued to be that way. But the real pivot point came in the process of getting married, that was when things really ramped up. It allowed us to draw a line in the sand and say whether you are for us or against us this is happening, we are married now.

Andy's parents had not rejected her outright, but her sexuality still made them uncomfortable. She believed that their coping mechanism had been to avoid discussing or dealing with the topic. Her marriage forced her parents to acknowledge her relationship and confront their issues. As I previously found in other research (Ocobock 2013), the additional legitimacy marriage confers on LGBQ relationships can place new demands on family members to respect relationships they have previously chosen to ignore. Meghan, a 31 year-old woman who was engaged to her partner of 3 years, also understood this potential. She thought that getting married would say to her family: "This is here, this is really happening and it's staying for a while, this isn't a phase" kind of thing," and she thought "that's all for the better."

Yet other participants did not feel empowered by marriage to be more open with family or demand greater recognition from them. Initially, Esteban, a 34 year-old man who was with his partner 4 years before marrying him, thought that getting married would allow him to make "a bold statement" to his family. It would "push the envelope" with his family and force them to acknowledge their relationship. He explained, "All these steps that you go through for marriage -

it's not like this quiet thing. It forces a lot of conversations that sometimes are uncomfortable." However, the more of these conversations he had, the more his initial feelings of confidence dissipated. Ultimately, Esteban decided to hold separate wedding events so that his unsupportive family members would not be forced to attend a wedding they would find uncomfortable. Other participants did not even try to gain familial acceptance for their marriage. They felt that they had worked hard to have good relationships with family after a negative reaction to their initial coming out, and were too fearful to lose the ground they had already made asking them to support their marriages. Liam, a married 33 year-old, had experienced gaining the right to marry as a "dignity and confidence booster" that helped LGBQ people to "hold their heads higher" in public, but when it came to his family relationships he told a very different story. He told me that when he first came out to his parents they thought that he must be "mistaken" and "confused" because his wife had left him. But because he did not want his being gay to "drive a wedge" between him and his parents, he "just continued to work at" the relationship. He said that over time his parents had become more accepting and they had met his partner and got on well with him in the two years before they married, but still "didn't want to have any in-depth discussions about it." However, when he and his partner decided to get married, he felt that:

> The thought of actually having someone from my family come to the wedding despite the progress I'd made with my parents just seemed undoable. I couldn't imagine asking my parents to make the trip for it. I thought that it would probably lead to hurt or confusion or disappointment.

And so he said, "I didn't even bother inviting them."

Unmarried participants also thought of marriage with some trepidation because it would require them to be more out and demanding with family members than they were used to. They believed that they had good relationships with family members in part because they did not push them beyond a level of support they with which they were comfortable. They were not sure how

their families would react to their marriages and were concerned it would upset the fine balance they had achieved. Terence, one of the participants who told me that he felt more empowered to show affection in public after gaining the right to marry, said that if he and his partner of 25 years decided to get married they would not discuss it with their family because that would be "rocking the boat" and they "don't do that." Likewise, Becky, another participant who had told me how gaining the right to marry had made her feel more able to show affection in public said of her family:

> I think it might make relationships with family harder in that if we pushed them to honor it or to come to some kind of wedding we had or something, and they refused or they acted like assholes, then it's opening the door to conflict. I think that could happen if we used it as a vehicle to push them to be more accepting than they want to be. But I think if we were like, we're getting married and you don't have anything to do with it, then they could just go on [as they had been before]. Marriage does that – it invites that come support us or else, kind of thing. It forces people's hands.

Becky considered it an option to get married without asking family members to be there. However, others felt this was not an option. They believed that marriage was by definition a family event and could not imagine it without their families there. Getting married would therefore leave them with little choice but to be more open about their relationships and to try to gain a new level of acceptance from family members. Maria, an unmarried 25 year-old woman who had been with her partner 2 years, admitted, "I think about what our wedding would look like in my mind and I always picture my family there. … When I envision it they are there but I feel like they are going to be very uncomfortable and so like I don't even want to do it." I asked if she could get married and not invite them, but she said she would "never do that."

For some participants, the idea of having to tell or invite their family members was enough to put them off marriage altogether. Cody, a 36 year-old unmarried man, told me that when he had first come out to his parents they were "horrific." His parents would call every

Sunday and angrily yell at him about being gay and his "dad was a complete terror for years." Since then his parents had "come a long way." Now they would even come and stay with him and his partner of 7 years. But, thinking about marriage, he told me:

> I don't want to do something that I'm not 100% sure that they're even comfortable with. It's a little scary to me. It was so harsh coming out, and I think that some of those feelings are deep down still there. I think that in some ways that's why I wouldn't wanna have a wedding. I wouldn't even wanna deal with it. Having to tell my family--. That's almost kind of a reason not to get married.

No matter how much family relationships had improved since initial coming out experiences, the idea of getting married seemed to highlight the precariousness of their family relationships. The anxiety Susan, a 48 year-old unmarried woman, felt about how her family would react stalled her wedding plans. She and her partner of 18 years had got an application for a marriage license when it first became legal in 2004 and had planned on getting married. Like Cody, Susan said that her family relationships had improved over time and that her family was generally supportive of her relationship now. Her partner was invited for Thanksgiving and other family events and her family regularly asked after her. But when she started planning her wedding she realized that she could not bring herself to ask them to be there. She said, "I just cannot picture saying, "Hey, do you guys want to come to my wedding?" She conceded that her family might be fine with the idea of marriage, and recognized that it was her "own homophobia" that stopped her. But she was "so afraid" of what her family thought about her that "even if they agreed to come" she would be "too uncomfortable with them being there."

Susan's fear of what her family members would think of her marriage offers a stark contrast to the "I just don't give a shit" attitude participants had toward more impersonal, community relationships. In social interactions with people they did not know, participants often expressed a fierce, bring-it-on kind of attitude, but in more personal family relationships they

still practiced avoidance. In general, having the backing and status of marriage had allowed participants to be more out, care less what other people really thought of them, and to demand more respect. However, when it came to families of origin the impact of marriage was sometimes the opposite – pushing them back toward the closet, rekindling old anxieties about what family members thought, and making them less assertive about their relationships.

Conclusion

Institutional definitions of legitimacy emphasize that rather than resting on *actual* social support, legitimacy is *presumed* to adhere to particular social entities or practices. I found much evidence of this kind of legitimating process among my participants, who assumed their marriages were legitimated because marriage is a behavior consistent with cultural norms, beliefs, and values shared in society. Married and unmarried participants both understood legitimacy as a "fact" of marriage. As such, the legitimacy they assumed they gained from marriage stemmed from a perception of cultural support for marriage in general, regardless of how much social support they thought existed for same-sex marriage in particular. They took for granted that the legitimacy of marriage was powerful enough to extend to their relationships, even in the absence of full societal support for same-sex marriage.

In some ways, my findings suggest being married (marital status) has a unique impact on LGBQ people's impersonal social interactions with heterosexuals in public. Married participants could draw on a terminology imbued with legitimacy, which did some of the work of coming out for them. Moreover, marriage gave them a sense of "authority" and "social credibility" that made them more confident of getting respect. However, I also found that one did not need to be married to be more out and confident in public. Simply having the right to legally marry (marital

access) also gave participants a feeling of "equality" and "citizenship" that also shaped their social interactions. Married people *expected* better treatment from the heterosexuals they encountered in their public social interactions by virtue of their marital status, and presumed their new social status to be automatic and unquestioned. However, both married and unmarried people alike *demanded* better treatment from heterosexual others by virtue of having the right to marry. Having the right to marry did not infer an automatic or unquestioned social status like being married did, but unmarried people could also draw on the feeling of external societal validation to demand respect and fight any prejudice and discrimination they encountered in public. As such, my findings suggest that some legitimacy is gained from a more general sense of inclusion in the institution of marriage, not only from the particular status and prestige accorded to married couples. Existing literature demonstrates a significant correlation between internalized homophobia and lesser self-disclosure to heterosexuals among LGBQ people (Herek et al. 1997), and so it makes sense that by reducing internalized homophobia the social validation and legitimacy marriage rights provided also promoted greater openness and confidence in interactions with heterosexuals.

However, I also found that the legitimizing effects participants described had clear limits. There was a disjuncture between the general rhetoric of increasing openness and boldness and a continuing unwillingness to show affection in public. PDA appeared to be a boundary line – a limit of how far some participants were willing to push social interactions with heterosexuals. LGBQ people might feel more confident to talk about their partners in casual conversation or empowered to fight administrative instances of prejudice or discrimination, but not to challenge verbal and physical harassment. Some participants also felt that they could not use the legitimacy of marriage to help them gain familial acceptance or support. In fact, they felt that marriage

risked undermining the little familial acceptance and support they already had. These findings run counter to existing literature on the impact of marriage for LGBQ people, which has highlighted only its positive effects on relationships with heterosexuals, both community and family members (Ramos et al. 2009; Richman 2013; Schecter et al. 2008; but see Ocobock 2013). Ultimately, the limits I have identified demonstrate the conceptual distinction between legitimacy and acceptance. Marital legitimacy does not depend on heterosexual acceptance and support, but nor does it help to achieve it.

In his 1996 book about the politics of homosexuality, Andrew Sullivan boldly argued, "If nothing else were done at all, and gay marriage were legalized, ninety percent of the political work necessary to achieve gay and lesbian equality would have been achieved" (185). However, as Seidman (2002) countered, he offered no evidence or reason to believe that formal political equality would gradually translate into social equality … Legal equality easily coexists with social inequality (186-7). Despite all the legislative progress that has been made, there remain very high levels of heterosexual prejudice against LGBQ people. Recent polling shows that although heterosexuals are increasingly embracing LGBTQ civil rights and equal protection under the law, many are still uncomfortable with having LGBTQ people in their families and the communities where they live (GLAAD 2015). This led the organization GLAAD to argue "Closing the gap to full acceptance of LGBT people will not come from legislation or judicial decisions alone, but from a deeper understanding and empathy from Americans themselves" (2015:2). Most participants in this study also acknowledged that the amount of prejudice and discrimination they experienced had not changed as a result of marriage rights; only the way they felt about and dealt with them. Some also argued that they did not care what heterosexual strangers and acquaintances thought of them as much now, and they could draw on the

legitimacy of marriage to be more out and demanding even without heterosexual acceptance. However, whether the cultural legitimacy of marriage is really meaningful without true social acceptance remains a topic for debate. Certainly, my findings make clear that marriage is far from a panacea for the problems LGBQ people face as a result of heterosexual prejudice.

CHAPTER 4

The Normalizing Consequences of Marriage in LGBQ Communities

In the previous chapter, I examined how being *seen* as "normal" allowed LGBQ people to interact with the straight community in different ways, but in this chapter I show how *becoming* normal impacted interactions and relationships *within* LGBQ communities. In doing so, I shift attention away from the legitimating impact of marriage on LGBQ people's relations with heterosexuals to its impact within LGBQ communities. The fight for marriage-equality has raised and exacerbated a number of concerns about the future of LGBQ culture and communities. As Bernstein and Taylor (2013) point out, many of these concerns center on the possible consequences of normalization. Critics worry that marriage will "lead to the assimilation of LGBT culture into the mainstream," and result "in the disappearance of LGBT culture and identity altogether" (Bernstein and Taylor 2013:18). Others argue that the same-sex marriage movement will benefit only those same-sex couples who are "homonormative" (Duggan 2002). As such, it will further marginalize other LGBQ people, including those who do not wish to marry or conform to marital norms, such as monogamy (Warner 1999). In addition to the possible marginalization of unmarried and non-monogamous people, some scholars suggest that the focus on marriage will result in the "secondary marginalization" (Cohen 1999) of poor and non-White LGBQ people and bisexual and transgender people, for whom marriage offers fewer benefits (Hull and Ortyl 2013; Kandaswamy 2008; Stein 2013). In their review of LGBT scholarship, Moore and Stambolis-Ruhstorfer (2013) called for scholars to move past debate and "investigate empirically the warnings … that marriage for lesbians and gay men will ultimately

result in exclusions for those who fall outside of the new 'gay norm'" (502). This chapter responds to that call.

There is some conceptual ambiguity regarding normalization; and so I start by offering some brief clarification. Normalization is the *process through which* an idea, social practice, or group becomes "normal." In relation to same-sex marriage, it could be the process through which marriage becomes a "normal" idea and practice to same-sex couples. It could also refer to the process through which same-sex couples come to be seen as "normal" to heterosexuals by marrying. Here, the idea that marriage has become "normal" does not derive from the observed prevalence of marriage (i.e. how many people do it) but rather from ideas about marriage as an expected behavior. One might think of "normal" in this regard simply as the opposite of abnormal. It might include, for example, the idea of marriage becoming perfectly normal among LGBQ people, and the idea of LGBQ people becoming perfectly normal to heterosexuals. Related, the term "norm" has two distinct meanings. It can refer to behaviors that are the most frequent pattern. In this sense, marriage is now the statistical "norm" among LGBQ people in Massachusetts,[1] but *same-sex* marriage is not the statistical "norm" for all people. Yet a "norm" also refers to agreed upon social expectations or rules for behavior that individuals have internalized. A social norm then is the articulation of what is deemed right and proper regardless of its empirical prevalence. Some suggest that there are few social norms governing the behaviors of LGBQ people in marriage, as marriage is so new to them (Cherlin 2004). Others have argued that same-sex couples will largely adhere to the same norms governing heterosexual marriage (Lauer and Yodanis 2010). Lastly, marriage may also be referred to as "normative" in the sense that it is a morally endorsed ideal; it is something you *should* do. Critics of marriage

[1] US Census data show that by 2010 68% of all resident same-sex couples in Massachusetts had legally married (Badgett 2011).

have been primarily concerned with the potentially *normative* consequences of marriage. If marriage is socially expected, then what will happen to those who do not conform to marital expectations?

I examine my data for evidence of two possible consequences of normalization within LGBQ communities. Both address the idea that non-conforming LGBQ people will be marginalized by marriage, but in different ways – one focuses on the marginalization of critical, non-conforming *views*; the other focuses on the marginalization of those with non-conforming *behaviors*. First, I examine whether marriage suppresses radical and critical voices within LGBQ communities. Focusing on the *Baker v. State of Vermont* decision that resulted in civil unions in Vermont in 2000, Bernstein and Burke (2013) showed that the marriage movement initially had the effect of opening up new public spaces for critical debates about same-sex relationships and marriage. However, Gilreath (2011) argued that by "the second decade of the twenty-first century" there is "nearly total capture of the debate by the mainstream Gay rights agenda. … Basically, popularly at least, in the famous debate between Andrew Sullivan and Michael Warner on the efficacy of normalcy, Sullivan has won" (211). The result, he argues, is that "a Radical, revolutionary stance … is less often heard" (215). Duggan (2003) also suggested that that LGBQ people will mute their critiques of heteronormativity in return for access to social institutions like marriage. The suppression of debate and critique is an expected outcome of institutionalization. As Schneiberg and Clemens (2006) explain: "Once an organizational form, industrial norm, or political regime acquires legitimacy … people stop fighting, debates cease, and organizations wither" (212). The same might apply to the institution of marriage. During the stage of seeking marriage rights, there was a great deal of debate within LGBQ communities about whether marriage was the right political goal for the LGBQ community. However, now

that marriage rights have been won and marriage becomes increasingly taken for granted, one might expect these debates to greatly diminish.

Second, I examine whether marriage results in increased stigma based on marital status and practices.[2] By assimilating LGBQ people into the norms and institutions of the larger society, marriage has the potential to help this community "overcome the kind of stigma historically attached to homosexuality" (Herek 2006:617). However, many critical commentators (Kim and Duggan 2005; Duggan 2002; Gilreath 2011; Seidman 2002; Warner 1999) have warned that same-sex marriage will also marginalize those who choose not to get married or conform to marital norms, such as monogamy, by giving the stamp of normality to "good" gays at the expense of "bad" gays (Bernstein and Taylor 2013:13). Seidman (2002) explains this double-sided nature of normalization. He says that, on the one hand, "normality means that gays are just like any other citizens" – if they have "the same needs, feelings, commitments, loyalties, and aspirations as straight Americans" then they "deserve the same rights and respect" (14). But "normal also carries another *normative* sense" – as "the normal gay is expected to exhibit specific kinds of traits and behaviors." Gilreath (2011) argues:

> The convergence of Left politics with Right moralism in the marriage context constitutes a new hierarchy in which to be a like-straight, monogamously coupled, ideally coupled, Gay unit defines responsible Gay citizenship and good living, leaving Radical Resisters of the Heteroarchy[3] with a searing brand of civic irresponsibility where the pink triangle might once have been (210).

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[2] Goffman (1963)'s seminal account of stigma refers to stigma as "an attribute that is deeply discrediting" (3) and "an undesired differentness" (5). It emphasizes the socially constructed character of stigma and the way that stigma is related to ideas about what is normal and abnormal in society. By virtue of a particular characteristic or group membership, "an individual is regarded by society as diverging in a disfavored way from its understanding of normalcy" (Herek 2009:2).

[3] Gilreath (2011) does not define "Heteroarchy" but it is a term that others also use in LGBTQ literature. For example, Thomas (2005) defines "heteroarchy" as "literally, rule by heterosexuals. It is the structural subordination of a group based on an idea of inferiority" (45).

Part of the "troubling politics of normalization" Warner (1999) described was a fear that those who are sexually non-normative would become "a lightning rod not only for the hatred of difference, of the abnormal, but also for the more general loathing for sex" (23; also see Rubin 1993). These critics have tended to assume that increased stigma would come from heterosexuals toward non-normative LGBQ people. Yet, some have also recognized the potential for increased stigma within LGBQ communities. For example, in a recent op-ed, Ryan (2014) writes:

> Same-sex marriage is not going to harm opposite-sex marriages, as opponents so often claim, but its gravitational pull is likely to warp all other kinds of queer relationships. Our community's pluripotent, mutable ways of loving one another are fast becoming something we need to defend all the more to the straight world – and, now, perhaps to our married gay peers as well.

The fear is now that those who do not conform to the norm of monogamy will also have to defend themselves to their increasingly judgmental married gay friends and acquaintances.

Although institutional theory does not speak directly to the issue of stigmatization, some of its core tenets suggest that marriage could result in increased stigma for those who do not conform. At a basic level, when something is institutionalized it becomes *the* model against which all others are defined. As such, one might expect marriage to also become the relationship against which all others are *judged*, and found lacking. Marital practices may become the basis for increased stigma, as conforming to expected marital behaviors, such as being monogamous and having children, become important. Conforming to institutional expectations is crucial for obtaining external legitimacy in institutionalized environments. Meyer and Rowan (1977) stress: "In institutionally elaborated environments, organizations become sensitive to and employ eternal criteria of worth" (350), and "organizations that incorporate societally legitimated rationalized elements in their formal structures maximize their legitimacy and increase their resources and survival capabilities" (352). Similarly, DiMaggio and Powell (1991) argue:

"Organizations are rewarded for their similarity to other organizations in their fields" (73). Similarity makes it easier to "be acknowledged as legitimate and reputable, and to fit into administrative categories that define eligibility for" material benefits.[4] This is especially true for new and peripheral populations emerging in an already established institutional field. Institutional theory then suggests that LGBQ people's growing sensitivity to the importance of gaining external legitimacy (see Chapter 3) may make them less tolerant of their LGBQ peers who do not conform. LGBQ people understand that the legitimacy and success of the marriage movement depends on their ability to conform to institutional expectations. They may therefore see their non-conforming peers as posing a threat to the legitimacy LGBQ people stand to gain through marriage. Expressing stigma could then become a means by which some within the community distance themselves from those they see as posing a threat to their perceived normality.

My findings present a complex picture of the normalizing consequences of marriage. I find much evidence that the institutionalization of marriage works to suppress critical views on marriage as an institution in LGBQ communities, but only limited evidence of stigmatization based on marital status or practices. Why would marriage work to marginalize people with non-conforming views about marriage but not those with non-conforming behaviors? My findings

[4] In addition to increasing stigma based on marital status, many critics are concerned that marriage will increase material inequality and access to resources. There is growing evidence that it has become more difficult for unmarried LGBQ people to gain access to benefits in states where marriage is a legal option, as spousal benefits have replaced domestic partner benefits (Silverman 2015). I also encountered several examples of this in my data. However, concerns about new material inequalities were much less dominant than concerns about social inequalities and stigma among my participants. This concern with the social over the material likely results, at least in part, from the fact that most participants were middle-class and less adversely financially affected by changes to material benefits. Non-middle class LGBQ people may have very different concerns about the normalizing consequences of marriage.

suggest that some of the same forces help explain why critical LGBQ voices have been depressed by marriage and why marriage has *not* resulted in increased stigma within LGBQ communities. Specifically, respect for the "personal choices" of others had the effect of suppressing and softening critical perspectives, while also ensuring that LGBQ people remained open-minded and respectful of the "personal choices" of those who chose not to get married or conform to marital norms.

The Role of Marriage in Normalization

The concept of normalization has dual meaning. On one hand, normalization is a social process through which ideas or actions come to be regarded as "normal" by *others*. Marriage serves to normalize same-sex relationships, as it helps heterosexuals see them as "normal." In this regard, normalization and legitimacy are highly connected. The people who took part in this study understood that the legitimacy they stood to gain through marriage was dependent on heterosexuals seeing their relationships as "normal" - as just like opposite-sex ones. Legitimacy was premised on the idea that, by getting married, same-sex couples were adhering to the same cultural ideals that heterosexuals also valued. As such, participants' comments about legitimacy often referred to normalization, and vice versa. For example, Angie, a 51 year-old married woman, said: "Marriage is about legitimizing same-sex relationships. It's just one more way that we can be like everybody else. It shows we're not this separate culture. We're not really different from anyone. We get married, we have children, we own homes, and we have jobs." Similarly, Maggie, a 40 year-old married woman, believed, "Marriage lends legitimacy to the fact that we're normal, we're a family just like anybody else." These participants, and others, understood that marriage offered LGBQ people legitimacy because it gave them a way to show

heterosexuals that they were just like them. On the other hand, normalization is also something that happens *to* LGBQ people. It is not just a change in the way others perceive LGBQ people, but also a real change in the way LGBQ people think or behave.

Conservative advocates for marriage stressed that LGBQ people were already "virtually normal" (Sullivan 1996) and that the vast majority of LGBQ people "want to live ordinary middle class lives" (Bawer 1993) before same-sex marriage became legal anywhere in the U.S. Queer critics of marriage have also suggested that the normalization of LGBQ people was already well underway before the legalization of same-sex marriage. For example, Warner (1999) argued that by the end of the twentieth century "Nearly everyone, it seems, wants to be normal" (53). Showing that same-sex relationships are already basically the same as opposite sex relationships has been a primary strategy of the marriage equality movement. Marriage equality activists understood that winning marriage rights depended on convincing the heterosexual public that same-sex couples would not change the institution of marriage or undermine its sanctity, and that LGBQ people only wanted to lead normal, respectable lives. This strategy required making "normal" LGBQ couples the face of the movement. Ann, a 54 year-old married participant who had some professional involvement in the marriage equality movement, saw this as simply "making another part of our range visible." She said that the most visible elements of the LGBQ community had been "the wild and crazy party boys or dykes on bikes" and that it was important to change the "public image" by showing that for the most part LGBQ people were very "ordinary looking homos." Art, a 44 year-old married man, who had also been professionally involved in the movement for marriage, framed it differently. Rather than simply making ordinary LGBQ people more visible, he believed that the marriage equality movement had gone to great pains to make anything abnormal less visible: "Anything that would make

people seem significantly non-conforming in any way other than their sexual orientation was a no no."

Despite their different perspectives, their involvement in the marriage equality movement had allowed both Ann and Art to see normalization as a social movement strategy. Most other participants had not been professionally or actively involved in the marriage equality movement and did not see "normalization" this way. Yet many still echoed the official message of the movement in their interviews. Lizzie, a 48 year-old married woman, said: "I mean we just aren't that different than a lot of other couples who are worried about work and money and our kids and vacation and sleep and our families. There's no great secret anything else that we're doing." Evan, an unmarried 49 year-old and father of two young children, joked, "Our big secret gay agenda is macaroni and cheese and chicken nuggets and going to CVS. I mean look at us - we're so mainstream!" Dennis, a 53 year-old unmarried man, said:

> I don't know who ever said that we're not a family. We have families. We're worried about our families, our nieces and nephews. We're worried about community. We're worried about our schools. It's all part and parcel of the same thing. We putz around the yard, putz around the house just like an old married couple. It's just sort of normal. … If I had any message to say to anyone [heterosexual] about gay relationships it would be that we're more alike than we are different.

Whether consciously or not, some participants tried to use the interviews as opportunities to get the "normal" message across to a heterosexual public.

For others, however, normalization was more than just a "message" that they wanted to convey. Most participants argued that gaining the right to legally marry had made same-sex relationships *more* normal. In this way, they offered support to the idea of normalization as something that happens *to* LGBQ people. They agreed that many LGBQ people had had "normal" lives and relationships before gaining the right to legally marry, but also saw marriage as contributing to a process of normalization. Tamryn, a married 29 year-old woman put it this

way: "There are still little pockets of radical queers but the mainstream LGBT community is heading in the other direction - toward white picket fences and 2.3 kids and SUVs, or at least a Prius! And marriage has played a big part in that." Participants had varying opinions about whether normalization was a good or bad thing but almost all regarded it as an inevitable by-product of marriage that had already occurred or that was well under way. For example, Theresa, a 69-year old married woman, thought "the best thing about being able to be legally married is that it makes us like regular people," while Terence, an 51 year-old unmarried man, believed that "the normalization of our gay culture is the worst part of marriage." While these two responses show disagreement about the valence of the change, both agree that normalization has occurred as a result of the access to same-sex marriage. Charles, a 61 year-old married man, simply said: "Now we are just boring, just like everybody else. Like it or not, it's just the way it is."

My findings also suggest that gaining the right to legally marry plays an important role in that normalization process. One mechanism through which marriage contributes to normalization is by enabling LGBQ to imagine having "a normal life" in a way they had not been able to before.[5] It was striking how much participants understood normalcy to depend on being able to legally marry, demonstrating what a central role legal marriage plays in achieving adulthood. Without the option to legally marry, many LGBQ people had come to that the conclusion that they would not be able to achieve other "normal" things in their lives, like having children, buying a house, or even having a quiet domestic life. In other words, marriage was not just one way of being normal, but rather was understood as the gateway to a bundle of other normal

[5] In Chapter one, I showed that most participants now *took-for-granted* that their relationships would lead to marriage. The fact that LGBQ people now looked for marriage-potential relationships and would accept nothing less offers some evidence of normalization. However, here I show that having the right to legally marry shaped more than just participants' relationship aspirations. It also changed their outlook on life more generally, and made them more desirous of other "normal" things, such as having stability, or having children.

possibilities. In offering LGBQ people the possibility to partake in perhaps one of the most normal, life-course activities, marriage had also allowed them to imagine other new, more conventional, possibilities for their lives.

Raul, a 48 year-old married man told me that he had "always known with certainty" that same-sex marriage was *not* going to be something he would see in his lifetime. He said, "I had always wanted to be married, I always wanted to have the same life [as heterosexuals] with children and all that other stuff, but I always thought that's the one thing I'll never have." Because he had not been able to legally marry, Raul had assumed he could not have "all that other stuff" associated with a normal life, such as living a domestic, quiet life in the suburbs, owning property, and having children. But when same-sex marriage became legal in Massachusetts, "all of a sudden it was possible." Josh, a 40 year-old married man, shared a similar reaction:

> I do think that it's fundamentally changing how gay people view their lives … Even up until two years before there was gay marriage, I never even thought that I would be able to have what I wanted to have in my life. I never thought that the things that I really wanted would ever be realized. But then all of a sudden it was like, not only is marriage happening, but it was happening two blocks from my house!

When I asked Josh what marriage allowed him to do that he hadn't felt he could before, he said that he had assumed that he would never have children. After marriage became possible, he subsequently realized that he could be married and be a parent (now he and his husband have two children).

Mikey, a 38 year-old unmarried man, told me that his childhood "definitely wasn't the white picket fence, two-parent household thing." He had grown up in a "housing project" with a single mother whom he described as "always making poor choices with relationships and life." He said that in the past he had also "been making poor choices about who to have relationships

with" but that gaining the right to legally marry had allowed him to imagine a different kind of life for himself. He explained, "For the first time in my life really I was feeling like relationships can really work. For me, it really became this idea of like wow with marriage I can have a legitimized thing. And I can really have a full on respectable, normal life, you know?" Gaining the right to legally marry allowed Mikey to imagine new possibilities for his relationships and increased his desire to have a more "stable" and "family-oriented" life. He also said that now he especially looked up to an older, heterosexual married couple he knew who acted as "role models" and "mentors" to him, and hoped one day to have "the kind of family life" he saw them having. The centrality of class mobility in Mikey's narrative is noteworthy. For Mikey, marriage represented an opportunity to live a middle-class ideal because that was not the kind of life he came from. For other participants too, marriage also represented a middle-class respectability from which they felt they had previously been unfairly excluded. Not being able to marry had prevented other people from seeing them as fully respectable, even though they came from respectable, middle-class backgrounds. They saw marriage as an essential part of what it meant to lead a "respectable" life. In this way, to be "normal" often represented conforming to White, middle class standards of respectability (see Valverde 2006; Ward 2008).

Several participants also told me that having the right to legally marry had presented them with what they viewed as an easier way of living their lives. Without the option to legally marry, LGBQ people had fashioned their own, alternative relationship practices and lifestyles, but this had required effort and imagination. Marriage offered them a pre-made model for how to structure their relationships and what to expect of them. Rachel, a 30 year-old married woman, explained:

> I think that [when I came out] in college we sort of romanticized the kind of kickass, we're queer, we're just not part of this thing, we're doing this smash the state, totally

> different thing, and it was very freeing. Making your own society and making your own families was much more self directed and much less kind of falling in line and doing what's kind of expected. But I think that marriage makes it possible to have something more expected, that you can settle down. Actually I was just talking to one of my lesbian friends from college and we were sort of talking about "yeah, ya know, forging your own path is exhausting!" (laughs)

I asked Rachel what exactly was exhausting about the way she had approached her relationships before she had access to marriage, and she replied, "Well if you're making your own path then you're making a lot of decisions and kind of figuring things out and you're spending a lot of your energy thinking, 'well what am I to you? What are the rules of what I am to you? And how do I express that to other people?'" Without marriage there were no clear rules or models for how to conceptualize a relationship, what relationship practices to follow, and how to get others to see the relationship for what it was. For her, this was "freeing" in some ways and allowed for creativity, but it was also "exhausting." Cody, a 36 year-old unmarried man, described being gay as "like a salmon swimming upstream" but said that, "Having that opportunity to marry kind of makes it so you don't have to swim as hard upstream anymore. It makes it easier to be gay sometimes because we're kind of on the same playing field now. We're all going in the same direction." Having clear norms for relationships made it easier for some LGBQ people to imagine and sustain their relationships. As institutional scholars point out, the homogeneity of social structures and practices results in large part from efforts to reduce uncertainty (DiMaggio and Powell 1991). Being able to marry and follow marital norms offered some LGBQ people greater certainty about what to expect from their relationships and how to behave in them.

These findings show that marriage played an active role in the normalization process. It did so primarily by changing the possibilities LGBQ people felt were open to them and by providing a template for how to live an easier life. Next, I examine what some of the consequences of normalization have been within LGBQ communities. I focus on one of the most

common critiques of marriage - that it will result in the further marginalization of LGBQ people with non-conforming views and behaviors.

Suppressing and Softening Critical Perspectives

As institutional theory predicts, my findings show that critical voices within LGBQ communities have been suppressed and softened by marriage. The people who took part in this study told me that they rarely heard critical perspectives toward same-sex marriage anymore. Participants were aware of critical perspectives, but because they rarely encountered them they spoke about them as peripheral and irrelevant. "Little pockets of radical queers" still existed, as Tamryn put it, but other LGBQ people did not hear their views very often or assign them much importance. Clara, a 29 year-old married woman, said "My sister, who is also gay, says that we just want to like copy this straight institution, and we're looking for a permission slip to be allowed into straight people's world instead of just continuing to live our own lives." But when I asked her whether she came across these kinds of debates regularly, she said, "No, not often, except with my sister. Other than with her though I've almost never been involved in any discussions about it in regular life." Jamie, another 29 year-old married woman told me that she knew that some "lesbians in the community feel like they don't want to do something so heteronormative," but when I asked her whether she heard that critique often she said, "Not really, not anymore." She said, "There had been a lot of conversation about it" when she had been in college but "outside of that" she did not encounter it. She wondered if that kind of debate "even still exists?"

Many others also perceived debates over marriage as a thing of the past. They suggested that public debates over marriage had largely taken place before the right to legally marry had

been won, but afterwards had quickly diminished. Patrick, a 50 year-old married man told me, "There was certainly a lot of debate in the gay community about … how it's buying into a heterosexual institution, and why should we do it? You still hear it occasionally but I wouldn't say it's real common now." Josh, a 40-year old married man remembered:

> There was so much talk early on. I remember going back to New York like three years after we had gay marriage here [in Massachusetts], and so many people were like, yeah, but we're not going to be like straight people, and we shouldn't have gay marriage. Because a lot of people were still like 'what the heck? We don't want that. Why would we do this stuff?' And you rarely hear that now. All that went away.

Like most participants, Patrick and Josh were not especially concerned that debates over marriage had dwindled. By contrast, Ruby, a 33 year-old unmarried woman spent a good portion of her interview worrying about it. She was "worried that marriage really thwarts a more complex, critical conversation about what kind of structures for families are permissible." She thought that LGBQ people used to "be critical of marriage and some of its pitfalls and the ways that it is very limiting to us" but that "marriage kind of depresses that conversation." She went on:

> I've been surprised about how it's become so normative. Like where is that critique? I'm not hearing those radical queer voices that used to be so loud in my ears that were like "Why are you capitulating to this hetero institution?" I'm not really hearing it here anymore. … Everybody just seems so pleased about it [getting married]! That's the thing I keep coming back to, like a friend was showing off her diamond ring, and I'm like 'Really?! We're taking the whole kit and caboodle, we're not even critiquing the diamonds anymore?![6] What?!' [sounding exasperated].

[6] Here Ruby is most likely referring to controversies over "conflict diamonds" or "blood diamonds." These are diamonds sold in order to fund armed conflict and civil war. Profits from the trade in conflict diamonds were used by warlords and rebels to buy arms during wars in Angola, the Democratic Republic of Congo, and Sierra Leone. Because it is difficult for consumers to know with certainty that the diamonds they are buying are "conflict free" many remain critical of the diamond industry in the U.S. She may also be referring more generally to the use of child labor in the diamond industry in India and Africa.

Ruby was well aware that gaining the right to legally marry had played some role in "depressing" more critical conversations and debates in the LGBQ community but she did not have any idea how or why it had achieved this kind of normalizing effect, and her lack of comprehension as to how this had happened frustrated her.

Analyzing my data, I identified three mechanisms by which marriage contributes to the suppression and softening of more radical, critical voices. First, gaining the right to legally marry suppressed a more critical conversation by making LGBQ people feel the need to be outwardly supportive of their friends and acquaintances who were getting married. It had become less appropriate to be critical when the debate was no longer a theoretical, abstract one, and one's friends were choosing marriage for their own relationships. People who might be inclined to criticize the institution of marriage theoretically now risked implying a lack of support for people's personal relationship decisions if they did so. Tom, a 57 year-old married man, had been actively involved in LGBQ community organizations for many years and knew a broad range of LGBQ people. When I asked him about critiques of marriage in the community, he said:

> Here's what I can tell you – we know a lot of gay men and we know a lot of lesbians, and regardless of what they may think of marriage for themselves they all came to our wedding [laughs]. And nobody said "Marriage, that's a bad thing, and we shouldn't be having that." Nobody said "Man, this is all patriarchal and screwed up." So if there are people in [this area, in Western Massachusetts] who are feeling that they are not people that I'm running into. I think most people feel that, even if I don't want to do it myself, it's good that other people can do it.

Hannah, a 39 year-old married woman, was aware that some people "feel like we are assimilating" by getting married, but when I asked her if anyone she knew was openly critical of her decision to marry, she said "No. Nobody gave us grief over it. I mean cause I think if they're friends of yours people just want to be supportive of you, you know they don't wanna necessarily be critical." Jamie agreed: "Whatever people think about marriage, I think there's a

point at which most folks are just like, 'you found someone that you love and who loves you, Mazel Tov!'" These comments – and others – also show that marriage had become regarded as an issue of personal choice rather than public debate. Beth, a 58 year-old married woman explained:

> I think for a while it [marriage] was splitting people apart, but I think ultimately that's disappeared because the people whose attitude towards marriage was inclined to be negative ultimately conceded that it might be a good thing to at least have the freedom to marry for people who *did* want to get married. And it doesn't mean everybody has to.

Marriage was no longer something people felt they had a right to comment on anymore. Rather than a topic for debate, whether one got married or not was now a private decision and an issue of personal choice.

This concern for appearing to respect the personal choices of those who marry is also keenly felt by scholars and activists. For example, Gilreath (2011), who provides one of the most radical critiques of marriage, felt the need to preface his critique of marriage by saying: "Nothing in the following critique is meant to be a moral judgment about any Gay persons desiring marriage for reasons of personal importance to them" and footnoting "Certainly I have Gay friends who want to marry" (212). Gilreath has the expertise and authority necessary to ensure that his scholarly critiques are not misinterpreted as "passing judgment" on his "Gay sisters and brothers" for marrying but most rank-and-file LGBQ people cannot so easily accomplish this. Therefore, for many LGBQ people, the need to appear to be respecting others peoples' personal choices ultimately ensures that critical perspectives are suppressed.

Some participants also suggested that they could not criticize the particular relationship choices other people made once they were married. Art, a 44 year-old married man, had "been involved one way or the other in organizing around relationship recognition since the early 1990s" but did not think LGBQ people should conform to heteronormative relationship practices

just because they got married. When he first came out in the 1980s he had felt "rescued by lesbian feminism" and had found it "hugely liberating" to have been "embraced by a deeply leftist feminist community." But now watching the feminists he had known for so long get married and cave into what he saw as heteronormative and patriarchal marriage practices, he felt exasperated:

> Listening to lesbians call one another "my wife" makes my head spin. Ugh. I've heard some lesbian feminists who I would never have thought would do that do it! People who I've known for years, who all of a sudden [said] "This is my wife," and I'm thinking "Whaaat?!"

But he went on to say, "Now of course I honor the language they choose to use and I'm not going to get a copy of *The Female Eunuch* and whack them over the heads with it, or say "Simone de Beauvoir is spinning in her grave now!" His language of having to "honor" their choices implies he felt to do otherwise would have been socially inappropriate. Although Art did not explicitly state that he felt pressure to mute his critiques, his comments, and others, suggest that some LGBQ people felt the need to police their public and interpersonal communications so that they appeared supportive of those who married and conformed to marital conventions. As such, expressions of support may be a performative means of adhering to social norms about the appropriateness and rightness of marriage. In these cases, having the right to legally marry did not change critical people's views on marriage as an institution but it did make them less likely to express them. For others, however, having the right to marry also seemed to soften their critical views, as I show next.

Second, some participants told me that it was harder to be critical once they saw how happy other people felt at being able to get legally married. In this sense, there was an emotional component as well as an issue of social etiquette. It is not just that people withheld their criticisms; their emotional response to marriage also made them less inclined to be critical. They

witnessed marriage having a positive impact on their friends and acquaintances that was difficult to dismiss, regardless of how they personally felt about marriage as an institution. I focus here on two participants who were among the most critical of marriage, Ruby and Becky, to show that seeing other people happy was powerful enough to soften even the most critical of opponents. Ruby told me that when marriage first became legal seeing her friends get married had made her feel "frustrated." She saw marriage as "a very conventional decision" and felt like her friends were "giving up on this dream that we'd been creating of a world where we didn't need those kinds of rules and structures." But, even she admitted that her "feelings on marriage were shifting," and she attributed this in large part to seeing how happy marriage made people. She explained:

> I see my gay friends who've gotten married and I see how meaningful it is for them and that has had a big impact on me for sure because they are so happy to have this possibility. I do think that living in Massachusetts and having more friends who are getting married here is having an effect on me. I haven't quite figured out what that effect is but it means that my thoughts are evolving. So I think that I'm trying to expand, I'm trying to be more open, to allow more room for my friends and colleagues and so on who are really made happy by this institution (laughs). I've tried in my 30s to be a little less judgmental than I used to be and I think that's part of it too, it's like 'why the judgment when these things make people happy?'

Becky, a 37 year-old unmarried woman, initially offered a different perspective, as she told me that seeing how happy marriage made other people made her "unhappy." She shared:

> I'm surrounded by people who are choosing to get married. I'm friends with all these people, like the parents of our children's friends and I think it's actually evidence of how successfully at least certain kinds of being a lesbian have just been so thoroughly normalized.
>
> AO: When you say certain kinds of being a lesbian, what do you mean?
>
> Like people in families. You know, like committed lesbian relationships. It's just so White, middle class, two people with kids. But I see marriage as this pretty insidious thing. And the worst thing is that this makes a population of people who several decades ago were much more likely to have that kind of analysis of the family as a somewhat oppressive and limiting arrangement happier, in a way. Sort of like the opiate of the

> masses. It's like throwing people enough of a bone that they're happy with what they're got, but what they've got still sucks and that makes me unhappy.

However, Becky later revised her statement, adding, "Although I wish people would organize their lives differently, this is what they want to do and of course it is sort of heartwarming, and I'm happy for people that they get to do this thing they seem to really want to do."

Becky and Ruby - and others - recognized a distinction between the "intellectual" and "emotional" forces influencing their feelings about marriage. They understood that the emotional proved just as, if not more, powerful than the intellectual. This is how Becky explained it:

> So there's part of me that kind of intellectually didn't care about marriage and even had contempt toward it. But at the same time, there was probably a more emotional reaction that like I was happy. Like of course these news stories about these 80 year-old women who had been together for decades and could finally get married [affected me]. Even though the more critical part of me is like ugh (laughs) there is also part of me that is able to be moved and *is* moved, whether I like it or not. And, I think all that has kind of canceled out to a sort of general ambivalence about marriage.

Becky's comment that she was emotionally affected *whether she liked it or not* highlights how participants conceptualized emotions as something they could not control. They said that they were surprised at the strong emotional reactions they had to gaining access to legal marriage and watching their friends get married. Ann, a 54 year-old married woman, told me a story about what happened when she and her "hardcore activist" friends had all attended their first same-sex wedding. She said:

> There were two rows of hardcore activists who turned into water fountains! One of them in particular had spent years arguing that she did not want it to be marriage, but she had had to come around because she realized everyone around her was leaving her behind. And when we all managed to stop crying, she picked her head up and she said, "I guess being ready for it intellectually is not the same as being ready for it emotionally."

Ann believed her friend had already made an intellectual transition, grudgingly becoming more open-minded about the idea of same-sex marriage, but she had been taken completely off guard by the emotional reaction she also experienced.

Third, I found some evidence that gaining the right to marry also depressed more critical perspectives through mimetic forces. As institutional scholars explain, uncertainty is a powerful force that encourages imitation and isomorphism (DiMaggio and Powell 1991:69). Isomorphism is a "constraining process that forces one unit in a population to resemble other units that face the same set of environmental conditions" (DiMaggio and Powell 1983:147). New and peripheral populations in an institutional field are more likely to model themselves on others that they perceive to be more legitimate or successful. "In fields characterized by a high degree of uncertainty, new entrants, which could serve as sources of variation and innovation, will seek to overcome the liability of newness by imitating established practices within the field" (DiMaggio and Powell 1983: 156). Same-sex marriage is certainly a new and "uncertain" practice for LGBQ people, but seeing that both same-sex and opposite-sex couples gain happiness, legitimacy, and resources through marriage encourages LGBQ people to follow that route for their own relationships. Even the most critical among my participants found themselves being influenced by seeing so many other LGBQ people get married, and told me that they found themselves desiring it more as a result.[7] It was not just that people with critical views became less inclined to share them; their critical views were also softened by marriage and they became more open-minded about marriage for themselves.

Theresa, a 68 year-old minister, had "grown up in a fairly conservative community," but had been "very influenced by a more progressive way of looking at things" at college. Her previous marriages to men had been "open" and "alternative," and she saw herself as "critiquing

[7] Mimetic factors were not as commonly discussed as etiquette and emotional factors. This may be because mimicking the actions of others is usually more unconscious than attempts to be polite and less obvious than the kinds of visceral emotional reactions to marriage participants discussed. Participants might not so easily recognize how the marital actions of others influenced their own desires, and they might not be as willing to admit what influence other people have over them.

the model of marriage all along." When people in her church first started discussing same-sex marriage she was very opposed to the idea:

> When the first stuff came out about marriage I was not interested. In fact I was angry with the men in our denomination because they wanted to pass a resolution to encourage people to support their ministers who wanted to do commitment ceremonies. And I thought that was the wrong thing to be doing. I thought that we should be asking people to look at homophobia, and I was not interested in marriage.

However, Theresa's views on marriage changed when she herself started performing same-sex weddings. She told me, "There was something about standing there as people were making these public promises to one another that opened my heart to the idea of marriage." It was not just that she became more opened minded about other people choosing marriage, but seeing other people marry also made her desire it for herself. She admitted, "It probably made me want a wedding more than the idea of marriage because I had never had a traditional wedding… and I couldn't stop thinking about it." Theresa persuaded her reluctant partner to have a commitment ceremony, and later also to get legally married. They had big ceremonies and celebrations for both events.

As a minister, Theresa was in a unique position because her role had introduced her to same-sex weddings on a regular basis since the 1990s, whereas most other participants only encountered same-sex weddings occasionally prior to it becoming legal in 2004 (see Chapter 1). Once it became legal in Massachusetts, suddenly same-sex marriage seemed to be everywhere – people were seeing their friends and acquaintances get married in person and watching strangers get married on TV. With so much marriage "in the air," as one participant put it, thinking about getting married seemed almost unavoidable. Even those who were most critical of marriage as an institution could not help but be influenced by seeing others marry. Tony, a 69 year-old married man, was very involved in more alternative groups within the LGBQ community. After his previous partner of 18 years passed away of AIDS he had found solace and comfort in an "erotic

massage" community. He had initially been critical of the movement for same-sex marriage because he thought that LGBQ people should not rely on a government that had been so unsupportive of their relationships in the past. I asked him what had changed his mind (he married his then partner of three years in 2011), and he attributed it to the influence of seeing his friends marry. Some of his closest friends married the day it became legal and then gradually other people he knew also started getting married and so, he said, "I suppose once it all started, I thought, well, maybe it could apply to me?" Tony's wedding would not be considered "normal" or "mainstream" by most - he got married with a small circle of friends in attendance, some of whom were from the erotic massage community, and the ceremony mostly involved "spiritual rituals." Yet by getting legally married he was still participating in an institution he had once been very much against.

Meghan, a 31 year-old woman who was engaged to her partner of three years, said that for most of her life she had been critical of marriage. However, since moving to Massachusetts in 2003 she started to change her mind. She explained:

> Being in Massachusetts definitely people are so used to the idea of same-sex couples marrying, and everyone talks to you about getting married. Like we play kickball with all these people telling us all about their weddings and getting free stuff through the bachelorette party.[8] And then all of a sudden it was like I started thinking 'How do I have more of these things?' (laughs) 'Who's gonna throw me one of these?'

Meghan was somewhat joking and making fun of herself when she said this, but she also more seriously told me she had really struggled to accept how easily her views had changed and felt embarrassed by the influence other people had had on her. She said:

[8] Here Meghan is also talking about heterosexual people talking to them about getting married, and she suggests now heterosexual people will talk to gay people about weddings and marriage in a way that they did not before. In this way, mimetic processes may include being influenced by the marriages of heterosexuals as well as the marriages of LGBQ people.

> I started to really struggle with the idea that I wanted *more* (emphasis in original) than just a happy committed relationship [sounds quiet and thoughtful]. I wanted that marriage thing which I had been dead set against. I'd never dreamt of my wedding growing up. I tend to stray from the norm. I'm rebellious. I didn't want to get married cause that's what's expected, that's what you're supposed to do in life as you grow up, go to school, you meet someone, you get married and you have children and then you work the rest of your life. Ugh, shoot me in the head, that's boring! So it was a struggle for me cause I had been so vocally "I'm never doing this, this is bullshit, what the hell," you know? So then I was like 'oh crap, I want to marry her.' And I really had to process like 'what do I do with this feeling and what is it that makes me want to? Why the hell do I want this stupid ring on my finger and what does that represent?'

Meghan had since come to terms with her change in views and, at the time of the interview, she and her partner were planning their wedding.

By contrast, Ruby was still very much struggling to make sense of why she found herself desiring marriage more and more. In the past she had really been committed to creating more alternative family forms, for example wanting to raise a child with a best friend instead of a romantic partner. However, since moving to Massachusetts, she too had found herself influenced by all the people around her getting married. She explained, "Being in Massachusetts I'm now swimming through a whole different set of social norms and it's clearly having an effect because now I think about marriage a fair amount, and I'm thinking about it with positive feelings." She said she was embarrassed to "feel so influenced by what's around me" and felt that she had "to take responsibility for creating my own life." But she also stressed how difficult it was to hold on to more alternative aspirations when all the couples she knew were doing "this very expected dyadic relationship thing" and she no longer had any "real role models of other arrangements around anymore" to look to for inspiration. The lack of alternative relationship structures LGBQ have to model their relationships on parallels DiMaggio and Powell's (1991) explanation of organizational homogeneity. As they explain, "Much homogeneity … stems from the fact that despite considerable search for diversity there is relatively little variation to be selected from"

(70). “The fewer number of visible alternative organizational models in a field, the faster the rate of isomorphism in that field” (76).

That even the most critical of people were swayed by the regularity and normalcy of marriage around them highlights just how difficult it is for more alternative, critical perspectives to survive intact once marriage becomes institutionalized. The mechanisms I have described work in tandem to suppress and soften critical perspectives. If those with critical views of marriage feel less able or inclined to share them but so many others in the LGBQ community are publicly displaying and discussing their marriages, and LGBQ people are influenced by what they see and hear around them (as we all are), then it is no wonder that people like Ruby feel alone and begin to change their views about marriage. But how does having the right to legally marry impact LGBQ people’s views about those who choose *not* to marry?

Stigmatizing Those Who Do Not Marry or Conform to Marital Norms

Having a shared history of stigma based on their sexual orientation (Herek 1998), it seems unlikely that LGBQ people would now stigmatize people within the community based on their marital status or practices. However, institutional theory suggests that LGBQ people may worry that other people’s non-conformity will adversely affect the gains in social legitimacy they have recently made, and that these concerns may then manifest themselves as a kind of stigma against their non-conforming peers. In addition, we know that many LGBQ people think about marriage as the gold standard for their own relationships (Chapter 1) and so it also seems likely that they would judge unmarried relationships as lacking the love and commitment they think marriage epitomizes. If this is the case, then it could lead some LGBQ people to exhibit stigma toward their unmarried peers. Below I present evidence of two kinds of stigma that were expressed and

experienced among my participants: Stigma against LGBQ people who choose not to marry, and stigma against LGBQ people who do not conform to ideas of marital monogamy. In this way, I examine both marital status and marital practices as the basis for new hierarchies within the LGBQ community. However, I also emphasize that expressions and experiences of stigma were not common. Instead, rhetoric of respect for the "personal" relationship choices of others acts as a buffer against stigma in LGBQ communities. In this way, a pre-existing norm of tolerance continues to exist alongside the new norm of marriage and works to protect the community against some of the potentially stigmatizing consequences of marriage.

Stigma Against Unmarried LGBQ People

Some participants echoed the concerns of queer marriage critics about increased stigma for unmarried and un-conforming LGBQ people. Art (quoted earlier) thought that "one really lovely thing about queer culture is that although we were on the outside [of mainstream, heterosexual culture] there were a lot of relationship structures … that were largely honored and accepted by the [LGBQ] community," but now he worried that LGBQ people would turn their backs on their newly deviant peers in an attempt to gain acceptance and inclusion. He said:

> I understand that people who have grown up queer and been rejected in various ways want to be able to come back to some of those sources of rejection and say "no, no, no, I'm just like you" but my fear is that if that's where you're going then you're going to be less inclined to say "oh by the way my friends are still weird!"

However, Art worried only that same-sex marriage *might* create new hierarchies and inequalities within the community, not that it already had. He admitted, "I guess I can't say I've seen any concrete evidence of people who are not in couples being frowned on within the community. I just fear how much it's going to change. I worry about it." Gail, a 56 year-old married woman, told me, "I think it's a fear of some people, and I have it too, that there are going to be two

classes now - the married and the not married." But when I asked her if this was something she had noticed happening in the LGBQ community since marriage became legal, she paused and replied, "I haven't really. No I haven't." Similarly, Rachel, a 30 year-old married woman said, "I feel like there's sort of a kind of a judgment that if you don't get married then maybe there's something wrong with you" but when pressed to give examples, she amended her statement, saying: "Well actually I think it's not yet true for gay relationships, but the more marriage is an option I worry the more that's gonna be an idea gay people have." Like cultural critics of marriage, some participants worried that increased stigma for unmarried LGBQ people could result from marriage, but 8-9 years after same-sex marriage had become legal in Massachusetts it remained only a fear for the future.

A few participants believed that gaining the right to legally marry had *already* resulted in increased stigmatization for unmarried LGBQ people. However, they too struggled to think of concrete examples. Heather, a 31 year-old married woman, told me, "I have little bits of evidence that suggest that gay marriage is having the effect of making more diverse kinds of relationships that fall outside of the boundary of a normative couple potentially harder to live … like I think there is almost this subtle negative undertone when people talk about unmarried relationships." But when I asked her if she could give an example, she replied, "Well it's more just a gut feeling." Others offered more second-hand evidence, such as having unmarried friends who said they felt looked down upon. For instance, Erin, a 36 year-old married woman, said: "I've heard a lot of people say that there's kind of this shame almost that comes if you choose not to be married, and I think that has been kind of a byproduct of the acceptance and normalization." Mikey, an unmarried 38-year-old, also told me, "I've heard friends be defensive, like 'well now that you can get married that doesn't make me any less good of a person for not

doing it' so I feel like some [unmarried] people feel a little bit like they are being looked down on." However, he recognized that knowing people who feel like they are being looked down on is not the same as having evidence that they really are looked down upon. He added: "I don't have much evidence for it though, because I'm not really seeing any of the ones who've been married or want to get married saying like 'I feel bad for those sorry bastards who are going to be single forever!' I haven't seen that so much!"

As these examples show, some participants were well aware of the potentially stigmatizing consequences of same-sex marriage for their unmarried peers. Some even believed that marriage had already had the effect of increasing stigma within the community. However, it was most often only a "gut feeling" they had, a "subtle undertone" they perceived but could not really put their finger on, or something that only other people said they felt, rather than something they had personally experienced or witnessed directly. In order to further explore whether their fears and intuitions were unfounded, I looked for more concrete evidence of stigma in my data. Had any of the unmarried participants experienced stigma? Did any participants express negative judgments against unmarried LGBQ people?

Only one unmarried participant told me that she had personally felt stigmatized for her relationship status. Becky, a 37 year-old unmarried woman, had been dating her current partner for 3 years. She and her partner started their relationship when they were both in relationships with other people – Becky was in an unmarried relationship with another woman and her partner was in a heterosexual marriage. They both also had young children from their previous relationships. She told me that she routinely felt looked down upon by others:

> Nobody bats an eyelash at my kid having two moms, that's one huge benefit of being around here. On the other hand, I do feel like I have much more stigma or bad reactions to being broken up and having a blended family than I ever did being a lesbian around

> here, so that's been kind of a shocker. … That has felt more alienating than the lesbian thing ever has around here.

Although the circumstances in which Becky and her partner got together had been stressful, she now felt that there were clear benefits to being in a "blended family," particularly around being able to share parenting with their ex-partners. She said she had "never wanted the white picket fence" and felt she had "thrived" in her current situation: "Sharing custody has turned into such an amazing thing for me, and it's made parenthood so much better. I love it." However, she felt that other people around her did not see their family structure in such a positive light, especially other LGBQ parents of young children who she experienced as very judgmental. Becky also had little interest in getting legally married and her unmarried status may have also contributed to the stigma she felt, but it appears as if she was primarily judged for adultery and divorce. Either way, Becky's experience does offer some evidence to support Seidman's (2002) view that "[t]he bad citizen today is someone who violates romantic, intimate, familial norms, regardless of his or her sexual identity" (161).

I also found some examples of participants expressing stigma toward unmarried LGBQ people. Recall that Mikey said that he had *not* seen examples of people "saying they felt bad for those sorry bastards who are going to be single forever!" In fact, later on in the interview he told me about a single friend whom he "felt really bad for" because "he is probably not ever going to get married." He found his friend's unmarried situation troubling because it did not fit with his overall perception of him as respectable and successful: "In a lot of ways he has a more upstanding existence than I do … so it's just funny that he can't integrate that other part into his life of keeping a relationship going." For Mikey, his friend's single lifestyle excluded him from having an adult, "upstanding existence," despite all his other credentials. Anna, a 30 year-old unmarried woman, saw LGBQ communities as comprising two distinct kinds of people – single

people whose lives were wild and out of control, and coupled people (married or headed in that direction) who were settled and respectable. She told me that "for a long time [she had] struggled to have positive role models in the LGBT community" because she felt like she was surrounded by single LGBQ people, whom she described as "hot messes partying all the time" who "just couldn't get their lives together." But she thought that "in the last eight years" since marriage had become legal she'd "seen this booming population of couples settling down and living a more traditional life," which she really appreciated. These comments from Mikey and Anna were the most directly stated examples of stigma based on relationship or marital status I encountered. It is noteworthy that both were from other unmarried people. One possible explanation is that as LGBQ people become increasingly viewed as belonging to one of two classes – married and respectable, or unmarried and unrespectable - unmarried people who want to marry will feel the need to distance themselves from other unmarried people and position themselves with married people who they see themselves as more alike. One way of positioning themselves with married people is to vocally critique other unmarried people, though this may not be a conscious strategy on their part.

Expressions of stigma toward unmarried people by married people were somewhat more common, but also less directly stated and more subtle. They did not necessarily feel sorry for their unmarried counterparts, as Mikey did, or look down on them, as Anna did, but they did assume that there must be something wrong with their relationships if they did not want to get married. Those who think this way may not necessarily express these views openly or directly to unmarried LGBQ people. Nonetheless, a general awareness that some married people think this way may be enough to lead unmarried people to feel stigmatized. This may explain why participants offered anecdotal evidence of unmarried people feeling looked down upon, even

though they could rarely give me examples of experiencing stigma directly. Married people also did not state these opinions explicitly to me but the stigma was implicit in the more general comments they made. Hannah, a 39 year-old married woman, recognized this kind of more implicit stigma when she said: "There's a pretty good quadrant of the queer community that expects if you're in a relationship then, you know, why wouldn't you get married? And it's not necessarily said explicitly but I think it's at least there implicitly."

Tricia, a 62 year-old married woman, expressed this kind of implicit stigma when discussing her gay brother's unmarried relationship. She assumed that her brother and his partner must not really be committed to one another because they were in no rush to marry:

> Like I just wonder. They used to say "We're not going to get married until it's legal" and then when it became legal then they were "Well we thought about doing it for our 20th anniversary but now we think we'll wait until DOMA [gets repealed]." You know, I just don't understand. I mean they've been together a long time and they own property together. I don't know what it is [sounds perplexed]. All I can think is that at any given time one or the other is thinking maybe I'm going to want to be with someone else. That's all I can think of. I can't imagine any other reason not to get married.

Esteban, a 34 year-old married man, had similar doubts about his unmarried gay cousin: "My aunt and I often have conversations like 'When is she gonna get married? What's going on? What's the relationship issue?' Esteben also said that he thought the unmarried friends who had not attended his wedding were probably jealous of him getting married, and wondered if his marriage "brought certain things up for them that they didn't want to deal with" about their relationships. Esteban assumed that his unmarried friends who had not been overly supportive of his marriage must have been questioning their own commitments. A few others made more general statements about unmarried people. Lizzie, a 48 year-old married woman said: "Sometimes I do sort of think 'well why aren't you married? Cause you could be, so what's the deal?'" In the same way, Harriet, a 64 year-old married woman believed that "all queer couples

who have been in a relationship for a while should ask themselves if this is going to lead to marriage. [They should ask themselves] 'Am I still feeling some wanderlust or am I going to really make a commitment to this person?'" In her view, people who were not ready to make the commitment of marriage must be feeling some "wanderlust."

Offering another kind of indirect evidence that some within the LGBQ community do not think unmarried relationships are as committed or serious, Ricardo, a 52 year-old married man told me:

> I think now what a lot of us see is if you're [in a relationship but are] not married and you go out to a club to go dancing then single guys say 'Oh, okay, they're not serious. I still have a chance at them.' I think that once they hear that you're married, it's kind of like, oh, okay [sounding like giving up]. You know, it's beyond the seriousness.

This example suggests that some people in LGBQ communities draw clear distinctions by marital status, and regard unmarried people in relationships as still available, whereas they see married people as off limits. However, this was only anecdotal evidence and no other participants mentioned this.

Examples of less direct, implicit stigma by married people like the ones presented above were more common than more explicit statements about unmarried people as "wild" and "un-respectable." However, they were still rare. My data also suggest that there is some potential for stigma against people who chose to get married as well. In other words, stigma based on marital status applied both ways in LGBQ communities. Specifically, some participants told me that married people stood to lose status and respect precisely because marriage is associated with normality and conventionality. Andy, a 32 year-old married woman, explained:

> [Getting married is] like saying "Oh I want a mini-van." It's not that bad but it's like saying "I would like to be really respectable now." I don't feel like it's a cool thing to do. There are a lot edgier, more radical things you could be doing. So people are supportive but it [getting married] doesn't necessarily raise your social status at all [laughs].

Among some people in the LGBQ community being seen as "radical" and "edgy" certainly gains someone more respect and status than being seen as "respectable." Andy told me that she experienced getting married as a "threat" to her "self-image." This was both because it challenged her "radical" status and because, in her mind, marriage was "an old person gay thing to do." As Andy's comment suggests, age likely plays a role here. Rejecting marriage at a young age may be seen as a cool relationship choice, but this may not apply to older LGBQ people. Rachel, a 30 year-old married woman, also told me that she felt looked down upon by some of her friends who probably thought "that means they're kind of conservative gays and they're doing the 'look we're just like everyone else' thing." Nate, a 40 year-old married man, went a step further and told me that other gay men he knew vocally critiqued his choice to marry. He said: "I get stressed talking to other gay people who aren't married because sometimes I feel as though they challenge me. They're like 'well why'd you have to get married? Couldn't you just say you love one another and isn't that good enough?' And I don't like conflict very much."

Liam, a 33 year-old married man, was of the opinion that because stigma applies to both married and unmarried people "it is roughly balanced out." However, among my participants, there was probably a little more evidence of stigma toward unmarried LGBQ people than toward married LGBQ people. Moreover, although people within the LGBQ community might look down on both married and unmarried people, my findings about the suppression of critical voices suggest that they are likely less able or willing to express stigma against those who marry. Nate's experience of being critiqued for getting married (above) is therefore probably somewhat of an anomaly. Nonetheless, neither experiences nor expressions of stigma based on marital status were common. Instead, participants much more frequently articulated statements of open-mindedness and respect for people's relationship choices.

When I asked Matt, a 42 year-old married man, if he thought that married and unmarried people are thought of or treated any differently in the LGBQ community, he replied:

> Straight people might look at gay couples now and ask them why they aren't getting married but gay people are smart enough to know that marriage is not for everybody. Gay people don't put that pressure on each other. Just because marriage is available doesn't mean that you have to want to be in a gay marriage.

For the most part, I found Matt's perceptions to be supported by my data. Participants frequently drew on the language of "personal choice" to describe how they felt about other people's decisions to get married or not. They were emphatic that LGBQ people have "the option" to marry but made sure to stress that they did not judge other people for the personal marital decisions they made.

For Keith, a 41 year-old married man, having the right to legally marry was not in of itself a symbol of true equality; rather, equality also required having the right to choose not to marry and to be free to have any kind of relationship one wanted. He fervently stated, "Everyone should be able to have the right to choose whether or not they want to get married and what kind of relationship they want to have or not have, and I believe that as a matter of equality and anti-discrimination, absolutely I believe in that."[9] Similarly, Judy, a 50 year-old married woman, argued "I don't think everyone should be married but I think everyone should have the right to be married, and I think everyone should be able to have as much information as they need about what it is and whether or not it would work for them." She understood marriage as something people could "opt into if they chose" and respected that it might not be the best decision for

[9] Keith also went a step further, and argued that he did not think marriage should grant couples benefits and protections that unmarried couples did not have access to. And he also thought that benefits should not be dependent on monogamy. Talking about an unmarried friend of his in an open relationship, he said: "Why should we get a tax cut because we're not fucking as many people as he is? (laughs) I don't know. It makes no sense."

everyone. Caroline, a 35 year-old married woman, likened other people's decisions to marry or not to how she felt about "Don't Ask, Don't Tell":

> I kind of feel like in that way it's similar to Don't Ask, Don't Tell. I'm not a big fan of the armed services in general, but I still would fight for LGBT people to be able to fight openly. It doesn't mean I'm going to go and enlist and I hope my daughter doesn't go and enlist but I still feel that people should be given the opportunity to choose to serve if that's what calls them.
>
> AO: And so that's how you feel about marriage too?
>
> I do. Get married if you want. I hope that you have the legal option. But I feel like that's a really personal decision, for whatever reason.

Caroline went on to tell me that she and her spouse "know a female couple who have been together for a long time" who don't want to get married, and said "Whatever is making them choose to stay in a committed partner relationship but not a committed marriage relationship is on them." In this way, she acknowledged that both unmarried and married relationships could be "committed," that there could be any reason for them not wanting to marry, and that it was a personal decision of no concern to her. Yet her phrase that the decision not to marry was "on them" could be interpreted as a subtle judgment, somewhat akin to saying that it was "their loss." In this way, statements of open-mindedness and respect for personal choice might mask implicit forms of stigma toward those who do not marry. Nevertheless, the point here is that statements of respect for personal choice were more frequent and explicit than expressions of stigma.

Unmarried participants who wanted to marry also made clear that they were open-minded about those who did not. Ryan, a 29 year-old unmarried man was "planning" on getting married to his partner. He said: "I definitely want to get married and have some sort of path laid out" and he told me that he and his partner had had "serious" conversations about it to make sure they were "thinking on the same page" and that there was "an assurance that it will happen." Yet he believed that marriage was a decision that was not right for everyone:

> I think that everyone deserves to have the life that they want. I'm always in support of options, any options. The more options the better, because everyone's happiness is different, and so if someone wants to live a certain life, my hope is that they're able to pursue it, whatever it may be. It doesn't mean that everyone should get married. I definitely don't think marriage is for everyone.

Similarly, Alisa, a 27 year-old unmarried woman, was planning on proposing to her partner. She was very emotional when she talked about her own marriage. She had always "held marriage on a pedestal" but had felt like she "wasn't worthy of it" and that no one would "ever love her enough" to want to get married. Then, after starting to date her partner, she said: "All of a sudden I could totally see myself doing this [getting married], and I realized how much I *really* want it." Alisa could not wait to get married and start a family, and she would have been very upset if it did not happen in the near future. Yet when she discussed how she felt about other people's decisions to marry or not she saw it very differently. She described marriage with no emotion at all, as a simple, free choice: "I think that marriage is something that you can do in life but you don't have to do it. It's something that people can pick and choose like 'I'm going to brush my teeth today,' or they choose to wear an outfit one day or they don't."

There is a striking disjuncture between how essential participants felt marriage was for their own relationships (Chapter 1) and their professed open-mindedness about whether or not other people marry. A possible institutional explanation for this is that the institution of marriage no longer governs social action through shared norms about what people *should* do. Marriage is not as normative as it once was, and most people do not marry because they feel they have to or because they are following some deeply socialized moral obligation. Instead, taken-for-granted ideas about marriage love, and commitment make marriage seem like a very personal decision – one that is essential to many LGBQ people in their own relationships, but unrelated to what other people should or should not do. Nonetheless, cultural ideas about what marriage means can still

result in less direct, more implicit kinds of stigma, as I show, because they can become so taken-for-granted that some people have a hard time even conceptualizing non marital relationships as loving or committed.

Stigma Against Those Who do not Conform to Monogamy

As with stigma based on marital status, I found little evidence of stigma based on relationship practices among the LGBQ people who took part in this study. I asked participants a direct question about their views on monogamy and marriage and so if they had negative opinions about those who are non-monogamous I would have expected them to emerge in response to that question, but they did not. Nor did they come up in response to other questions, such as broader questions about their experiences dating in the LGBQ community. Only two out of 116 participants expressed any direct negativity toward their gay peers who were non-monogamous, and again both examples were from unmarried participants. Cody, a 36 year-old unmarried participant, expressed stigma toward his non-monogamous peers in response to a completely unrelated question. He was telling me some of the reasons he and his partner did not feel in any rush to get married, when out of the blue he ranted:

> I will be honest with you, I have a lot of gay friends that are married and it hasn't changed how they interact with each other. And that disappoints me. A lot of them have open relationships even though they're married. A lot of them they kinda still just do stuff that a single person should be doing. I still love the concept of gay marriage but I'm disappointed at how a lot of gay men have used it, and it makes me sad. Personally when I look at marriage I think of monogamy. … It just is so frustrating for me cause so many people have worked so hard to give you this right and you're *making it look* horrible (emphasis added). It's almost like you're just taking it for granted. It's kind of a sacred thing to me, not a religious sacred thing but a thing where you're bonding two people. And you're not single anymore - you need to act like you're bonded.

Cody's views that other gay men were undermining the sanctity of marriage by being non-monogamous upset him so much that it was a reason he and his partner were holding off on

getting married themselves. This example offers some direct evidence of LGBQ people expressing negativity about non-monogamy because of a concern with external legitimacy, as institutional theory would predict.

The only other example of explicit stigmatization of non-monogamies I encountered was not directly connected to marriage, but was instead a more general condemnation of gay men who "slept around." Evan, a 47 year-old unmarried man, described gay men who "slept around" as not having figured out that there are "other ways to be a gay man." He thought that gay men his age who went to bars to meet people and who slept around needed to "learn to be an adult and be sensible." However, nothing in Evan's responses indicated that his views on non-monogamy had changed since gaining the right to legally marry, or that having marriage rights had in any way contributed to his views. While Cody's feelings of negativity about non-monogamy may have resulted from gaining access to legal marriage, Evan's likely pre-dated it. It's noteworthy that here, again, age may play a role. Men in their late 40s, like Evan, came of age during the height of the AIDS crisis in the United States. Their views on monogamy are likely heavily shaped by this experience. Indeed, Evan later went on to specifically connect his disapproval of non-monogamy with the AIDS crisis, when he said that he came across too many older gay men who were HIV positive because they had come out of heterosexual marriages later in life and felt the need to "sleep around" with men to "make up for lost time." He implied that, unlike him, they had not personally experienced the AIDS crisis and were learning the lessons he had taken from it much later in life.

As was also the case with stigma based on marital status, more participants expressed negativity about non-monogamy indirectly and implicitly than expressed it directly and explicitly, but they were still a small minority. There is a high rate of this kind of negative

stereotyping of non-monogamous relationships among the general heterosexual public. Compared to monogamous relationships, consensual non-monogamous relationships are perceived as less satisfying and lower in relationship quality, and those involved in consensus non-monogamy are perceived as fundamentally flawed (Conley et al. 2013; Moors et al. 2013). Only a small number of participants (12 - both married and unmarried) in this study expressed these kinds of views. They said that they "respected" other people who had non-monogamous relationships and had "no problem" with it, but described non-monogamous relationships as inevitably or always "leading to hurt" and "drama filled." Kaitlyn, a 29 year-old married woman, said of non-monogamy: "If it works for other people, that's great, good for them, but I personally couldn't do it emotionally. It's a nice idea in theory, but if you're being honest with yourself then someone's feelings always get hurt." In response to a question about monogamy, Lizzie, a 48 year-old married woman, conflated non-monogamy with "betrayal" and "infidelity," and argued: "If you're doing that, something's not working in your relationship." Josh, a 40 year-old married man, saw non-monogamous relationships as not working because they were too full of "drama:"

> I know people who are non-monogamous, but my experience is that it just doesn't work. … I think the people that say that it works for them have a completely different idea of what they want to get out of their life than I do. So yeah, it works, but it is usually like very tumultuous and emotional and challenging and all that. … [If I were to be non-monogamous] I'd have to quit my job, because if my personal life was that drama filled, I wouldn't be able to manage anything!

Although these participants said they did not have a moral objection to non-monogamy they made assumptions about what non-monogamous relationships were like and did not believe they could be of the same quality as monogamous ones. However, there was no evidence that having marriage rights had played any role in influencing these views, and they were not commonly expressed.

Almost a decade after gaining the right to legally marry in Massachusetts, rather than a "hatred of difference, of the abnormal" and a "general loathing of sex" (Seidman 2002) the vast majority of monogamous people in this study appeared to respect other people's decisions to be non-monogamous. They saw their own marriages as necessarily monogamous but did not believe that marriage necessitated monogamy. Similar to the issue of getting married, LGBQ people distinguished what they felt about their own relationships from how they felt about other people. In fact, participants regularly responded to questions about monogamy in their own relationships by expressing their support for others. When I asked Talia, a 47 year-old married woman, "How do you feel about monogamy in your relationship?" she replied, "Well I don't have any judgments about how other people should do it but it's important to me." Courtney, a 37 year-old married participant, responded to the same question saying: "As a general rule I'm non judgmental about it for other people, but monogamy is what works for us. And it's not because of some sort of judgment; it's just that we're happier in a monogamous relationship." In the same way, Robert, a 51 year-old married man, stated unprompted:

> For us, monogamy works. Neither one of us would want it any other way. But if other people like that [non-monogamy], that doesn't bother me. That's their business, and if it works for them then it's fine. I'm not going to put anybody down. Just because it doesn't work for us doesn't mean it's not okay for somebody else.

At first Austin, a 48 year-old married man, appeared to have strong views on the topic of monogamy. He said, "To me monogamy is tremendously important for a stable, long-term relationship." But less than a minute later he added, "We know one couple that's in an open relationship, and it seems to work for them. So we don't have any problem, whatever works for other people is fine with us." In this way, married participants were often quick to emphasize that just because monogamy was important to them did not mean that they negatively judged those who were not monogamous.

Married people's quick and unprompted defenses of non-monogamy suggest that they may have been conscious of critiques about marriage as normalizing and stigmatizing. They wanted to stress that this did not apply to them, and made sure that I did not misread their need for monogamy as a condemnation of others. Keith, a 41 year-old married man, addressed this more directly:

> I think there are a lot of people who feel that the marriage equality movement has been an attempt to normalize and mainstream what was queer. … But equality is the ability to choose how you live your life, and to be accepted fully based on those choices, even if you don't necessarily agree with those choices. To give you an example, a friend of mine is involved in a five person marriage essentially. So they all live together and they all have sex with each other and love each other and they've been in this tangled web of polyamorous relations for years, and it works for them, so who are we to judge that, right? The polyamorous relations that my friend and his partners have is not for me. Our marriage is not for him. Fine. We can all love each other and respect each other and be part of a community as co-equals.

He wanted to emphasize that it was possible to want marriage equality, be married and monogamous, and still support the life-choices of others. Keith also believed that this "was not a mainstream view in the LGBT community," and thought that there "are lots of people who are fighting for marriage equality that find all of that to be just too much." Yet, at least among my participants, Keith's openness to difference *was* a mainstream view. The issue of non-monogamy may have been "too much" for those still actively fighting for marriage rights to support or promote, but among the rank and file LGBQ people I interviewed, who already had the right to legally marry, this was not be the case.

Several participants also described their own need for monogamy as a kind of personal failing and saw people who were non-monogamous as possessing skills and qualities that they lacked. Some thought that they were not emotionally strong enough to cope with non-monogamy. Gretchen, a 51 year-old married woman said: "In my relationship I do not believe non-monogamy would work. For me, it's too complicated with all the emotions. And this is an

issue I've talked to my polyamorous friends about. I find it very hard to keep things in boxes and keep your emotions and jealousies [in check], so it always just seemed a little too complicated to me." Others believed that being non-monogamous required organizational skills that they did not possess. Grace, 48, married said that she wasn't a good enough "planner" to be able to work through the rules for how they would be non-monogamous:

> It's not that either of us feel that a relationship has to be monogamous, we certainly don't judge people that are non-monogamous. We just think it's really hard to do that. We're not great planners together, so I wouldn't feel very confident that we'd be able to go through the process of coming to terms for how that would work out.

Raul, a 48 year-old married man said that he would not be able to manage multiple people's needs: "I respect it and I don't judge it, it's just not for me. I know couples that have open relationships and everybody has different rules about it. But I just think it's hard enough to keep track of one person! Add one more person and it's too complicated!" Brianna, a 31 year-old married woman, similarly said she had a "lack of brain power" to cope with non-monogamy but admired other people who managed to make it work.

The survey findings lend support to the views expressed during interviews. When asked their opinion on the statement "Couples that live together should always be monogamous," more participants disagreed (37%) than agreed (27%), and over a third (36%) had no opinion on the matter, suggesting a great deal of open-mindedness on the issue. There were also no significant differences in the opinions of married and unmarried participants with regard to monogamy. Married and unmarried people alike were open-minded on the issue of non-monogamy for other people. Unfortunately this survey question did not distinguish between monogamy in married and unmarried relationships. As such, the findings demonstrate openness toward non-monogamy in general but do not show that this applied evenly to both married and unmarried relationships. However, in the interviews participants typically did not differentiate between married and

unmarried relationships in their statements about non-monogamy, and when they did specify marital status they were just as open-minded about non-monogamy in marriage as they were about it in unmarried relationships. For example, Erin, a 36 year-old married participant, said of marriage: "I think marriage works when two people work together. So, I think if people have an open understanding and that's how they can function well, and that works for them, it's fine by me. I don't feel like marriage has to be any one way." Similarly, Linda, a 54 year-old married woman, said: "I know that a lot of married people, gay and straight, don't have monogamous relationships, and I don't think I have strong feelings about that, I think it all depends on the situation … I kind of think that it's a personal decision."

Both expressions of stigma and open-mindedness on the issue of non-monogamy varied somewhat by gender. There were no statistical differences by gender in participants' views on monogamy in the survey but analysis of the interview data revealed clearer gendered patterns. One might think that gay men would be more accepting of non-monogamy because it is more of a statistical and social norm among them: 27% of men in this study said they were "non-monogamous," compared to just 5% of women.[10] However, overall, the men also seemed to be less open-minded about non-monogamy than the women. Although men more often had non-monogamous relationships than women, those men who were monogamous were more likely to express negativity toward their non-monogamous peers, and less likely to express statements of open-mindedness on the issue. Recall that the only examples of explicit negativity toward non-

[10] A further 17% of men in this study can be described as "monogamish," while no women could be. The term "monogamish" was coined by Dan Savage in his column *Savage Love* to refer to his relationship with his partner, with whom he was "mostly monogamous," but it can mean a number of different things. For all of these people, this meant that they considered themselves monogamous because they did not engage in sexual activity with other people independently of their partner, but they did engage in sexual activity with others together as a couple, usually in a "threesome."

monogamous people were directed at gay men by gay men. From an institutional perspective, men's lower tolerance of non-monogamy among other gay men makes sense because it poses more of a threat to their external legitimacy. The LGBQ people in this study were well aware of the much higher rates of non-monogamy among men than women and also believed this was common knowledge among heterosexuals. Other people's perceptions that non-monogamy in male same-sex relationships is common might pose a risk to those men who are monogamous and wish to be seen as "normal." By contrast, the low prevalence and lesser visibility of non-monogamy among women in same-sex relationships means that monogamous women might not see other people's non-monogamy as a threat to the "normal" image they want to portray. Nevertheless, overall, among both men and women, the dominant trend was little judgment and much open-mindedness on the issue of non-monogamy.

Conclusion

Many LGBQ people already lived "normal" lives and had very ordinary looking relationships before they gained the right to legally marry, as marriage rights advocates have spent so much time emphasizing. Yet marriage also plays a role in normalizing LGBQ people, by increasing their desire for conventional lives, and providing a pre-made, easier template for their relationships. Many participants were grateful for the new "normal" possibilities they saw marriage as providing. However, they also often shared the concerns of LGBQ activists that normalization would have troubling consequences for LGBQ communities.

As institutional scholars predict (Schneiberg and Clemens 2006) and critics of same-sex marriage warn (Duggan 2003; Gilreath 2011), the institutionalization of marriage has contributed to the suppression and softening of critical, radical voices within LGBQ communities, and my

findings help show the mechanisms through which it does so. Marriage suppresses critical perspectives by making critiques of marriage seem more like "personal" criticisms of friends and acquaintances, and therefore less appropriate, and by shifting the focus away from an intellectual level of analysis toward a focus on emotions. It also softens critical perspectives through mimetic processes, which make people who were once critical more desiring of it. At the same time, my findings suggest that the same impulse toward open-mindedness may act as a buffer against another possible normalizing consequence of marriage – increased stigma for those who do not conform. The institutionalization of marriage did not appear to have resulted in increased or widespread stigma towards those who choose not to marry or conform to marital norms. [11] This was, at least in part, because the same idea of respect for "personal choice" influenced open-mindedness about both normative and non-normative relationship choices.

The rhetoric of marriage as a "free" and "personal" choice for others may be a mechanism to help some LGBQ people make sense of their own marital decision-making experiences. Nobody likes to acknowledge that external, societal influences shape our most personal decisions. We want to think of ourselves as free agents and so we assign this agency to others too. By talking of marriage as a free choice for others, participants were also downplaying the societal influences many of them had felt and experienced. The idea that marriage is a "free" or "personal" choice allows marriage to be seen as an *individual* decision and ignores the *social* and *cultural* power that the institution of marriage has over people's personal relationship

[11] In this chapter, I present only what participants told me they thought. Knowing what people say they feel is not necessarily reflective of how they act. For example, participants said they respected polyamorous friends, but did they invite the multiple partners of their friends to events, or privilege only one partner? I have no way of answering questions such as these with my data.

aspirations and choices.[12] Nevertheless, the rhetoric of "personal choice" participants assigned to *other* people's marital decisions also appeared to reflect genuine efforts on the part of LGBQ people not to judge or marginalize their peers. Many participants seemed to go out of their way to ensure that I (and others) know that they would not engage in stigmatizing behavior as part of the community's efforts to gain broader societal rights and respect. Belonging to a community with a long history of marginalization, it makes sense that LGBQ people would be particularly sensitive to this issue. A cultural norm of tolerance for difference in LGBQ communities seems to have transferred over into the post-marriage context, so that marriage and tolerance are coexisting as normative ideals. Tolerance for difference may be a lasting component of the LGBQ experience, but it's also possible that, over time, this protective buffer against stigma may weaken, as newer generations of LGBQ people feel less sensitive to and impacted by a history of marginalization.

[12] Seidman (2002) critiques that " Rights advocates often rationalize the marginalizing effects of marriage by appealing to a language of individual choice. The right to marry, they say, merely gives gays a choice that they presently lack; and it does not preclude individuals from choosing not to marry, and it doesn't necessarily devalue other intimate arrangements," and argues, "This argument is sociologically naïve" (192). Some participants also used the language of "choice" to counter possible critiques of marriage. However, I would not expect rank-and-file LGB people to have the kind of sociological awareness Seidman (2002) suggests rights advocates should have. My argument is only that the rhetoric of "choice" they used is playing a similar role here in allowing them to ignore the social and cultural power of marriage.

CONCLUSION

Throughout this dissertation, I examined the ways having access to legal marriage has impacted LGBQ people's couple, family, and community relationships. In doing so, I have bridged two disparate fields of study – family studies and institutional studies – to shed new light on the character and strength of contemporary marriage as an institution. Neither field has addressed the institution of marriage in any depth. Family scholars refer to marriage as an institution but have only rarely attempted to theorize or study empirically exactly what this means, while neo-institutional scholars have focused primarily on economic and political organizations and typically mention marriage only in passing. This work offers family scholars a more comprehensive and nuanced examination of marriage, and institutional scholars a new case study for thinking through institutional processes and outcomes. In addition, it provides sexualities scholars much needed empirical data on contemporary LGBQ relationships in a rapidly changing legal and social landscape.

The Institutionalization of Same-Sex Marriage finds that marriage had become institutionalized among LGBQ people in Massachusetts, just eight years after same-sex marriage had become legal there. Marriage has become taken-for-granted as an expected and necessary relationship outcome. It governs their relationship choices and behaviors, and it is understood as a unique means of obtaining social legitimacy. This study also demonstrates the institutional mechanisms through which contemporary marriage operates. It shows that although marital rules and norms have weakened, widely shared, taken-for-granted cultural scripts that connect marriage to love and commitment have a powerful influence over intimate relationships. In addition, it provides a detailed, complex picture of the consequences of the institutionalization of marriage for LGBQ people. It shows that marriage can provide LGBQ people with more defined,

easier templates for their relationships, fulfill their desires for commitment and security, and make them feel they belong more in their communities and society at large. At the same time, it can also weaken relationships that do not follow the marital path, depress debate and critical perspectives, create new inequalities, and highlight the limits of family and societal acceptance.

In some ways, this study captures a very particular historical moment. Although the youngest participants felt as if they had always had access to legal marriage, this was not true for most of the people that I interviewed. Rather, most experienced gaining access to legal marriage as a pivotal moment and profound transformation in their relational history. The transition from exclusion to inclusion in the institution of marriage made them acutely aware of the influence of marriage in their lives and uniquely positioned them to consider how it had changed their relationships. The SCOTUS decision in 2015 that legalized same-sex marriage throughout the country means that every new same-sex relationship is now starting with the potential for legal marriage. Over time, it will therefore become harder for LGBQ people to perceive how legal marriage is influencing their relationships and to see the difference it makes. Just like heterosexuals, I expect that same-sex couples will come to "pay little attention to the institutional nature of everyday life" (Cherlin 1978:646) and marriage will become an unexamined institutional backdrop in their lives. The distinctive position of this group therefore offers an exceptional vantage point from which to study the impact of marriage on LGBQ lives and from which to examine institutional processes as they are occurring.

The Impact of Legal Marriage on LGBQ Relationships

The LGBQ people who took part in this study had a wide array of marital experiences, and it is not possible to capture or do justice to them all in this dissertation. This dissertation also does not

speak to the experiences of all LGBQ people. For example, single LGBQ people, those with less education, and those whose who live in other states, may experience gaining the right to legally marry differently. Nonetheless, the findings of this study offer important insights into the experience of same-sex marriage. Now that same-sex marriage is legal across the country, scholars and cultural commentators are eager to know more about what this means for same-sex couples and LGBQ communities. To that end, here I offer a brief overview of ten key empirical findings from this study about how gaining the right to legally marry impacted LGBQ people's couple, family, and community relationships.

1. Gaining access to legal marriage catalyzed decisions to marry

Legal marriage did not introduce the possibility or idea of marriage to LGBQ people, but it did prompt many more couples to marry than would likely otherwise have done so. LGBQ people often already had marital aspirations and ideas but without legal marriage they usually did not actualize them. They needed legal marriage to move forward and act on their marital plans. This was not, however, usually because they required legal or financial incentives to marry. Instead, most people got legally married because they understood it as a way to express their love and commitment in a more culturally validated and socially recognized way. Having the option to legally marry allowed them to act upon pre-existing ideas about marriage that felt more real and meaningful.

2. Younger LGBQ people expected to marry and saw it as essential for their relationships

Younger LGBQ people, and especially those who started relationships after gaining the right to legally marry, often assumed they would marry their partners. They took-for-granted that anyone

in a loving, committed relationship would want to get legally married. Many also regarded marriage as essential for relationship progression and survival. They needed reassurance from their partners that they wanted to get married in order to feel secure in their relationships, and could not imagine their relationships lasting without the promise of marriage. Having hypothetical conversations about marriage at an early stage was one mechanism they used to gain the reassurances they needed. However, when they did not gain the necessary reassurance of marriage, this could lead to the demise of the relationship.

3. *The lesser importance older LGBQ people placed on marriage could help them get married*

On average, older LGBQ people, especially those over the age of 50, were less interested in marriage than their younger counterparts and placed less importance on it. Several factors contributed to this, including ideas about the appropriate age and timing of marriage, their having more often had prior heterosexual marriages, and a sense of pride that their relationships had lasted without institutional support. Counter-intuitively, the lesser importance they placed on marriage assisted them in deciding to get married. Because they saw marriage as less important than their partner's happiness, they were sometimes willing to get married to make their partners happy, even if they did not personally think it was important.

4. *LGBQ people said marriage made their relationships better*

LGBQ people usually said nothing "tangible" changed about their relationships after getting married because the routines of their daily lives and relationship patterns were already well established and did not change much. At the same time, however, they also often said that marriage had made their relationships "better." This is because marriage changed their

relationships in more "intangible," affective ways. Specifically, being married made LGBQ people feel more committed and secure in their relationships. This was true even for people who had been in long-term relationships prior to marriage. They felt that getting legally married demonstrated that their partners were "not going anywhere" in a way that expressing it without legal marriage could not have.

5. *The extra commitment and security LGBQ people felt impacted relationship behaviors*

Married LGBQ people not only felt more committed and secure than their unmarried counterparts, they also behaved as if they were. They were significantly less likely to report "seriously considering" ending their relationships, regardless of how long they had been with their partners. Married people were also much more likely to pool all their money with their partners, to own joint property, and have the property be in both names. In addition, LGBQ people also said that being married changed the way they argued and made future plans with their partners. They explained all these differences with reference to the extra commitment and security they felt in marriage compared to their unmarried relationships.

6. *The legitimacy and terminology of marriage helped LGBQ people to come out*

For married LGBQ people, being able to use the terminology of "wife" and "husband" helped them to come out as in a same-sex relationship in routine social conversations without having to say the words "lesbian" or "gay." This meant that their sexuality could be inferred without having to be explicitly stated. They also believed that using the words "wife" and "husband" would convey information to others about their relationship that would automatically grant them legitimacy. They expected that the high social status and legitimacy of marriage would trump the

lower social status and illegitimacy of being in a same-sex relationship. As a result, they felt less apprehension about coming out to heterosexuals in everyday social interactions.

7. *Getting married highlighted the limits of family acceptance and support*

LGBQ people often experienced marriage as like a "second coming out" with their families of origin because it reopened conversations about their sexuality. Although getting married could not force rejecting family members to support their relationships, it sometimes prompted already supportive family to give their relationships greater recognition and respect. However, some LGBQ people were too fearful to broach the topic of marriage with family. They said they had worked hard to have good relationships with family members after initial negative coming out experiences, and did not want to lose the ground they had made. For some, the idea of having to tell their family members was enough to put them off getting married altogether. Getting married exacerbated old anxieties and highlighted the precariousness of family support.

8. *Marriage empowered LGBQ people to challenge prejudice but not to show affection in public*

Both married and unmarried LGBQ people said that gaining the right to get legally married gave them a feeling of equality that changed the way they understood their relationship to others and their place in society. Increased feelings of citizenship and belonging also empowered them to challenge prejudice and discrimination. They did not think prejudice or discrimination had declined, but they did feel better able to deal with it when they encountered it. However, there was a disjuncture between increased willingness to fight prejudice and a continuing unwillingness to show affection in public. LGBQ people were cognizant that having marriage

rights would do little to protect them from harassment and remained vigilant not to put themselves in unsafe situations.

9. *Gaining access to marriage suppressed and softened critical views in LGBQ communities*
LGBQ people who had previously criticized marriage now felt that they risked implying a lack of support for people's personal relationship decisions if they continued to do so. Whether people got married or not was now seen as a private issue, not a topic for public debate. They also said they found it harder to remain critical once they saw how happy getting married made people, and that marriage had become personally more appealing to them. The strong emotional reactions they had to marriage often caught them by surprise and softened the intellectual critiques they had.

10. *Marriage did not usually lessen support for non-marital & non-monogamous relationships*
Although a few people expressed implicit stigma toward those in the LGBQ community who did not want to marry or practice monogamy, most articulated statements of open-mindedness and respect for the "personal choices" of others. They stressed that having the right to legally marry was not in of itself a symbol of true equality; rather, equality also required having the right to choose not to marry and to be free to have any kind of relationship one wanted. LGBQ people were careful to stress that they would not marginalize their less conforming peers in order to gain broader societal rights and respect. A norm of tolerance in the community persisted and protected against new forms of stigma.

Contributions to the Same-Sex Marriage Literature and Avenues for Further Research

This study offers one the most comprehensive investigations of the impact of legal marriage on LGBQ relationships to date. Many of the topics addressed in this study had not, to my knowledge, been empirically examined before, including: how unmarried LGBQ people feel about marriage; how they discuss getting married with their partners; how being married impacts their financial practices, their coming out experiences, and the way they feel about and deal with prejudice; how access to legal marriage impacts those people with more critical views of the institution; and how legal marriage results in increased stigma within LGBQ communities.

The findings of this study also corroborate and expand existing work. With regard to decisions to marry, others have also found that love and commitment rank highly in the reasons LGBQ people give for getting legally married (Ramos et al. 2009; Richman 2013). But I look beyond "reasons" and "motivations" for marriage to explore how having access to legal marriage shapes marital aspirations and actions. Others have also found that same-sex couples prefer marriage over commitment ceremonies, civil unions, or domestic partnerships (Gates et al. 2008; Hull 2006; Reczek et al. 2009; Richman 2013). Yet I show that rather than simply increasing their desire to marry, having access to legal marriage prompts LGBQ people to act on marital aspirations and plans they already had. With regard to the impact of marriage on commitment, scholars have also found that married couples feel more committed to their partners (Ramos, Goldberg and Badgett 2009; Schecter et al. 2008). I show that increased feelings of commitment and security impact relationship behaviors, too. With regard to age-based differences in marital experiences, existing research shows that older same-sex couples are more likely to be married (Gates et al. 2008) and suggests that they are less interested in marriage (Porche and Purvin

2008).[1] However, existing research has not explored how these two trends connect. I use my findings to show the lesser importance older people place on marriage may actually help them make decisions to marry.

In other areas, this study provides an alternative perspective to that of the existing research on same-sex marriage. Most importantly, my findings suggest that legal marriage has less uniformly positive social effects than previous research has suggested. Others have emphasized the ways legal marriage helps same-sex couples gain social legitimacy and acceptance (Richman 2013; Ramos et al. 2009; Schecter et al. 2008) and made people feel safer showing public affection (Richman 2013:152). By contrast, my findings highlight that feelings of legitimacy do not necessarily indicate increased acceptance or support. Having the right to legally marry does not reduce the prejudice and discrimination LGBQ people face, and, in most cases, does not help them feel any safer showing affection in public. Similarly, my findings also show that legal marriage has less uniformly positive effects on family relationships than most others have found (Ramos et al. 2009; Richman 2013; Schecter et al. 2008). One exception is the web-based survey research by Lannutti (2008), which highlighted that a lack of family approval could be an obstacle to marriage for same-sex couples. In a previous study of the first wave of gay men who legally married when Iowa approved same-sex marriage in 2011, I found that marriage often led to new and renewed experiences of family rejection (Ocobock 2013). In this study, I also find that some LGBQ people are too fearful to even disclose and discuss their marriages with family members, and that fears over family acceptance can put them off getting married. The findings in this study also differ from existing research on the impact of marriage in

[1] The findings in Porche & Purvin (2008) are limited by the very small sample size - 4 lesbian and 5 gay male same-sex couples, who were together 20 years or more – but I included it here as the findings from this study corroborate their findings about generational differences.

LGBQ communities. Prior research showed that the marriage equality movement opened up space for a critical discussion of marriage as an institution (Bernstein and Burke 2013). To the contrary, I demonstrate that when same-sex couples gain access to marriage it suppresses debate and softens critiques. Overall, my findings paint a more complex, varied picture of the impact of legal marriage on LGBQ relationships than the existing research on same-sex marriage.

My findings point to a number of areas for further research on same-sex marriage. More research is needed to examine how not wanting to marry impacts relationship possibilities and progression among LGBQ people, and how this differs by age, gender, class, and race. Additional research should also explore if and how the altered feelings of commitment and security in marriage impact other relationship behaviors, such as monogamy, sexual practices, having children, and domestic labor. The topic of marital legitimacy also calls for much more research. What situations lead married same-sex couples to lose external legitimacy? And how do married same-sex couples actively manage their behavior and what they disclose about it to maintain legitimacy? Further research should also explore the kinds of factors that might increase stigma based on marital status within LGBQ communities. Additional research is also needed to explore how other groups of LGBQ people experience marriage, including those who are less well educated, racial and ethnic minorities, single people, and those in polyamorous relationships.

The Institutionalization of Marriage

The institution of marriage has changed fairly dramatically in the past century (Amato, Booth and Rogers 2007; Axinn and Thornton 2000; Cherlin 2004; Coontz 2005; Cott 2000). On the surface, same-sex marriage appears to be the latest, and perhaps most radical transformation, in a

long line of changes to the institution of marriage. The idea that same-sex couples will transform marriage has instilled fear in opponents of same-sex marriage and hope in some of its supporters. The reality is, of course, much more complex. First, some degree of institutional change was necessary for same-sex marriage to become a desirable goal for LGBQ people in the first place. Family scholars make clear that it is because the rules and norms of marriage had already weakened that same-sex couples begun to desire access to it. As Coontz (2004) argues, "Marriage as we have known it for 5,000 years had *already* been overthrown [when same-sex couples started seeking access to marriage]… but, it was heterosexuals, not gays and lesbians, who accomplished this revolution" (977). She explains that LGBQ people's desire and demand for marriage is "a symptom, not the cause, of how much and how irreversibly marriage has already changed" (977). It is because marriage today does not require specific ways of behaving - for example, of sharing domestic labor, engaging in intimacy, or having children - that same-sex couples are able to enter the institution with relative ease. Second, as Badgett (2009) argues, the evidence suggests that marriage changes gay people more than gay people change marriage (202-209). The findings of this study also support this assessment, although I make a somewhat different argument. Rather than showing how marriage "changes" LGBQ people, I show that the institution of marriage is plenty strong enough to withstand changes to the population of people marrying. Marriage expanded to include same-sex couples into the institution as it already existed and became institutionalized among LGBQ people without any substantive changes to its meaning or practice.

Moving beyond debates about whether marriage changes gay people or they change it, the findings in this study push scholars to examine what we can learn from the case of same-sex marriage about how the institution of marriage works today. They demonstrate that even though

the "social norms that define people's behavior in a social institution such as marriage'' have weakened this does not, as Cherlin (2004) argues, mean that marriage has been "de-institutionalized" (848). Institutionalization does not depend on the existence of strong social norms for behavior. The neo-institutional literature makes clear that "Even as external formal and informal rules weaken and actors have more freedom in their choices, internalized taken-for-granted assumptions and unconscious processes of imitation will likely remain in place," which means that "marriage should remain institutionalized" (Lauer and Yodanis 2010:67). This is exactly what we see happening in the case of same-sex marriage. The case of same-sex marriage helps illuminate how marriage continues to have a strong institutional power over our relationships, even in the absence of strong social norms. For the most part, the LGBQ people who took part in this study got married and followed expected marital behaviors not because they felt they had to but because they had internalized taken-for-granted assumptions about the special connection between marriage, love, commitment, and legitimacy. Some of these cultural ideas already permeated same-sex relationships before marriage was a legal possibility, but gaining the right to legally marry elevated them to a more taken-for-granted nature and gave LGBQ people a means of enacting them.

Eight years after gaining the right to legally marry, many of the LGBQ people in this study took-for-granted that they would get married. For younger participants not marrying had become untenable for their relationships. Ideas about marriage and commitment were so taken-for-granted that they often manifested themselves as emotional changes. They also had the power to profoundly change how people felt about their relationships, and to influence what relationship behaviors and practices they engaged in. In addition, the LGBQ people in this study

took-for-granted that their relationships would be legitimized by marriage, even in the absence of any evidence of increased heterosexual acceptance or support.

Institutionalization and Personal Choice

Despite the clear impact that marriage had had on their relationships, participants in this study routinely described marriage as a very "personal" choice. They are not alone. This was also the kind of language the Supreme Court Justices used in making same-sex marriage legal. Justice Kennedy wrote that a core principle demonstrating the reasons marriage is fundamental under the constitution is that "the right to personal choice regarding marriage is inherent in the concept of individual autonomy" (Obergefell v. Hodges 2015:12). He continued, "decisions about marriage are among the most intimate that an individual can make," and explained that it was this "abiding connection between marriage and liberty" that also invalidated interracial marriage bans in the Court's 1967 decision in *Loving v. Virginia.* This had also been a key argument in the Supreme Judicial Court decision to make same-sex marriage legal in Massachusetts, when it was argued that "the decision whether and whom to marry is among life's momentous acts of self-definition" (Goodridge v. Department of Public Health 2003:322). Yet Gilreath (2011) has argued that "the language of personal choice and freedom" that so often accompanies marriage "has the effect of masking the reality of force actually rendering marriage compulsory" (217). He conceptualizes the institution of marriage as operating much like other institutions that have historically been used to control homosexuality, including prisons and psychiatric wards. The answer, I think, lies somewhere in between these two perspectives. Marriage is not a completely private choice made by individuals in a social vacuum but nor is it a compulsory institution of control and oppression.

The idea that marriage is a "free" or "personal" choice is problematic because it allows marriage to be seen as an *individual* decision and ignores the *social* and *cultural* power that the institution of marriage has over people's personal relationships. Examining marriage as a case of institutionalization necessarily directs our attention to the ways in which marriage constrains our relationship choices and the meanings we attach to them. In its truest form, to say that marriage is institutionalized implies that LGBQ people can conceive of no alternatives. Whatever the reason for getting married – be it legal benefits, legitimacy, or love – marriage appears like the only means of obtaining them. If LGBQ people get legally married because it is the only way to access important benefits and protections then can we really say that it is a completely free and personal choice to marry? If they marry because they do not think their relationships will be legitimated without it then, again, is this really a free choice? If LGBQ people take-for-granted that legal marriage is the only meaningful way to express love and commitment then doesn't this imply they lack the freedom to express love and commitment in other, more varied ways? The cultural scripts available to LGBQ people in making decisions to legally marry also appear to be very limited. Swidler (2001) has shown that people vary greatly in how much culture they apply to their own lives - some people draw on a wide range of cultural precepts, while others move within narrow confines, using one or two formulas or phrases again and again (46). Yet when it came to the decision to marry, I found very little variation. Most of the LGBQ people in this study seemed to be drawing on a very limited repertoire of cultural ideas (Swidler 2001), evoking the same basic notions of marriage as the ultimate expression of love and commitment again and again.

By contrast, there was much greater variation in the ways LGBQ people actually practiced marriage – and this is where we see more evidence of personal choice and freedom.

Although participants were following the same basic cultural scripts in deciding which relationship practices to engage in, such as to pool finances or practice monogamy, within these activities there was much room for variation. The specific ways that people shared and managed their finances varied greatly. So too did the ways they understood monogamy and practiced it. They also exhibited a wide variety of ways to divide domestic labor, and to have and raise children in marriage. In this way, LGBQ people exercised choice and freedom within the constraints of broad institutional expectations, so that the fundamental assumptions of marriage remained intact while the specifics of how they did so varied greatly. As Swidler (2001) makes clear, "marriage is the institution that decides, or at least redefines, important elements of one's life organization. But at the same time … it is up to individuals to form marriages, to link their life strategies to the institutional structure marriage provides" (131). Thus, while the institutionalization of marriage necessarily means LGBQ people's relationship choices are constrained, individuals will continue to exhibit agency in the specifics of their everyday relationship practices.

Incomplete Institutionalization?

The findings presented in this study suggest a high degree of institutionalization had already occurred, but same-sex marriage may still be incompletely institutionalized. Here I do not mean that it is "incompletely institutionalized" in the way that Cherlin (1978) articulated of remarriages. Cherlin argued that remarriage was "incompletely institutionalized" because, unlike people in first marriages, people in remarriages lack the taken-for-granted assumptions about how to act and behave and therefore have to negotiate appropriate behaviors with little

institutional guidance.[2] However, it is not a lack of taken-for-grantedness that makes same-sex marriage "incompletely institutionalized." I have already shown just how taken-for-granted assumptions about marriage were. Instead, I suggest that same-sex marriage may be incompletely institutionalized with regard to another key component of institutionalization – legitimacy. LGBQ people assumed their marriages would grant them social legitimacy, but these assumptions did not rely on any evidence that other people really saw their relationships as more legitimate. Moreover, their marriages did not make their relationships legitimate enough to guarantee them acceptance and support from family members, nor to ensure their safety in public. This leads to the conclusion that although marriage is highly institutionalized among LGBQ people, it is not yet institutionalized in any broader societal sense.

It is also too soon to know how completely marriage will be institutionalized among new generations of LGBQ people. Zucker (1977) makes clear that "for cultural persistence, transmission from one generation to the next must occur" (727). My findings highlighted generational differences in degrees of institutionalization, with younger LGBQ people exhibiting more of the qualities of institutionalization than their older peers. It is therefore likely that marital scripts will get transmitted to new generations and become even more taken-for-granted, but we cannot know this yet. This cohort, being the first to be able to legally marry, may well have unique patterns and experiences of marriage that may not be duplicated in subsequent

[2] Hequembourg (2004) points out that despite the popularity of Cherlin's hypothesis, there have been surprisingly few studies to test his assertions about stepfamilies. Among the few existing studies, some (Jacobsen 1995) argue that he overstated the impact of incomplete institutionalization on heterosexual stepfamilies, whereas
others (Fine, Coleman and Ganong 1998) support his assertions that there are fewer existing scripts to help guide stepparent expectations than there are for biological parents. Hequembourg (2004) argues that Cherlin's concept of "incomplete institutionalization" is useful for understanding the experiences lesbian mothers and she shows how lesbian mothers forge their own scripts when institutionalized structures are inadequate.

cohorts. As such, how same-sex marriage is experienced in the first decade after legalization may not tell us much about what how it will be experienced it in the longer term.

Contributions to Institutional Literature and Avenues for Further Research

Throughout this study I have drawn on the institutional literature primarily as a means of developing ideas within family scholarship about the institution of marriage, but the findings in this study can also provide new insights for institutional scholarship. First, this study offers an empirical demonstration of how taken-for-granted cultural scripts guide social action. In this way, it emphasizes the role that culture plays in sustaining institutions. I agree with Swidler (2001) that "love and marriage provide a perfect example of [the] relationship between culture and institutions" (130). Yet she conceptualizes cultural scripts as most necessary when institutions are weak, so that "people continue to elaborate and shore up with culture that which is not fully institutionalized" (132). By contrast, my findings illustrate that cultural scripts are themselves a primary mechanism of institutionalization. They show empirically that "not norms and values but taken-for-granted scripts, rules, and classifications are the stuff of which institutions are made" (DiMaggio and Powell 1991:15).

In addition to the relationship between institutions and culture, my findings also highlight the role that emotions might play in institutionalization processes. Love and commitment are especially personal, intimate topics that we would expect to have an emotional element and, as such, the role that they play in institutionalizing marriage may be unique. Nonetheless, it is possible that when other kinds of cultural scripts are at their most taken-for-granted they too may manifest as "feelings." Really believing in cultural scripts may have the power to produce emotional responses and changes, which in turn may also impact social action. Moreover,

through changes in emotional states, behaviors that were previously compulsory or normative can be re-invoked in ways that on the surface appear more personal and individual. Swidler (2001) hints at the connection between culture, institutions, and emotions in marriage when she argues that "the mythic culture of love relocates the institutional features of marriage - exclusive, all-or-nothing, transformative, enduring - in the interior of individual psyches" (122), and that these cultural ideas "reconstitute the institutional characteristics of marriage as intrapsychic states" (130). Others have also noted that emotions are an important component of the law (Richman 2013). But emotions have not been explored directly in the institutional literature. The particular relationship between cultural scripts, emotions, and relationship behaviors in institutional processes warrants more attention.

Some work in the institutional literature has begun to try and better delimit the concept of legitimacy and explore how it differs from other related concepts, such as reputation (Deephouse and Carter 2005). Similarly, the findings of this study reveal the importance of distinguishing legitimacy from social acceptance. Most institutional definitions of legitimacy connect it to acceptability or acceptance (Deephouse and Carter 2005:332; Meyer and Rowan 1977:351; Suchman 1995:574). However, my findings show that the legitimacy LGBQ people stood to gain through the institution of marriage did not necessarily depend upon heterosexual acceptance, nor help achieve it. They also suggested that, when it comes to making value judgments about others, some LGBQ people place higher value on being socially accepting than on obtaining social legitimacy. Further research should interrogate conceptual clarification between legitimacy and acceptance, from the standpoints of both those granting and receiving legitimacy. Scholars might look for other cases where feelings of legitimacy change how actors interact with external

individuals and agencies even when it does not alter how others treat them. More research might also explore other situations when alternative values dominate over the desire for legitimacy.

Lastly, this study demonstrates that having access to institutions matter as much as adopting institutional structures or practices. The institutional literature typically focuses on why organizations adopt particular structures or practices (DiMaggio and Powell 1983; Meyer and Rowan 1977). I found that simply having access to the institution of marriage mattered for LGBQ people's relationships. In some ways getting married had a unique impact, for example in the kinds of relationship behaviors and practices they engaged in, or in the legitimacy that they believed marriage granted them. Yet in other ways simply having access to the institution of marriage made a difference to their relationships, for example shaping their relationship aspirations, catalyzing them to act on pre-existing relationship plans, and empowering them in social interactions. Institutional scholars might gain further conceptual clarification on how institutional access and adoption differ in their effects on social action by exploring other cases where particular groups of individuals or organizations are excluded from an institution and then gain access to it, or by comparing the experiences of those with and without access to particular institutions.

In examining same-sex marriage as a case of institutionalization, I have answered pressing questions about how having access to legal marriage will impact LGBQ lives, demonstrated the continuing institutional power of marriage over personal and social relationships, and illuminated some of the mechanisms through which institutions govern social action. Marriage is here to stay, and we should not expect its meaning or practice to change in any substantive ways in the near future. My hope is that when scholars discuss the "de-institutionalization of marriage" and

politicians and pundits lament its decline, readers can draw on the insights in this study to challenge and interrogate what that really means.

APPENDIX A - METHODS

Research Site and Context

When I first started planning this research project there were six states that offered full, legal marriage to same-sex couples and two additional states in which same-sex marriage had been legalized but had not yet gone into effect. There were therefore eight options for a possible research site. Massachusetts stood out as an obvious choice. Massachusetts was the first state to make same-sex marriage legal in 2004. This meant that same-sex marriage had already been legal there for eight years, whereas all the other possible states had offered same-sex marriage for five years or less. As data on the longer-term impact of marriage was absent from existing literature on same-sex marriage, I chose the site that offered as long-term a perspective as was possible. At the time, it also felt as if there was less risk that the legal status of same-sex marriage would change in Massachusetts compared to other states. In other states, opponents were still actively working to overturn decisions that had made same-sex legal. By contrast, Massachusetts had already survived attempts to amend the state constitution to ban same-sex marriage.[1] I did not want to risk that the legal status of same-sex marriage would change mid-way through data collection. It was also important that participants felt that their right to legally marry was safe and permanent in order to observe the full range of possible institutional effects on their relationships.

At the time of data collection, same-sex couples who were legally married at the state level did not have their marriages federally recognized. The Defense of Marriage Act of 1996

[1] Opponents of same-sex marriage worked to try and get a proposed constitutional amendment banning same-sex marriage on the 2008 election ballot. The attempt was blocked by the state legislature in June 2007.

restricted marriage to different-sex couples and therefore denied married same-sex couples access to federal level marriage protections and benefits. In June 2013, just after I had completed data collection, the Supreme Court of the United States overturned the relevant section (Section 3) of DOMA, granting married same-sex couples federal recognition. The lack of federal recognition of their marriages was a topic that many participants brought up in their interviews. They were frustrated by not having what they saw as full equality under the law. There was little evidence, however, that the lack of federal recognition had much substantive impact on their decisions to marry. A couple of participants told me that they would be more interested in marriage if it was federally recognized, both because of what that would represent about equality and what it would give them in terms of legal benefits, but otherwise the lack of federal recognition did not appear to have any bearing on marital decision-making.

Recruitment

Criteria for inclusion in the study

There were two main criteria for inclusion in this study – residency and relationship status. First, to be eligible for the study participants had to be residing in Massachusetts. Same-sex couples who were denied access to legal marriage in their home state often travelled to Massachusetts to get legally married but their marriages were not usually recognized back in their home state (Badgett and Herman 2011). Although it is important to explore how couples in these interstitial positions experienced marriage, I needed participants to have unquestionable access to legal marriage and its potential benefits to fully explore how it impacted their relationships. Second, participants had to have been cohabiting with a same-sex partner for at

least a year, but did not need to be legally married. I purposefully included married and unmarried participants in order to examine how both marital access and status impacted people's relationships. I theorized that LGBQ people who marry would have unique experiences based on their marital status but that, as a normative and taken-for-granted relationship script, marriage would also provide an institutional context for the relationship choices and behaviors of unmarried people. I included only people already in cohabiting relationships because I thought that cohabitation offered some, albeit imprecise, indication of a pre-existing commitment. I wanted participants to be able to speak about marriage as a real possibility for their lives (even if they did not necessarily desire or plan it) rather than just a hypothetical or imagined scenario, as single people might have.

Only one person in any couple was included in the study. I recognized that marriage is comprised of two people who may have different understandings and experiences, and that including both partners is important for research that is aimed at exploring couple dynamics or similarities and differences *within* couples, but this was not the focus on my research. I did not need to know both partners' perspectives on each relationship, but rather wanted to gain a wide variety of perspectives on relationships and marriage from as many people as possible. Based on prior pilot research in Iowa, in which I had included both members of couples (see Ocobock 2013), I felt confident that recruiting individuals would be more advantageous in terms of the size and range of the sample. Participants in this study often told me that not requiring their partners to participate had made their participation easier because their partners would not have wanted to take part. In the rare cases when both partners specifically asked to participate I explained the reason for including only one of them and randomly chose which one would take part. No participant ever expressed any dissatisfaction with this recruitment method.

Recruitment strategies and experiences

I recruited participants and collected data in Massachusetts over the course of a year – from May 2012 to April 2013. I arrived in Massachusetts having never spent more than a week there before and with no pre-existing contacts for the study. A few friends told me that they knew people who might want to participate or who could connect me to others. By chance, I started chatting to one of my new neighbors on my second day in Massachusetts and quickly discovered she was a lesbian who had lots to say on the topic of marriage. She kindly offered to help spread the word about the study. Otherwise all recruitment efforts were done from scratch. I decided to cast as far a net as possible and utilize a wide variety of recruitment strategies. I passed out fliers about the study at LGBTQ events, such as Pride parades and community meetings. I drove all over Massachusetts posting fliers in venues known to be popular with the LGBTQ community, such as coffee shops, bars, and community centers. I contacted the directors of LGBTQ and LGBTQ-friendly community organizations and asked them to distribute information about the study directly to their members. These groups varied greatly. They included a couple of organizations focused on marriage equality issues (for example, MassEquality) but for the most part were non-political, social organizations, such as book clubs, hiking and dancing associations, and support groups. LGBTQ-friendly religious organizations, such as the Metropolitan Community Church, also passed on information about the study to their members. Then as the study progressed, I drew on "snowballing" techniques (Weiss 1994) by asking participants to pass on information to others they knew. The kindness of strangers also facilitated recruitment. Without my knowledge people found out about the study and shared information about it with groups they belonged to and with friends, family members, and acquaintances.

In recruitment materials, I told potential participants that the study was about "how lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender people have experienced gaining the right to legally marry and how it impacts their lives." Recruitment materials made it clear that I was looking for married and unmarried participants, and that it did not matter what their views on marriage were or whether they had any interest in marrying. I did not have the funds to offer every participant a financial incentive for participating, but I offered them the chance to be entered into a drawing to win a $250 gift card of their choice. Very few participants mentioned the drawing when enquiring about the study or during interviews with me, and so this did not seem to be a major incentive for their participation. Instead, participants often told me how grateful they were to have the opportunity to talk about their relationships and marriage.

Over the course of the year, recruitment efforts ebbed and flowed – sometimes I needed to do very little to find new participants; other times I needed to ramp up my efforts, especially to ensure that I get a varied sample. It was not my intention to produce statistically generalizable findings or a sample that was representative of larger populations of married or unmarried same-sex couples in any statistical sense. Rather, I expected my findings to be used to inform theory about same-sex marriage, as well as marriage in general, and to generate hypotheses about an as yet sparsely investigated area of scholarship. As such, I approached recruitment and sample size using more of what Small (2009) describes as "case study logic." Each person (or "case") I recruited was intended to provide an increasingly accurate understanding of my research questions (rather than to make the sample representative). Although I did not turn away interested participants who fit the study criteria, I paid close attention to the demographic characteristics of participants so that I could focus my recruitment efforts on obtaining a diverse and balanced sample. I took a break from recruitment mid-way through the year for a couple of

months to review the data I had already collected. This gave me the opportunity to assess the kinds of participants I had already recruited and identify where my sample was weak.

In general, I found recruiting women much easier than men. I also found recruiting married people easier than recruiting unmarried participants. Despite my best efforts to encourage people with all views on marriage to participate, it is possible that the topic of marriage may have put off those who were not personally interested in it. In the second recruitment period I focused my recruitment efforts more specifically on men and unmarried participants. I made new fliers and other materials that targeted them directly, focused my efforts on advertising at venues I thought might attract more men (such as gyms, clubs, and male-only organizations), and reached out to people who had already participated again to see if they could encourage men and people in unmarried relationships they knew to take part. I continued recruiting until I had reached saturation i.e. the point when I felt that no new information was being added to the knowledge I had already obtained and synthesized.

The Sample

In total, I recruited 116 participants: 66 women and 50 men; 70 of whom were legally married and 46 of whom were in unmarried relationships. Participants ranged in age from 23 to 69, and had been with their partners anywhere from 1 to 32 years. All participants identified as lesbian, gay, bisexual, or queer (92 identified as gay or lesbian, 10 as bisexual, and 13 as queer). Participants were predominantly White, highly educated (84% identified as White only and 92% had a Bachelors degree or higher), and lived in urban areas (53% described where they lived as

an "urban area/city" and a further 33% described it as a "large town or city suburb").[2] Appendix B provides more information on the demographic characteristics of my sample.

It is important to keep in mind the characteristics of the participants in this study when considering the findings. The analysis of this sample – highly educated, predominantly White, urban, cisgender, and coupled - should not be taken to stand in for any other group. In particular, socialization experiences, access to resources, networks, and marriage markets may differ for those with different amounts of education and those of different racial and ethnic backgrounds (Banks 2011; Moore 2011; Schwartz and Graff 2009; Streib 2015). We know that Whites are more likely to marry than African Americans, and Americans with higher income and education are more likely to marry than Americans with lower income and less education (Gibson-Davis et al. 2005; Goldstein and Kenney 2001; Teachman et al. 2000). Recent statistics also suggest these same trends are true for same-sex couples (Gates 2015). Within my sample, I found no clear patterns by race/ethnicity or education, but research with greater proportions of non-white and non-highly-educated participants might show that the impact and experience of same-sex marriage varies by race and class quite substantially. As none of my participants identified as transgender this research also cannot speak to their experiences. My findings also do not speak to the experiences of single people who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, or queer, or to those who are not in dyadic relationships, although they too are likely impacted by gaining access to legal marriage.

[2] This data on the kinds of areas participants lived was self-reported. My experiences going to people's houses to conduct interviews suggest that this data is not very accurate. I was regularly confused about why participants had said they lived in a "large town or city suburb" when the areas they lived in seemed like small towns or even rural areas to me.

Data Collection Methods

This study utilized both qualitative and quantitative methods of data collection. All participants were asked to complete both an online survey and take part in a semi-structured in-person interview with me. As I collected survey and interview data from the same participants, my design involved "nested data" (Small 2011:13). I collected survey data from each participant before conducting interviews with them. This enabled me to tailor the interviews based on the participants' survey responses and to explore issues that emerged in the survey in more detail in the interview. Eight participants completed the survey but did not follow through to do the interview (despite multiple attempts to schedule it with them). In those cases, I did not include their survey responses in the analysis.

The survey was programmed online using Qualtrics Survey Software. Because the survey was fairly complex, with multiple skip patterns, it proved too difficult to offer participants a paper version. However, I made it clear to potential participants that if they did not have access to a computer I would help them to find one to use. In the two cases where participants did not have their own computer, I helped one person make arrangements with a local community center to use their computer, and met the other myself so that they could use my personal laptop to complete the survey. It took participants an average of 30 minutes to complete the survey. The survey collected basic demographic information and included questions on a wide variety of topics relating to their personal and social relationships, including: their relationship history; coming out experiences; commitment and marriage decisions; relationship behaviors and practices (for example, regarding property, finances, sex, domestic labor, childcare, and socializing); relationship satisfaction; relationships with families of origin; friendships, community involvement, and social life; and perceptions of social prejudice and discrimination.

It also asked direct questions regarding their opinions on marriage, and how they thought having the right to legally marry, and being legally married, had impacted various aspects of their lives.

I designed the survey instrument based, in part, on questions that had already been used in other research and established survey measures, so that I would be able to more easily compare my findings to the existing research. For example, I utilized the "Outness Inventory," designed by Mohr and Fassinger (2000) to assess the degree to which participants were open about their sexual orientation, and the "Perceived Social Support from Family/Friends" scale designed by Procidano and Heller (1983) to assess perceived support from family and friends. I also included some questions that other researchers had made publicly available from their own projects, including questions used by Blumstein and Schwartz (1983) in their landmark *American Couples* study, and by and Mignon Moore (2011) in her study of Black lesbian women. However, some of the topics I wanted to ask about had not, to my knowledge, ever been asked about in a survey before, especially regarding the impact of legal marriage on relationship outcomes, and so I had to write many of the questions myself. The survey instrument was tested multiple times by personal contacts in married and unmarried same-sex relationships.

The semi-structured interviews covered many of the same topics as the survey but collected more extensive life and relationship histories, and explored participants' relationship and marital aspirations, choices, and experiences in much more depth. I tried to ensure that all participants discussed the same general topics and that I asked the questions in similar ways. Yet I also tried to leave the interviews flexible enough that I could respond to unexpected issues and change the ordering of questions easily. Interviews lasted from 45 minutes to 3 hours, but averaged an hour and a half. They took place wherever participants felt most comfortable talking and believed they would have privacy. I conducted most interviews at participants' homes but

also did them at my home, and in coffee shops, restaurants, bars, community centers, libraries, and parks. Due to scheduling restraints, two participants were not able to complete in-person interviews with me but agreed to be interviewed over the phone instead. All interviews were audio-recorded with participants' consent. On a couple of occasions, participants joked that I should turn the recorder off because they were about to say something controversial, but they were not serious. In general, participants seemed not to notice the recorder, and recording the interviews never appeared to deter interviewees from speaking openly.

It is worth noting that while I asked individuals to be interviewed in private, without their partners present, and stressed the importance of their being able to speak candidly, on occasion I could not prevent their partner being there during the interview. Sometimes partners would enter the room, or chime in from the adjoining one. On one occasion the interviewee's partner stayed in the room for the whole interview, and I did not feel that I could ask them to leave. The interviewee insisted that her partner's presence would make no difference to her responses but I have no way of knowing if it impacted the interview. I included her interview data in the analysis but noted to consider her responses in light of her partner's presence. On a few other occasions, interviewees whispered particular responses so that their partners in adjoining rooms would not be able to hear, suggesting that they may have also held back from speaking candidly at other points during the interview. However, these instances were rare and most participants had enough privacy to share their views and experiences without concern.

Interviewees regularly appeared emotional and cried during the interviews. They often commented that they had not expected the interview to trigger such emotional responses. When participants became emotional, I reassured them that it was a common reaction and totally understandable, but also made sure they knew they did not have to continue discussing the issue

if they felt it was making them upset. It is possible that the interview process may have triggered emotional responses that lasted beyond the interviews. As I could not follow up with participants due to IRB restrictions, I have no way of knowing if and how the interview experience affected them after it was over. Overall, it seemed as if the interview experience was a positive one for most people. Participants often thanked me profusely for the opportunity to share their experiences and told me that they had found the experience revealing and engaging.

Analysis

I began analysis of the survey data by running simple descriptive statistic for all of the questions, so that I could gain numerical information on the general characteristics of my sample (e.g. central tendencies and distributions) and how they had answered each question. I then conducted Chi-Square analysis to test for correlations between variables. This allowed me to identify key patterns in the data and see the major similarities and differences between the sub-groups in it – for example, between married and unmarried participants, men and women, and different age groups. When Chi-Square analysis proved statistically significant, I then ran regression analysis to further explore what might explain the relationships between variables and see whether the relationship remained significant even after other factors, such as age, relationship duration, and having children were taken into account.

I employed two different approaches in analyzing the interview data. At times, I utilized a deductive method of coding and used the "extended case study method" (Burawoy 1998). I knew in advance that I wanted to use my data to explore how marriage operated as *an institution* and to connect it to existing theories in family and institutional studies. I already knew, for example, that I would try and look at the data for evidence of adherence to norms, taken-for-

granted assumptions about marriage and coercive mechanisms. At other times, I utilized an inductive method of open coding (Charmaz 2006; Lofland and Lofland 1995; Strauss and Corbin 1998) and allowed themes to emerge from participants' responses rather than prior conceptual categories. In addition to coding based on particular questions I had asked or specific things I wanted to know, I also coded the data based on themes that emerged. I could not have known in advance all the themes that would be important in my analysis, for example "emotional responses to marriage," or "the use of marital terminology," and several themes emerged that were not issues I had anticipated in advance, such as the way marriage suppressed critical perspectives. After initial themes were identified in these inductive and deductive ways, I then aggregated and organized them into more precise or conceptual sub-categories. Analytic memos were then created to elaborate and theorize each major code and identify patterns across and within codes.

In many ways, the survey and interview data sources proved very complementary (Small 2011). By comparing across types of data, I gained insights and understanding that might have been missed if only a single method was used, as well as greater elaboration and clarification of results. For example, looking at both kinds of data allowed me to distinguish that being married impacted how LGBQ people argued with their partners, but not how much they argued. With regard to finances, I used survey data to see that financial practices differed significantly between married and unmarried participants but relied on interview data to understand why. With regard to commitment, interview data allowed me to see just how much being married impacted people's feelings of relationship commitment but it was the survey data that showed how these feelings also translated into significantly different behaviors, such as how often participants considered ending their relationships. In these ways, and many others, I drew on

both kinds of data to gain more certainty and understanding and improve the validity of my analysis.

However, I consider myself a primarily qualitative researcher, and I relied heavily on the interview data in my analysis. The qualitative data was essential for understanding LGBQ people's experiences of marriage. Rather than reducing marriage to a variable, the interview data allowed me to get at the lived experience of marriage and see the subtle and nuanced ways it impacted relationships. Many of the topics I wanted to explore were too complex to be captured in closed-ended survey responses and required detail and explanation. For example, the survey could adequately capture community participation but not how gaining access to legal marriage impacted feelings of community belonging. Moreover, while the survey enabled me to easily identify associations between marital status and particular outcomes, it did not help me to see why those associations existed. The interview data was therefore essential for exploring the mechanisms through which marriage shapes relationship experiences. The interviews were also vital for exploring meaning making - how LGBQ people assigned meaning to their actions and experiences and the ways they drew on marital norms and scripts to do so.

I cannot reliably assess whether any of the perceived changes participants told me about *actually* resulted from marriage. However, it was not the intent of this research to make causal arguments. Rather, my findings reflect LGBQ people's subjective perceptions about the effect of marriage in their lives. While the stories individuals tell about their lives may not be entirely objective, they nonetheless reveal underlying patterns in the ways that marriages are experienced and understood. I also believe that it makes sense to treat LGBQ people as people who know their own experiences, and as able to accurately report changes in experience as they moved from a marginalized to included status. This is in keeping with other LGBQ literature, which, for

example, has distinguished between perceived and actual support, and shown that perceptions of support from others are independently linked with various outcomes for gay men and lesbians (Goldberg and Smith 2008; Kindle and Erich 2005).

APPENDIX B - DESCRIPTIVE DATA FOR SAMPLE

Table 7: Individual Level Descriptive Statistics (*N*=115)*

	Number	Percentage
Gender		
Female	65	57%
Male	50	43%
Sexual Identity		
Gay or Lesbian	92	80%
Bisexual	10	9%
Queer	13	11%
Age (Mean: 41)		
18-24	3	3%
25-29	17	15%
30-39	37	32%
40-49	25	22%
50-59	23	20%
60+	10	9%
Racial/Ethnic Origins		
White	97	84%
African American/Black	5	4%
Hispanic or Latino/a	3	3%
American Indian/Alaska Native	2	2%
Asian/Pacific Islander	1	1%
African American/Black AND White	2	2%
Hispanic or Latino/a AND White	2	2%
American Indian/Alaska Native AND White	1	1%
American Indian AND Hispanic AND White	1	1%
Not Answered	1	1%
Highest Level of Education Attained		
High school diploma	6	5%
Associates degree	3	3%
Bachelors degree	36	31%
Master's degree	51	44%
J.D., M.D., or other doctorate	19	17%

*One participant's survey data was lost and so the total n for these descriptive statistics is 115 even though 116 people took part in the study.

Table 7: Individual Level Descriptive Statistics (Continued)

	Number	Percentage
Annual Individual Income **		
$20,000 or below	15	3%
$20,001 to $30,000	10	9%
$30,001 to $40,000	15	13%
$40,001 to $50,000	12	10%
$50,001 to $75,000	24	21%
$75,001 to $100,000	19	17%
$100,001 to $200,000	15	13%
Above $200,000	3	3%
Geographic Location (self-reported)		
Urban area/city	61	53%
Large town or city suburb	38	33%
Small town	14	12%
Rural area	2	2%
Current Religious Affiliation		
None	51	40%
Jewish	19	16%
Unitarian Universalist	13	11%
Protestant	13	11%
Catholic	6	5%
Other***	13	11%

** Two participants did not provide information on income and so the total here is 113.

*** The Other category included several varieties of Christianity (e.g. Anglican and United Church of Christ) and several kinds of spiritual beliefs (e.g. "Spiritualist" and "Polytheist") as well as "Eastern Orthodox," "Jewish/Buddhist," "Pentecostal," "Post-Denominational" and "Fluid."

Table 8: Relationship Level Descriptive Statistics (*N*=115)

	Number	Percentage
Relationship Duration (Mean: 10 years)		
1-4 years	37	32%
5-10 years	36	31%
11-20 years	29	25%
21-30 years	10	9%
31+ years	3	3%
Current Marital Status		
Legally married	70	60%
Unmarried (cohabiting)	46	40%
Number of Unmarried Engaged to be Married	10	22%
Prior Relationships		
Prior Heterosexual Marriage	13	11%
Prior Same-Sex Marriage	2	2%
Prior Non-Legal Commitment Ceremony	12	10%
Children		
Yes	42	37%
No	73	63%
Had child with current partner	27	23%
Had child from previous relationship	15	13%

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