

**“The more you stretch them, the more they grow”: Same-Sex Marriage and the  
Wrestle with Heteronormativity**

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Sign: .....  

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## ABSTRACT

With the understanding that marriage is a historically heteronormative institution that was (and in many respects continues to be) underpinned by heteronormativity, in this doctoral thesis I engage the ways that same-sex couples wrestle with heteronormativity in marriage. I move beyond the assimilationist vs. radicalisation debate that was central in same-sex marriage conversations characterised by the disagreement between Sullivan (1996) and Warner (2000). The assimilationist vs. radicalisation debate is too neat and relies on a binary logic of either or, whereas the experiences of same-sex couples in Cape Town, South Africa demonstrate a much more complicated picture. I argue that while same-sex marriage does not radically change the institution of marriage, it does provide a challenge to systems of dominance such as heteronormativity and has a transformational impact on the interpersonal relationships of same-sex couples. It is an interpersonal transformation, that with time, could possibly change the institution. Through marriage, same-sex couples provide alternative ways of reading same-sex intimacy, readings that challenge the prejudice and stereotypes built on homonegativity. In wrestling with the norm, in challenging dominant gender and sexuality systems through marriage, same-sex couples are engaged in a process of stretching. They stretch themselves as they become more assertive in making claims about their sexuality, they also stretch those around them to become more open to the possibilities of same-sex intimacy. Ultimately same-sex marriage provides alternative ways of reading familiar categories like “husband” and “wife” and reminds us that only our imagination is the limit in the infinite possibilities of relationship construction.

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## Chapter One

### Introduction

#### 1. About This Thesis

The year 2019 marks the thirteenth year since same-sex marriage was legalised in South Africa. South Africa is one of more than twenty nations in the world in a growing list that recognizes same-sex marriage, the majority of which are in the Global North. According to the Cambridge Dictionary (2018), marriage is “a legally accepted relationship between two people in which they live together.” According to Merriam-Webster (2018) marriage is “the state of being united as spouses in a consensual and contractual relationship recognized by law.” Historically this recognition was solely for heterosexual couples in South Africa, and this changed with the legalisation of same-sex marriage in 2006. Considering that the institution of marriage has been embedded in heteronormativity, how do we understand same-sex marriage? In this thesis I argue that in marriage same-sex couple’s wrestle with systemic heteronormativity, and in the process create political possibilities particularly in their immediate surroundings. In this I am echoing sentiments shared by Bernstein (2015: 322) that “same-sex marriage may allow the space for new political possibilities to emerge.” While the entering of same-sex couples into the institution of marriage does not fundamentally change the institution, notwithstanding that marriage as an institution has never been stagnant, same-sex marriage does challenge and change those close to the same-sex couples.

Same-sex couples utilise marriage to make claims about the legitimacy of same-sex love using the historically heterosexual institution. In marriage same-sex couples wrestle with dominant sexual and gender norms in the decision to marry, the construction of their weddings, and in navigating family life after the wedding. The characterisation of the wedding in this research is taken from the way South Africans understand the “white wedding.” According to Danai Mupotsa (2014: 10) “in the South African context it is common parlance to speak of ‘modern’, or ‘white’ weddings and traditional weddings.” The “white wedding” that Mupotsa (2014: 14) is referring to is similar to (or born out of) the dominant white dress and black suit western idea of a wedding. When referring to the white wedding in this thesis, it is in reference to this South African context of the white wedding that is different from the South African traditional wedding.

The wrestling that same-sex couples are engaged in throughout the marriage process is captured in the phrase by one of the participants, Jo, when he states “the more you stretch them, the more they grow”, referring to the transformation of his mother in law from someone who didn’t talk about her son’s gayness, to being open about the son’s sexuality. The wrestling with heteronormativity enables the stretching and growing of same-sex couples and those around them as they make demands about their relationships to South African society in general and to their family and friends in particular. Drawing on feminist and queer theoretical insights, I argue that, the wrestling that leads to stretching, while not radically changing marriage as an institution same-sex couples expand boundaries of marriage, same-sex couples expand boundaries of what it means to be a “husband” and “wife” and create a space for the rethinking of same-sex desire. Admittedly this rethinking operates at an interpersonal level. The feminist and queer theoretical insights are discussed in depth in the second chapter of the thesis.

Heteronormativity is how heterosexuality and gender norms are performed and reproduced in society as “natural” and, in opposition to this, how everything else, like same-sex intimacy, is seen as unnatural and deviant. As described by Ward and Schneider (2009: 438) “heteronormativity underpins all social phenomena, including the construction of identities, the dynamics of relationships, the discourses and symbols of culture, and the practices of institutions.” As such a system, albeit in different ways, heteronormativity affects homosexuals and heterosexuals as they organise their lives. Heteronormativity is integral to the construction of societal norms around sexuality, gender, and organising of relationships (Herz & Johansson 2015). This then means that marriage as an institution – of two people who obtain power and privilege through a contract with the state - has historically been in service of heteronormativity. By entering the institution of marriage, it can be argued, willingly or not, same-sex couples themselves, if only in part, are in service of heteronormativity. Although heteronormativity is an overarching system of norms and assumptions that structure society in terms of heterosexuality (Kitzinger, 2005), as well as normative gender ideals, it is a system that is constantly being challenged by feminist, sexual deviants, and gender non-conformists.

Heteronormativity as a term was first coined by Michael Warner (1993) to describe a system of norms that privileges heterosexuality while simultaneously discrediting same-sex desires. Feminist and queer scholars have taken up the concept across academic disciplines and

scholars like Lisa Duggan (2002) and Jaspir Puar (2007) went further to theorise homonormativity. Duggan (2002: 179) described homonormativity as “a politics that does not contest dominant heteronormative assumptions and institutions, but upholds and sustains them, while promising the possibility of a demobilized gay constituency and a privatized, depoliticized gay culture anchored in domesticity and consumption.” While one can appreciate Duggan’s (2001) critiques, as they speak to the Global North context in general and North America in particular, they do not adequately capture the complexities operating in the Cape Town context. As I demonstrate in this thesis, even as same-sex couples place demands on what in Duggan’s context would be called “normative”, considering the often-violent homophobia, the rigidity of gender norms, and the still marginal lives of same-sex couples in South Africa, same-sex marriage in Cape Town challenges the normative order. South African society is conservative, and marriage is a deeply cherished institution, and the entering of same-sex couples into the institution forces South African society to view same-sex relationships differently. In a way, the normativity of marriage cloaks same-sex couples with a veil that makes them legible. Thus, ironically, it is the conservative values that same-sex couples wrestle against in their lives, that in marriage they rely on to legitimise same-sex desire.

Wedgewood (1999) argues that there are no striking differences between heterosexual marriage and same-sex marriage. A liberalism standpoint that West (1998) disagrees with arguing that same-sex couples are different from heterosexual couples because partly same-sex couples are not encumbered with the historical gendered inequality that characterised marriage. While Wedgewood’s (1999) statements are true in some respects, as in the structure of same-sex weddings and some of the challenges same-sex couples face in marriage is similar to heterosexual couples, there are also notable differences. In the Cape Town context as evidenced by the narratives of the participants in this research, same-sex couples have to deal with different kinds of questions in marriage. For example, a female couple mentioned how their guests wondered who will wear the dress at their wedding, a question loaded with gendered assumptions, that firstly there will be a dress, and secondly that only one of them will wear a dress. This question relies on an already existing script of a particular kind of heterosexual wedding, the white wedding (Mupotsa, 2014; Ingraham, 2005), a question a heterosexual couple will not be asked as the gender of the bride and groom already dictates who will wear the dress. The gendered construction of the dominant white wedding is

palatable, and of course heteronormativity is closely linked to the concept of heterosexism. Stevenson and Lindberg (2013) describe heterosexism as a “discrimination or prejudice against homosexuals on the assumption that heterosexuality is the normal sexual orientation.” In this thesis I am concerned with same-sex marriage and how same-sex couples think about and experience marriage in a culture dominated by heteronormativity. I am interested in the complexities and possibilities created by same-sex marriage for same-sex couples in a deeply heteronormative culture.

The wrestle *with* marriage for same-sex couples was predated by the wrestle *about* marriage by queer scholars and activists rejecting same-sex marriage, while gay marriage advocates championed the fight for same-sex marriage. Andrew Sullivan (1996) who argued for same-sex marriage, and Michael Warner (2000) who are argued against the dangers of same-sex marriage, starkly represent the ‘normativity’ debate. The debate is discussed thoroughly in chapter 2. I take seriously the arguments made by Morgan (1994) that if gay and lesbian people adhere to the dominant ideals of the heterosexual construction of relationships then no damage is done to systemic heteronormativity. Morgan’s ambivalence about heterosexual institutions in the fight against heteronormativity was made in the early 1990’s but other queer scholars (Barker, 2012; Conrad, 2010; Bonthuys, 2008; Warner 2000) retained the critique arguing that same-sex marriage is assimilationist. With all of these debates in mind, how do we understand same-sex marriage and the lives of same-sex couples in the post-apartheid Cape Town context? It appears that same-sex marriage is not just a neat assimilation; nor is it a radical emancipatory project. It is rather a wrestle against heteronormativity that creates possibilities for same-sex couples, at least in their personal lives. Same-sex marriage is a demand to enter into an institution that once didn’t allow same-sex couples. In order to be able to exist within this institution, same-sex couples wrestle and stretch the institution to create space and possibility for a visible same-sex desiring sexuality.

Historically marriage has been viewed solely in terms of heterosexuality. Elia (2003: 62) argues that “a certain type of heterosexual relationship style is often promoted as the best, most respectable, and cherished” and this relationship style is similarly portrayed by married same-sex couples in the sample of this thesis. This relationship “style” Elia (2003) is referring to is the dominant heterosexual relationship of a man and a woman, an image that is dominant in popular culture. Furthermore, this relationship structure has historically largely been attributed

to Western culture, underpinned by capitalist notions of the ideal relationship, a relationship style that was strengthened after the industrial revolution where the family produced offspring for industry (Smith, 1997; Engels, 1972). The dominant heterosexual relationship style that Elia (2003) is talking about is monogamous, consists of two people, and might even desire to reproduce. In contemporary societies this relationship model has evolved and many people are creating different kinds of family as depicted by Golombok (2015) in the aptly titled *Modern Families: parents and children in new family forms*. The modern families depicted by Golombok exist in the periphery, and as articulated by Macleod, Morison, and Lynch (2018) sometimes struggle to be recognised by the state because their structures do not fit the relationship structure that is regarded as the ideal relationship, a relationship structure built on heteronormative assumptions that heterosexual pairing is the only viable relationship model.

Throughout history there have been shifts in marriage. These shifts are brought about by changing economic structures, changes in beliefs, migration, interactions with different and sometimes dominant cultures from elsewhere, and changes in the political structures. The changes in how interracial relationships were regulated in South Africa are a perfect illustration of the changes in marriage. Through the *Prohibition of Mixed Marriages Act 1949*, interracial marriage was outlawed in South Africa. This meant that people from different races were not allowed to marry each other. When the anti-miscegenation laws were repealed in 1985, interracial couples could marry. What this example demonstrates is that some things around the institution of marriage may change (such as the rules about who is permitted to marry who), and it impacts the composition of those inside the marriage, but marriage, as an institution has not disappeared. A similar effect occurs with the legalisation of same-sex marriage; same-sex couples are permitted to enter the institution of marriage, just like interracial couples were once permitted into it, but in both circumstances' marriage as an institution with its assumed pillars of monogamy, contract with the state, and the promise of reproduction remains. From being an economic transaction, to declaration of love, marriage as an institution has evolved (Coontz, 2005), and the legalisation of same-sex marriage continues the evolution.

There have been many debates about the legalisation of same-sex marriage. Contained in these debates were arguments about the constitutionality of same-sex marriage (Snyder, 2006), the pros and cons of same-sex marriage (Bernstein and Taylor, 2013; Corvino and Gallagher,

2012), and the normalisation effects of same-sex marriage (Sullivan, 1996; Warner 2000). Others have cautioned against the rush to same-sex marriage and have articulated ambivalence towards same-sex marriage and the same-sex marriage movement (Barker, 2012; Bonthuys, 2008). Still others have expressed absolute rejection of same-sex marriage and the same-sex movement (Conrad, 2010; Warner, 2000). When same-sex marriage was legalised in South Africa, and in other parts of the world, many activists and scholars were writing from a legal perspective (De Vos, 2008; De Vos and Banard, 2007), while others were theorising about the possible impacts of same-sex marriage on lesbian and gay identities and also on the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex (LGBTI) movement at large (Hunter, 2012). McMormick (2015) and Thoreson (2008) argued that in the South African context, same-sex marriage discussions have been mainly discussed in the legal field with “little scholarly literature” outside law. Coming from a queer perspective, McMormick (2015) scrutinises the book *To Have and to Hold* that chronicles the same-sex marriage debates in South Africa. McMormick (2015) argues that although the Civil Union Act had lofty ideals about recognising diverse sexualities, it has mainly represented those who identify as gay and lesbian negating other queer people like transgender people. The debates, both from before and after same-sex marriage was legalised, demonstrate that the change of law (or the promise of what the change will do) is one thing and the lived experiences of queer people is another. In a way, in this thesis I bridge the gap and demonstrate the impact of the Civil Union Act on the lived experiences of same-sex couples in Cape Town after the legalisation of same-sex marriage.

The earliest studies that have looked at the impact of state sanctioned same-sex marriage in South Africa are by Van Zyl (2011a; 2011b), who focused on the belonging needs of lesbian women. Similarly, to the work of Van Zyl, Scott’s (2013a; 2013b) research focused on the lives of lesbian women and their transitions into married life and how they navigate family life as married people. Yarbrough’s (2017; 2014) work also contributed to a better understanding on the new state sanctioned same-sex relationships, while also looking at the impact of customary marriages. Scott and Theron’s (2017) work on same-sex marriage outlined the ways married same-sex couples are steeped in respectability politics. My thesis contributes towards the growing intellectual work on same-sex marriage in South Africa in general. In particular this thesis contributes to our understanding of same-sex marriage in South Africa and the wrestling

of same-sex couples with heteronormativity and overall this thesis contributes to the growing body of queer studies in South Africa.

In theorising about the lives of married same-sex couples in their wrestle with heteronormativity, the thesis firstly focuses on same-sex marriage with reference to coming out, discussed in chapter four. Discussed in this section is the ways that same-sex couples utilise marriage as a vehicle to come out. Coming out as a process that many LGBTI people go through is itself characterised as a kind of wrestling. It is a wrestling that many with same-sex desires go through on their own until they are able to come out and share their desires with friends and/or family, and this process has been heavily documented in the last half of the twentieth century (Guittar, 2013; Savin-Williams, 2011; Carion and Lock, 1997). It has been, and continues to be, a preoccupation of LGBTI people because the standard assumption largely remains heterosexual and therefore the onus is still on “other” sexualities to announce their visibility. Not only does same-sex marriage push couples to be ‘fully out’ (Guittar, 2013) but in some cases the desire for marriage is what instigates coming out to parents and loved ones. Coming out is a fraught process because of the history of prejudice towards lesbians and gays in society. This history of prejudice has made same-sex relationships vulnerable through personal and institutional discrimination, and so same-sex marriage is also a response to the history of systemic discrimination of same-sex relationships. Also, in their desire for matrimony, I argue that married lesbians and gays are entangled in respectability politics that are hinged on heteronormative ideas about intimate relationship construction. The same-sex couples in this thesis narrate a story of the self through marriage, where they use words such as “husband” and “wife”, a language familiar to many in a heteronormative context. This warrants us to ask why these couples use this particular language at a time where many people in relationships opt to use “partner”. What is the function of these words for same-sex couples and how are they linked to coming out? In chapter four I discuss the different meanings of coming out, including how those who are guests at the wedding are forced to “come out” with their heteronormative prejudice as they have assumptions or expectations of same-sex weddings to include a kind of spectacle.

In continuing to theorise the wrestling that same-sex couples do with heteronormativity in marriage, secondly, I focus on the ways that same-sex couples “put on a show” with their weddings. This section of the thesis, discussed in chapter 5, I interrogate to what extent the



contents of same-sex weddings are shaped/influenced by heterosexual white weddings. In this section, I argue that the wedding is a heteronormative event, but as same-sex couples participate in it, they retain some aspects of the dominant ceremony while doing away with others. This negotiation between old traditions and developing new ones is similarly described in the Lewin (2001) looking at the commitment rituals of gay and lesbian weddings. It is perhaps in the construction of the wedding that the wrestling with heteronormativity becomes that much more apparent partly because the wedding is a highly gendered event (Mupotsa, 2014; Ingraham, 1999). Considering that the dominant wedding structure and the only state sanctioned wedding was the heterosexual wedding, how are same-sex weddings affected by this history? Who and what are the factors that play a role in the making of same-sex weddings? What can these factors and the role they play tell us about same-sex weddings in the heteronormative context of post-apartheid South Africa? It would seem that on the one hand the wedding of same-sex couples resembles the “show” of heterosexual white weddings (Mupotsa, 2014; Ingraham, 1999). Simultaneously the weddings of same-sex couples provide new possibilities that offer an alternative interpretation to the white heterosexual wedding. It becomes apparent that same-sex weddings are similar to white heterosexual weddings to the extent that it is two people joined together through the state with the presence of family and friends. They differ to the extent that same-sex weddings, in a heteronormative context, provide an alternative sexuality and gender pairing in marriage. In the process they create a legible alternative way for heterosexual family members to see same-sex desire.

Lastly, in theorising the wrestling that same-sex couples engage in with marriage I argue that couples ultimately wrestle for the visibility of sexuality, and for the assertion of sexuality. The wrestle for the visibility of sexuality, discussed in chapter 6, is characterised by the kiss or specifically the struggle for the public kiss – to a point where one couple decided to disinvite the parents (particularly the mother) who had apprehensions about seeing her son kiss another man “like in a heterosexual wedding.” The issue of same-sex couples displaying public affection has historically been a tension-riddled issue that same-sex couples continue to wrestle with. The displays of affection between same-sex couples remain contentious (Lionadh, 2018; Bachmann and Gooch, 2017). The sometimes-violent homophobic response to public affection between people of the same-sex has led to many public kiss-ins. Clearly, public displays of affection between same-sex people are political and are central to the politics of

visibility. In the wrestling with heteronormative culture, in marriage, the politics of sexual orientation visibility become illuminated (McGarry, 2016). In the wrestling with heteronormativity same-sex couples assert their sexuality, and in so doing they make claims on marriage for themselves and challenge their families and friends. The wrestling with heteronormativity that married same-sex couples are engaged with enables the process of stretching and growing. The process of stretching and growing creates a possibility of seeing those with same-sex desire in a new light and seeing their relationships as worthy. The stretching and growing is not only for families and friends, it also provides same-sex desiring individuals with new possibilities of how to be in the world.

I conclude the thesis by discussing the impact of marriage on lesbian and gay people, and how they wrestle with the heteronormative society and in the process creates possibilities for queer relationships. Although same-sex marriage does not radically change the institution of marriage, it does provide a challenge to the hegemony of heteronormativity. Albeit not completely and at times inadvertently, same-sex marriage as lived by same-sex couples challenges heteronormativity. The couples are stretched by same-sex marriage; their family members are also stretched by same-sex marriage. An optimistic view might conclude that this stretching will ultimately lead to societal changes with regards to how same-sex desire is seen and performed in public and in the private sphere. It is perhaps too early to make such a conclusion. What is clear is that same-sex couples, through marriage, claim a space for sexual visibility and assert their same-sex sexuality through the public performance of marriage. In the context of South Africa, where different kinds of intimate arrangements exist, same-sex marriages now forms part of an already existing multiplicity of same-sex relationship arrangements (Hunter, 2009) in the country, some of which are state-sanctioned, and some of which are not, but all of which seem to exist and thrive within the South Africa landscape.

## **2. The Importance of Studying Same-Sex Marriage in South Africa**

### **2.1. History, Politics, and Power**

The debates chronicled in *To Have and to Hold* (Judge, Manion, and De Waal (2008) about the journey to legalise same-sex marriage in South Africa demonstrate that marriage is an important institution. In South Africa, depending on the make-up of the couple (male and female or male and male, or female and female), a couple can use one of three marriage

legislations to legalise their marriage; they can use the *Marriage Act 1961*, the *Recognition of Customary Marriage Act 1998*, or the *Civil Union Act 2006*. There was also a Muslim Marriages Bill that was tabled in parliament (Bakker, 2008) and in 2018, the High Court has compelled the South African government to take steps to protect Muslim women in Muslim marriage by having legislative regulation of Muslim marriages. All heterosexual couples can use the *Marriage Act 1961* and the *Civil Union Act 2006* to legislate a union. Same-sex couples can only use the *Civil Union Act 2006* to marry. The *Recognition of Customary Marriage Act 1998* recognises heterosexual marriages between black African people who have entered into a customary marriage. The complex regime of the legal regulation of intimate relationships is necessitated by South Africa's particular history and the sometimes-conflicting cultural and legal practices relating to marriage and family organisation. These different marriage Acts are a testament not only to the complicated history of marriage regulation in South Africa, but also to the evolution of marriage regulation through different time periods in South Africa's political history as demonstrated by Potgieter (2017), Stacey (2011), and Yarbrough (2006).

The *Marriage Act 1961* is the oldest marriage legislation in South Africa. Marriage under this Act has a troubled history because it was formulated during apartheid. During this time in South Africa marriage law did not allow women to own property. It was only in 1984 that male marital power was abolished in the commencement of the *Matrimonial Property Act 1984*, wherein it was stated, "The marital power which a husband has under the common law over the person and property of his wife is hereby abolished in respect of marriages". Through the *Prohibition of Mixed Marriages Act 1949*, interracial marriages were outlawed during apartheid. The legislation under apartheid restricted the rights and freedoms of women and black people and affected black women especially. The Act didn't even consider lesbian and gay people.

The *Recognition of Customary Marriage Act 1998* was created to protect families who were married through traditional guidelines as per their culture, to place customary marriages on par with marriages under the *Marriage Act 1961* in the eyes of the state. The *Recognition of Customary Marriages Act 1998* was passed four years after the first democratic elections, and forms part of the necessary reformation of legislation to meet the standards of equality stipulated in the South African Constitution. There has been contestation regarding the *Recognition of Customary Marriage Act 1998*. The Constitutional Court case *Bhe v. Magistrate, Khayelitsha* [2005] made a ruling that amended the succession rules in the *Recognition of Customary Marriage Act 1998* that

removed all forms of discrimination in relation to sex, age, and birth status. This precedent, for example, enables extra marital children to be able to have a claim in the estate of their biological parents. Previous to this change of the law, extra marital children were discriminated against in the case of death of one of the parents because they were born outside the boundaries of marriage. However, complications to the implementation of the *Recognition of Customary Marriage Act 1998* and the *Bhe v. Magistrate, Khayelitsha* [2005] ruling were uncovered by Himonda and Moore (2015) as they demonstrated inconsistencies in the implementation of these legislations. The *Recognition of Customary Marriage Act 1998* is therefore troubled by complexities and contestations in its implementations.

In post-democratic South Africa, the *Civil Union Act 2006* permits people of the same-sex to marry. Same-sex marriage has had its own contestations, both within the LGBTI movement and in the nation at large. As demonstrated by Judge, Manion, and De Waal (2008), same-sex marriage was vehemently opposed by an alliance of social conservatives, religious groups, and African traditionalists. In South Africa, some traditionalists have argued that the recognition of same-sex marriage is against “African culture” (Gunkel, 2010) while others have used religious arguments citing passages from the Bible. When parliament debated the legalisation of same-sex marriage in South Africa, a number of organisations opposed the move – despite a Constitutional Court judgment ordering parliament to extend the same rights and status enjoyed by heterosexual couples to same-sex couples. The Southern African Catholic Bishops’ Conference, the Muslim Judicial Council, the Marriage Alliance of South Africa, and the Dutch Reformed Church all cited religious reasons why same-sex marriage should be outlawed (Judge, Manion, and De Waal, 2008). The members of The Congress of Traditional Leaders of South Africa (henceforth Contralesa) regard themselves as custodians of African culture and as such have fought against the legalisation of same-sex marriage (Gunkel, 2010; OutRight, 2006).

Within the LGBTI movement there were opposing discussions around the campaign for same-sex marriage. Some within the movement wondered if marriage was a pressing matter while there is widespread stigma, discrimination and violence, as well as poverty in LGBTI communities. Trengrove-Jones (2008) spoke to the contradictions that marriage was on the horizon, while LGBTI people, particularly black lesbians, were being murdered. Furthermore, the “victory” for same-sex marriage was not without its downside. The Marriage Act was not

amended, so it still exists and is only open to heterosexuals. The hierarchal order that places the heterosexual relationship at the apex is still maintained in the exclusive use of this matrimonial Act by heterosexual couples. Also, under the *Civil Union Act 2006*, until recently, civil servants could refuse to conduct a same-sex marriage citing the clause in section 6 of the Act that states that a marriage officer can refuse to marry same-sex couples on the grounds of “conscience, religion [or] belief”. This has since been amended. Bilchitz and Judge (2008: 149) correctly wondered if the *Civil Union Act 2006* was a “messy compromise” rather than a progressive piece of legislation. There have been numerous reports that lesbians and gays in South Africa still face prejudice and discrimination when approaching Home Affairs marriage officials to access marriage (DeBarros, 2016). The gay website *Mambaonline* (2016) published a list of Home Affairs offices that are supposed to perform same-sex marriage in South Africa, and yet only 28% of Home Affairs offices conduct same-sex marriages (Mambaonline, 2016). At a meeting called by LGBTI stakeholders, the Minister of Home Affairs, Malusi Gigaba, was reportedly “shocked” to hear about the mistreatment of LGBTI citizens by Home Affairs officials (African News Agency, 2016). What was “shocking” for Mr. Gigaba is a well-known fact that is often documented in online blogs and gay websites in South Africa. So, although same-sex couples can marry in South Africa, there has been challenges to accessing marriage.

The different marriage legislations and the controversies surrounding them show us that much is at stake when it comes to the institution of marriage. These controversies are about history, politics, and power. For example, both the Prohibition of Mixed Marriages Act and the Immorality Act were directly shaped by apartheid as a historical moment. Those in political power determined who can and cannot marry according to their own ideologies of who belongs inside the institution of marriage. The different legislations are a wrestle with power because the Marriage Act when it was originally conceived, was discriminatory; in that it didn’t recognise black people’s marriages, and interracial marriages. The apartheid state had the power to decide who can be considered a legitimate couple recognised by the state, a power that has subsequently been challenged by the introduction of different Marriage Acts. The different marriage legislations and their controversies show us the historical importance of marriage in people’s lives, and the power the state has in the regulation of marriage.

The wrestle with history, politics, and power was also evident throughout the research process as I was interacting with participants during fieldwork. As laid out in the methodology section,

chapter 3, who I was as a researcher matters and the participants interacted with my identity. Considering the racial, gender, and sexuality history and politics of South Africa, from an intersectional (Crenshaw, 1991) my identity as a young black queer academic is part of the research process. My identities were always present, and the participants interacted with them through the asking of personal questions, and also through English and Xhosa code switching where all kinds of assumptions were made in the camaraderie created by home language. The intersection of my racial identity and my queerness played a role in how I was perceived by the participants, as evidenced by how some participants answered questions invoking racial differences in experience between my experience and theirs.

In wrestling with power in the research process, I experienced myself as both an insider and outsider with the participants of this research. In line with Hayfield and Huxley's (2015) troubling of the neat binary of 'insider' and 'outsider' in the research field, I wrestled with moving between being an insider and outsider depending on context. My intersecting identities as a black queer academic set me up as an insider because of my queerness, but at times as an outsider primarily because of my race with white participants. My identity affected the research as the participants interacted with my identities in the research process. This has consequences for what participants share, and therefore how I understand the data. While the participants are genuinely talking about their lives, how they interpret some of the questions is dependent on how they are positioned in relation to the researcher.

## **2.2. Citizenship and Belonging**

Expectedly, post-apartheid South Africa is riddled with contradictions and contestations about what it means to be South African in the new dispensation. The contestations are about who has legitimate claim to citizenship. The new democratic South Africa is a context where sexual orientation is protected by the constitution against discrimination (Cock, 2003; De Vos, 2011), a context wherein same-sex marriage is legal (Judge, Manion, and De Waal, 2008). The Constitution of South Africa stipulates, "there is a common South African citizenship" and that the "citizens are equally entitled to the rights, privileges and benefits of citizenship" (South African Constitution, 1996: 2) and these rights should also trickle down to LGBTI citizens. The reality is that post-apartheid South Africa is a place where LGBTI people's lived realities do not mirror the freedoms entrenched in the constitution (Makofane, 2013).

It can be argued that LGBTI South Africans really start being considered part of South African citizenry after the adoption of the South African Constitution in 1996. It can also be argued that many LGBTI people continue to be marginal in contemporary South Africa, even as they have Rights like same-sex marriage. Since marriage is one of the privileges of citizenship, the inability to marry of same-sex couples demonstrated their marginality within South African society. Weeks (1995: 323) argues, “The moment of citizenship is the moment of making claims on society, a claim for inclusion. Making that claim for inclusion may seem assimilations, but actually making demands on a culture which denies you is extremely radical.” So same-sex marriage is a demand for citizenship (Brandzel, 2004); therefore same-sex marriage is about belonging (Van Zyl, 2011a).

While there is recognition and agreement with Weeks (1995) about making demands on the state, and the radical nature of asserting one’s sexual identity even as society is oppressive, there are demands from the state that pander to dominant groups. Same-sex marriage is one such demand. Scholars have demonstrated that citizenship or the imagined “citizen” is always regarded as heterosexual (Richardson, 2017; 2015; Concannon, 2008). In *Queering Citizenship*, Brandzel (2005) articulates the battle over same-sex marriage as a battle over citizenship. Speaking to the United States context, Brandzel (2005: 172) argues, “Marriage is critical to the formation of a properly gendered, properly racialized, properly heterosexual citizenship.” Mupotsa (2014: 24) is aware of this in the South African contexts when she argues “the mythical constructions of ‘the family’, or ‘nation’ are instrumentally connected to this Oedipal complex which frames the expression and constrictions of modern heterosexuality and aspirations for heteronormativity.” The implication here, of course, is that homosexuals and other queer people are often seen and discussed as existing outside the boundaries of citizenship (Alexander, 1994). In South Africa, like in many other jurisdictions in the world, the heterosexual family continues to be constructed as the only legitimate family, even as many diverse family forms exist. Critically thinking about belonging is central to understanding same-sex marriage.

In the 2005 Constitutional Court judgement that called for the legalisation of same-sex marriage, Justice Albie Sachs spoke specifically to the issue of citizenship and belonging. Justice Sachs noted:

“Finally, our Constitution represents a radical rupture with a past based on intolerance and exclusion, and the movement forward to the acceptance of the need to develop a society based on equality and respect by all for all (Constitutional Court, 2005: 59).” ... “It represents a harsh if oblique statement by the law that same-sex couples are outsiders, and that their need for affirmation and protection of their intimate relations as human beings is somehow less than that of heterosexual couples. It reinforces the wounding notion that they are to be treated as biological oddities, as failed or lapsed human beings who do not fit into normal society (Constitutional Court, 2005: 71).”

What is highlighted by the words of Justice Sachs is his understanding that same-sex couples have historically been seen as “outsiders” and this has implications on how same-sex couples are viewed as citizens of South Africa. This judgement takes seriously the citizenship (therefore, belonging) needs of same-sex couples. The judgement is aligned with the prevalent Rights discourse in post-apartheid South Africa that has enabled people from minority groups, like LGBTI people, to assert themselves into the South African narrative as citizens who belong. In her research of married lesbian women, Mikki Van Zyl (2011a) addresses the politics of belonging within the family, community and the nation. In the work we see the tension between love and care between family members. We also see expectations and desires of parents and their children. Living in post-apartheid South Africa where the rights of same-sex couples are recognised by the state, same-sex couples in Van Zyl’s (2011a) study enjoy the fruits of a democratic South Africa made possible by pioneers like Simon Nkoli and Beverley Ditsie<sup>1</sup>. Like the conclusions of Van Zyl (2011a), the assertions of Justice Sachs, and the emphasis of Brandzel (2005), the question of citizenship is central to same-sex marriage.

The arguments for citizenship (therefore belonging) of same-sex couples, and why they should be allowed to marry demonstrates that prior to legalisation of same-sex marriage their legitimacy to citizenship (therefore belonging) was contested. Also, the legitimacy of same-sex couples is predicated on assimilating into the already existing heteronormative structure of marriage. The argument here is not advocating for inequality and continued marginalisation of same-sex couples, far from it, but it posits to ask questions of the conditions that are set up by the heteronormative systems to facilitate the citizenship (therefore belonging) of lesbians and gays. The desire for marriage by same-sex couples is also what is under examination,

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<sup>1</sup> Simon Nkoli and Beverley Ditsie were (Ditsie continues to be) political activists who were instrumental in the creation of the gay and lesbian movement in South Africa. They organised the first Gay Pride March in Johannesburg in 1990.



particularly if we seriously consider that many of the legal rights that come with marriage were offered to same-sex couples prior to the legalisation of same-sex marriage through court decisions. Of course, all of the court judgements that enabled legal Rights like adoption as in the *Du Toit and de Vos v. the Minister of Welfare and Population Development and Others* [2002] judgement, do not come with the powerful social weight of marriage. Such rights-based discourses tell us that marriage is not just about the legal benefits but also about the social power and privilege it offers same-sex couples. It is this social power that enables the family and friends of same-sex couples to view same-sex desire in a different light under marriage. It is the power of marriage as a revered institution that enables same-sex couples to challenge heteronormativity.

## Chapter Two

### Literature Review

#### 1. Chapter Introduction

Same-sex marriage legalised through the *Civil Union Act 2006* is new and particular to the post-apartheid historical moment. This chapter helps to historicise marriage. The idea is to situate the debates about same-sex marriage by mapping out the different scholarly articulations about marriage. This chapter charts the evolution of the institution of marriage in order to make sense of contemporary same-sex marriage. In Southern Africa and in other parts of the world, the evolution of the institution of marriage is driven by economic, cultural, and political factors. Therefore, marriage and how family life is arranged is not immune to social and political upheavals; indeed, they shape marriage. The wrestle that same-sex couples are engulfed in in marriage is a wrestle that speaks to the nature of the institution, in that others, women, lower-class people, and racial minorities have had to wrestle with marriage and marriage laws in different time periods.

#### 2. Same-Sex Marriage and Democracy

In the book, *Why Marriage?* Chauncey (2004) traces the history that has shaped the debates on same-sex marriage. Chauncey (2004) argues that to understand the contemporary ideas about same-sex marriage it is paramount to look at the history that has shaped the recent ideas and movements on same-sex marriage. Speaking to the United States context, Chauncey (2004) notes that it is historical moments and movements that have led to the legalisation of same-sex marriage. According to Chauncey (2004) the idea of Gay Rights as Civil Rights, the changes in ideas about marriage that were brought about by post-war women's movement, and the devastation of HIV/Aids to the gay community are all pivotal events that have subsequently galvanised a conversation about same-sex marriage. Similarly, in South Africa, the conversation about same-sex marriage speaks to historical moments that have shaped the LGBTI landscape in post-apartheid South Africa. That so much had been achieved with regards to LGBTI Rights in post-apartheid South Africa that activist Beverley Ditsie (2008: 42) said that same-sex marriage was, for her, "a logical next step."

The “logical next step” that Ditsie is talking about follows the gains the LGBTI movement has made in South Africa since the first Johannesburg Pride March in 1990. The gains have been incremental, and they have been parallel with the development of South Africa’s constitutional democracy. Some of the big gains post-apartheid are the decriminalisation of sodomy in *National Coalition for Gay and Lesbian Equality and the South African Human Rights Commission v. Minister of Justice and Others* [1998]. In 1999, the Constitutional Court ruled, in *National Coalition Gay and Lesbian Equality and Others v. Minister of Home Affairs* [1999], that a permanent life partner of a South African citizen or permanent resident should be given the same Rights as a married spouse if they are from a foreign country. Also, in 2002, the Constitutional Court ruled that same-sex couples can have joint legal parental Rights to adopt children, in *Du Toit and de Vos v. the Minister of Welfare and Population Development and Others* [2002].

These court rulings have ensured a trajectory of LGBTI gains that would eventually lead to the legalisation of same-sex marriage in 2006. Clearly, the post-apartheid democratic dispensation is what has enabled same-sex marriage to be legalised in South Africa. Citing previous constitutional court judgements like *Carmichele v. Minister of Safety and Security* [2001] and *Azapo v. President of the Republic of South Africa* [1996], Ntlama (2010: 194) argues that the *Civil Union Act 2006* was legalised in a “context and against the background of affirming the legitimacy of the development of the measures to protect persons previously disadvantaged by unfair discrimination.” Furthermore, without the Constitutional Court forcing the South African government to live up to the constitution of the republic, by protecting the Rights of LGBTI people, these gains would have been impossible to attain because of the open prejudice towards LGBTI people. The relationship between democracy and LGBTI gains that include same-sex marriage is unmistakable.

In the book, *Gay Marriage and Democracy*, Snyder (2006) argues that democratic principles “not only allow, but also require the legalisation of same-sex marriage”. Snyder (2006: 2) hinges their argument on the definition of democracy, stating “democracy requires *equality amongst citizens* (author’s emphasis) in order to exist”. Snyder (2006) is specifically speaking to the United States context, but it is also applicable to the South African context in terms of how the LGBTI movements and the courts have read post-apartheid democracy. The married same-sex couples in Van Zyl’s (2011a; 2011b) research demonstrate how living under

democratic South Africa has enabled them to feel like they belong to South Africa and that their relationships are recognised by the state like the relationships of heterosexual couples.

In *Debating Same-Sex Marriage*, John Corvino and Maggie Gallagher (2012) debate with each other about the pros and cons of same-sex marriage, where Corvino argues for same-sex marriage, while Gallagher argues against same-sex marriage. Corvino argues that same-sex marriage is not something special that same-sex couples want, but it is an extension of what already exists. Although not Corvino's intention, what he is signalling is that same-sex marriage is a mock-up of traditional marriage. Same-sex marriage not only enables more people to be able to signal commitment to their family and friends when they love each other, but also to access the protections the state offers to couples who marry. Corvino further argues that gay people are part of society and in enabling same-sex couples to marry, society as a whole benefits. He argues that opponents of same-sex marriage see society as belonging only to heterosexuals, which limits their understanding of same-sex marriage as good for society as a whole. Corvino's argument echoes the writings of Rauch (2004) who argued that gay marriage is good for everyone by arguing for all the benefits that same-sex marriage would have for both homosexuals and heterosexuals. Rauch (2004) argues that omitting same-sex couples from the institution of marriage, everyone in society suffers because inequality creates instability in society.

Maggie Gallagher, in the debate between herself and Corvino (Corvino and Gallagher, 2012), argues that virtually all societies in the world have had a special status for the relationship between a man and woman and there are reasons for this. Gallagher (*ibid.*, 96) argues that marriage between a man and a woman is capable of "uniting goods that otherwise tend to fragment, with high social and personal costs: sex, love, caretaking, babies, and mothers and fathers". Interestingly, she acknowledges that not all marriages are able to unite all of these ideals, but then continues to argue that "*only* a union of husband and wife can ever do so" (*ibid.*, 96). Gallagher then goes on to compare same-sex relationships to "friendships" and notes that the state does not regulate friendships in the ways it regulates marriages. Gallagher's arguments point to the supposed superiority of heterosexual relationships particularly because they contribute towards what society sees as the ideal, raising children within a heterosexual setting. Gallagher claims that marriage protects children, and that children need heterosexual parents, and that same-sex unions in their different varieties "have nothing to do with babies"

(ibid., 116). Gallagher's arguments do not consider the many complex ways that gay and lesbian people arrive at having children, as depicted by Lubbe-De Beer and Marnell (2013), Moore (2011), and Hequembourg (2007). Gallagher does not consider same-sex families that have existed prior to the debates about same-sex marriages. Also, and even more radical rebuttal of Gallagher's arguments is Edelman's (2004) *No future* where he critiques the ubiquitous figure of the child as the centre of an agreed upon politics of "reproductive futurism." Edelman (2004) argues that the power of queerness is exactly embracing the possibility of "no future" (as in the title of the book) in having no children, therefore rejecting the prescribed social and political order. In Gallagher's ideas about marriage and family, the lives of same-sex families are invisible (Mignon Moore, 2011); they are perceived as non-existent because they are not heterosexual.

As can be seen from the scholars in the beginning of this chapter, in the debates about same-sex marriage, there are ideas about liberalism that are taken for granted. This is something that Robin West (1998) has taken issue with because liberalism has failed to articulate the differences that exists between people and groups in a bid to create equality. West (1998) questions the universality of freedoms promised by liberalism and how they actually can inhibit people's freedom precisely because they neglect the particularity of people's differences. According to West (1998: 727) same-sex marriage has the potential to "transform the very institution of marriage itself into a truly liberal and even egalitarian institution" because it would "normalise the ideal for-life union between sexual equals." Unlike historically where marriage was basically a legal subjugation of women through patriarchy. While I think West (1998) was overly optimistic about the potential powers of same-sex marriage, his point about the differences between same-sex couples and heterosexual couples is valid and important. Another point made by West (1998) is that same-sex marriage would legitimise non-reproductive sex acts, the implication being that the institution will not be so blatantly associated with reproduction. Of course, same-sex couples are having families, using all kinds of methods, but I think that does not take away from West's (1998) point that we should be weary of universalism that is contained in liberalism because difference matters.

While same-sex couples may legitimise non-reproductive sex, LGBTI people desire reproduction, and do form different kinds of queer families, as documented by the photographs in the Home Affairs Exhibition Material (2008) – see Marnell (2013), and Distiller

(2013) who wrote about lesbian motherhood in post-apartheid South Africa, both in the edited volume *Home Affairs (2013)* (Lubbe-De Beer and Marnell, 2013). In *Home Affairs (ibid.)* we see the different permutations of families that include LGBTI people in South Africa. It demonstrates that same-sex headed families in South Africa are diverse. There is more evidence of alternative family structures documented by Moore (2011) in *Invisible Families*, and Hequembourg (2007) in *Lesbian Motherhood*. Moore's (2011) work takes seriously the intersection of class, race, and gender to make visible the lives of black lesbian women and the families they construct. Through centralising the sexual identity, gender identity, and racial identity of black lesbian women in Moore's (2011) work, Moore (2011) depicts a complex picture of gender bending, black lesbian community building, and black lesbian motherhood. Albeit differently, Hequembourg (2007) also demonstrates the complexity of lesbian motherhood, arguing that lesbian mothers are engaged in a politics that moves them between assimilating to dominant norms and rejecting them. Hequembourg (2007) argues that because lesbian motherhood operates within a heteronormative world, it is inevitable that lesbian mothers move between the centre and the periphery, negotiating power as they parent.

The *Queer Kinship* book edited by Morrison, Lynch and Reddy (2018) further demonstrate that the narrow definition of family held by Gallagher (Corvino and Gallagher, 2012) does not consider the family life of people who are not heterosexual. The families depicted in *Home Affairs (2013)* (Lubbe-De Beer and Marnell, 2013), *Invisible Families* Moore (2011), and Hequembourg (2007) demonstrate the importance of same-sex marriage, or at least of the protections offered by marriage to same-sex families. Many of these works on queer families are built on the ground-breaking work of Kath Weston (1991) where she theorises about 'families of choice' amongst gays and lesbians. In the United States context, Weston (1991: 6) questions whether gay and lesbian families are viewed as alternative families, considering the fictive ideal of the "American family". Furthermore, Weston (1991: 2) before the debate between Warner (2000) and Sullivan (1996) pondered whether "are gay families inherently assimilationist" or that they "represent a radical departure from more conventional understanding of kinship".

At the heart of the debates about same-sex families is the different understandings of the concept of "home". The volume edited by Lubbe-De Beer and Marnell (2013) that chronicles different variations of same-sex families is intriguingly called *Home Affairs*. The title can be read

in two ways. Firstly, it is a nod to Home Affairs, the government institution that deals with administrating citizens of South Africa giving them government recognised identity numbers from birth to death. It is also the institution that sanctions and regulates marriages in South Africa. In fact, some of the same-sex couples that are part of this study were married at Home Affairs. Secondly, the title refers to affairs at home, in other words the everyday functions, interactions, and negotiations at home between family members. The acts of being a family – from grocery lists to laundry, cooking and cleaning, homework and school meetings. Of course, what the title is drawing us to is the intersection of Home Affairs the government institution and the power it yields as it regulates the affairs at home, part of which is to designate who qualifies to be classified a family and who is not.

This perhaps calls for a serious look at home making, in other words, family making, of same-sex couples. The book *Home Affairs* offers us different experiences and permutations of the South African same-sex family, thereby offers us different versions of the South African family, thereby challenging normative ideas of who can make a home and be a family. In wrestling with ideas of home building and family life, the same-sex couples predictably run up against heteronormative systems. As “sights of hetero-socialisation” (Sanger and Sanger, 2013: 55) families are usually the grounding institutions for heteronormativity. This means that same-sex couples themselves are products of this hetero-socialisation and must actively be aware of it. Hetero-socialisation demonstrates itself in the ways that even same-sex couples can be trapped by binary logic in their performance of family life. Lynch (2013) attributes the lack of bisexual families in LGBTI studies in South Africa to the attachments that LGBTI studies have to binary understandings of family formations and pushes for a broader understanding of LGBTI families that includes bisexuality. Lynch (2013: 73) argues that bisexuality “destabilise heteronormative constructions of marriage and family” precisely because bisexuality challenge the neat binaries that rely on heteronormative formulations.

Breshears and le Roux (2013) and Donaldson and Wilbraham (2013) demonstrates that heteronormativity relies on discourses of “authentic” or “normal” or “natural” families. These discourses become even more animated where particularly lesbian women make use of Assisted Reproductive Technologies (ART) to procreate and construct their families (Donaldson and Wilbraham, 2013; Swain and Frizelle, 2013). The heteronormative discourses

construct same-sex families as impossibilities, creating a culture where same-sex parents have to constantly explain their family configurations to strangers.

The *Queer Kinship* volume edited by Morison, Lynch, and Reddy (2018) is an expansion upon the scholarship on queer families from the germinal volume *Home Affairs*. The volume seeks to understand what constitutes queer kinship, and engaged in similar debates that this thesis engages in about perceived normalisations, radicalisations, gender hierarchy and changing LGBTI identities. While marriage is seen as a driver of family-making, *Queer Kinship* demonstrates that there are various ways that LGBTI people in South Africa do kinship relationships. For instance, Matebeni's (2018: 63) photo essay challenges family ideas premised only on law, biology, and cultural norms, and argues for "affective bonds between people whose relations extend the normative notion of 'family' and kinship." Matebeni (2018) argues that LGBTI people provide care, love, and a sense of belonging to each other through non-sexual relationships, and rejects the ideas that non-blood kin relationships are superficial or lacking in-depth.

Of course, in a heteronormative environment like the one found in South Africa, social institutions often fail LGBTI families because they are not legible to the law and the state. Macleod, Morison, and Lynch (2018) demonstrate how the South African government fails LGBTI families in family policy construction and implementation by underrepresentation or total neglect. In policy making, the obsession with "two-biological-parent family as the preferred family structure creates an impossible ideal for the majority of South Africans to live up to" (Macleod, Morison, and Lynch, 2018: 27). These normative understandings of kinship and family do not only fail LGBTI families, they fail the many South African families who do have a nuclear structure.

The question of queer kinship is a question about belonging, it is a question about home. Home is an important metaphor for LGBTI people because many LGBTI people do not experience comfort or belonging in their families of origin. The families of choice (Weston, 1991) that LGBTI people create become their homes, they become places of belonging imbued with love, care, and intimacy that LGBTI people desire. As demonstrated by Morison and Lynch (2018) in their research about the parenthood narratives of gay men, there are multiple ways that gay men think about family and kinship. What is evidenced here is also how the



identity of the men and their ideas of home is not stagnant but evolves with time and life experience. Both edited volumes, *Home Affairs* and *Queer Kinship*, offer us narratives beyond the heteronormative understandings of home-making and kinship, but also question simplistic binary understandings of kinship within LGBTI communities. They show us the complicated ways that LGBTI people do kinship, and how LGBTI people's lives enable possibilities to imagine kinship relations beyond the heteronormative model.

### **3. Same-Sex Unions in African Societies**

Same-sex unions have been documented in numerous African societies (Amadiume, 1987; Oyěwùmí, 1997). These same-sex couplings are different from the state-sanctioned Civil Unions, in that they existed (some continue to exist) at different times, with different meanings, and were performed for different reasons. The existence of same-sex unions on the African continent perhaps helps us place the state-sanctioned same-sex unions into context. In South Africa, perhaps the most commonly known form of woman-to-woman marriage is that of Queen Modjadji, also known as the Rain Queen, in a matrilineal culture where males are not allowed to inherit the crown (Krige, 1981). Although Queen Modjadji is not supposed to marry, she has many “wives” who are chosen by the Royal Council, and the children she bears, along with the children of the “wives”, form part of the dynasty, and through them the Rain Queen lineage continues (Krige, 1981). Some earlier documentation of woman-to-woman marriages on the continent was by the anthropologist Herskovits (1938) who wrote about the marriages between women, often older, wealthy women, of the people of the ancient kingdom of Dahomey, today known as Benin. Similar to the Rain Queen marriages, the children between the women of Dahomey would be recognised, in a way that mirrored how children would have been recognised in a husband-wife situation. These marriages are not the same as those permitted by the *Civil Union Act 2006*, but they demonstrate that for cultural reasons, same-sex unions are not a foreign concept in African societies.

Woman-to-woman marriages in different African contexts, like the Rain Queen, enable(d) women to accumulate wealth. Christianity subordinated woman-to-woman marriage practices by imposing western domestication on women. Additionally, same-sex couplings and marriages took on different mouldings in the urban environments of Southern Africa created by rapid industrialisation and urbanisation. Epprecht (2004), Niehaus (2002), and Moodie

(1988) document various male same-sex couplings and marriages in Southern Africa amongst mine workers who were housed in men-only hostels. Similarly to some women-to-women marriages, these relationships took on paternalistic formations where older men took younger men as wives, and these younger men would play the role of “wife” cooking and cleaning and providing sexual favours. These examples demonstrate that, albeit not state-sanctioned, same-sex coupling and marriage has a long history in South Africa, indeed Africa.

Additionally, there are three important works, aptly titled, that document same-sex coupling and marriages. Firstly, *Tommy boys, lesbian men, and ancestral wives: female same-sex practices in Africa* by Ruth Morgan and Saskia Wieringa (2006). In this volume, a section by Nkunzi Nkabinde and Morgan (2006) documents how traditional healers in South Africa, also known as Sangoma, are known to be involved in same-sex marriages, and this does not cause alarm in local communities, as traditional healers are understood to be linked to the ancestral realm. People who are chosen to be traditional healers are sanctioned by ancestors and are accepted as healers and guides from the those who have departed. Secondly, the edited book *Boy-wives and female husbands: studies of African Homosexualities* by Murray and Roscoe (2001) historicises homosexuality and homosexual coupling on the African continent. In this volume, Kendall (2001) argues that before terminology like “lesbian” and “homosexuality” were brought to rural Lesotho, woman-to-woman relations existed without controversy; thus, it is homophobia that is a western construct not homosexuality. Kendall (2001) concludes that it is westerners, with penal codes, laws against ‘unnatural acts’, and Christian values, who cultivated homophobia in the African continent. Thirdly, the book *Male daughters, female husbands: gender and sex in an African society* by Amadiume (1987), critiques the rigid understandings of gender and sexuality that were imposed upon colonised Africans by western settlers. Throughout the text Amadiume (1987) analyses and explains the complex systems that Igbo people in general and Nnobi in particular organised gender, labour, sexuality, land, and matriarchal familial ties in African societies. Arguing that that “the gender ideology governing economic production was that of female industriousness” (Amadiume, 1987: 27). A point also made by Oyěwùmí (1997: 12) that in “in Yorùbá society, in contrast (to Europe societies) social relations derive their legitimacy from social facts, not biology.” Whereas in western societies “a woman is always female regardless of her social achievements or status” this was (and remains so in

certain circumstances) not the case in certain African cultures (Amadiume, 1987: 119). Again, this is an argument that was echoed by Oyěwùmí (1997) about a decade later.

The historical and complicated relationship between marriage, sex, and gender is important in discussions and debates about same-sex marriage. Oyěwùmí (1997: 1) critiques “the idea that biology is destiny” that has been mainstay for European thought for centuries, arguing that historically it is not applicable to African societies. Oyěwùmí (1997: 2) argues that historically Europe made the body that which the social order is organised around, privileging the male body, and that this way of organising social life inevitably invites the “gaze of differentiation.” In African societies the social order was not determined by sex but by social relations. Eurocentrism meant that Europe would use the body centric gaze to look at and make sense of other parts of the world, which, of course, led to historical oppressions including colonisation, slavery, and the holocaust. This gaze of differentiation has implications for gender. Therefore, for the purposes of this thesis, it has implications for marriage. In other words, Eurocentric ideas about biological determinism had far reaching consequences, through colonialism and Christian missionaries, for non-western societies and their ideas of gender and sex.

According to Amadiume (2005) Eurocentric ideas about kinship have neglected African kinships because they upend patriarchy as a natural order. Amadiume (2005: 87) argues that “the main problem in these (Eurocentric) theories of kinship is the construction of woman as an object to be moved or owned.” That, for example, in ancient Egypt, “the matriarchal structure of kinship, was produced in African queendoms as the tripartite power-sharing system” (Amadiume, 2005: 87). Considering that marriages in many African societies was about the relationship between lineages (Oyěwùmí (1997), the destruction caused by the process of colonisation has left African societies disfigured. A disfiguration that the calls for decolonisation have tried (and continue to try) to unmake to be able to chart a different future for African societies.

There is much to be learned about the history of gendered relations in African societies from the structure of African languages. Amadiume (1987: 89) considers the “non-distinctive subject pronoun allows a more flexible semantic system, in which it is possible for men and women to share attributes.” This non-distinctive gender pronoun articulated by Amadiume

(1987) is something I am familiar with in my own native language of Xhosa, where “her”, “his”, “she”, and “him” are not part of the vocabulary. Similarly, to how Igbo people speaking English, as demonstrated by Amadiume (1987: 89), Xhosa people speaking English will often use interchangeably the English pronouns with no regard to gender. Simply put by Oyěwùmí (1997: 42), “unlike European languages, Yorùbá does not do gender, it does seniority.” This is a different way of conceptualising gender and this conceptualising has consequences on how people relate to one another. In this, Amadiume (1987) argues that the linguistic systems enable a conceptualisation of social roles without the consideration of gender, which gives rise to a myriad possibility for what we now know as ‘gendered roles.’ What is evidenced by Amadiume (1987) is the detriment of colonialism because it eroded the power of African women. Western education and Christianity, which ironically were prescribed as bringing civilisation and freedom, actually were the driving force in the erosion of African women’s power in their societies.

The woman-to-woman marriages in African societies were not civil unions, but together with the flexible semantic systems of African languages, they demonstrate a sophisticated history of gender and how it operated in some African societies. Considering the history of woman-to-woman in different contexts on the African continent, the *Civil Union Act 2006* can be seen as formalising and connecting to a part of African history. What is interesting here is how woman-to-woman marriages were not legible to the colonial state, but visible in African societies. In post-apartheid South Africa same-sex relationships were not legible to the state before the *Civil Union Act 2006*. This demonstrates the different ways that same-sex unions have been seen through history, and how we need to appreciate that history to contextualise contemporary civil unions. The history of same-sex unions in African societies, and the rationale behind them is echoed by the sentiments of Therborn (2004), who describes the fluidity of sexuality in African customs, particularly prior to the invasion of Christianity. Therborn (2004: 212) argues, “African customs well pre-dated the western sexual revolution, in regarding sex as a legitimate human pleasure. The often-intricate marriage rules often included a considerable flexibility for pre and post marital sex, provided discretion and particular taboos were respected”. The “intricate marriage rules” that Therborn is talking about here were often characterised as “barbaric” and ungodly by Christian missionaries and

set the groundwork for religious based discrimination towards sexual minorities (Epprecht, 2013).

Sexual identities, the same-sex relationships that are formed from those identities, and the regulation of those relationships, are shaped by the economic, social, and cultural politics. Woman-to-woman marriages were influenced by specific cultural practise, and marriages amongst men in the mines were shaped by migrant labour because of industrialisation. The current state-sanctioned same-sex marriage legalisation is shaped by post-apartheid democratic principles and Human Rights discourses. In agreement with De Vos (2001: 196) the sexual orientation clause in the constitution “contributed to the constitution of lesbian and gay identity” in post-apartheid South Africa. Historically, same-sex relationships have not featured in discussions about intimate relationships in South Africa. It is only in recent years that we see a proliferation of research (Scott and Theron, 2017; Abeagbo, 2015; Scott, 2013a; Van Zyl, 2011a; 2001b) focusing on the intimate lives of same-sex couples in South Africa. Through legalisation, same-sex marriages form part of the spectrum of South African state-sanctioned family structures. This necessitate theorisation of how same-sex couples take up the new law through marriage and ask questions about the impact of heteronormativity as same-sex couples participate in the marriage institution.

#### **4. The Evolution of Marriage**

In *Marriage, a history*, Coontz (2005) argues that societies around the world have had an ongoing “marriage crisis”, because marriage has been evolving since its inception. The history of the different marriage laws that regulate marriage in contemporary South Africa, discussed in the introductory chapter, are indicative of the regulatory evolution of marriage. The legalisation of same-sex marriage in South Africa is part of the ongoing evolution of marriage. The following section will demonstrate how the regulation of marriage is affected by social, political, and economic structures. In discussing the evolution of marriage, I am able to map out how we arrive at same-sex marriage.

#### 4.1. Colonisation and The Evolution of Marriage

The collision of indigenous South African cultures with colonialism affected the trajectory of marriage in South Africa. For example, the marriage systems before colonisation included large families with men having the ability to marry multiple wives (Amoateng and Richter, 2007); these kinds of marriages continue to exist today in rural South Africa. Marriage law, i.e. the rules and regulations of marriage, in South Africa predates the arrival of Roman-Dutch Law in 1652. Societies in Southern Africa had marriage systems before the Dutch settlers arrived in the Cape. Colonisation, western education, Christianity, as well as industrialisation, and the consequent migrant labour, have greatly affected the regulation of marriage and marriage patterns in indigenous South African communities (Radcliffe-Brown and Forde, 1950).

Amoateng and Richter (2007: 3) argue, “Colonialism-induced processes such as urbanisation, industrialisation and subsequent apartheid-imposed restrictions affected family and household formation patterns in the society, especially among Africans, who bore the brunt of such policies”. The proximity of white colonial settlers to native South Africans ensured that indigenous marriages were influenced and changed. This does not mean that without European settlers, marriage systems would not have changed; indeed, they most probably would have, but probably would have taken different directions. The changes in indigenous African weddings and marriages is perhaps captured in the novel, *Wrath of The Ancestors* by Archibald Campbell Jordan (1980), first published in Xhosa in 1940. In the novel, Jordan (1980) describes the wedding of Chief Zwelinzima marrying a woman who was educated at a mission-school. Jordan (1980: 55) described the “new” wedding ceremony as “grand” and a wedding that “had never been seen in Mpondomiseland before and was never likely to be seen again.” Today, overwhelmingly, Christian wedding rites (also known as the white wedding), and practices shape South African weddings and marriages (Mupotsa, 2-14; Erkland, 2014). The influence of Christian conservatism has had a lasting impact on the evolution of ideas and practices of sexuality and sexual identity on the African continent. The Christian conservative ethos of gender and sexuality was not always the standard in African communities (Kendall, 2001); rather, it was entrenched through missionary education. With the passage of time, and the introduction of apartheid laws that governed South Africa – the segregation of different races – the regulation of marriage took on a different shape. The marriage laws in apartheid South Africa were shaped by racial prejudice, and therefore limited marriage to people within

the same racial category (Sherman and Steyn, 2007). Colonisation and the transformation it brought with it meant that in South Africa, as is the case elsewhere in Africa, both ‘western style’ as well as indigenous forms of intimate relationships continue to exist. The wrestle between the “modern” and “traditional” wedding rites is captured by Mupotsa’s (2014) thesis as she looks into the meanings of white weddings for black women in contemporary South Africa (more on Mupotsa’s work later in this chapter).

#### **4.2. Modernisation and Marriage**

Modernisation is riddled with tension as it transforms societies through industrialisation to become urban. There is a wrestling of ideas and ways of being, including marriage and wedding practices, as “traditional” ways of doing things make way for “modern” ways. The two adult monogamous structure of heterosexual marriage, now also the structure of same-sex marriage, has strong ties to capitalism. Duggan (2002) amongst others argued against same-sex marriage for this very reason, that marriage would create suburban domesticated consumers out of lesbians and gays. Chasin (2000) had already argued that the market had long corrupted the gay and lesbian movement more than a decade before same-sex marriage. Some (Coontz, 2005; Macfarlane, 1987; Engels, 1972) have argued that under capitalism the nuclear family is ideal as it best benefits the market and ensures stability. Thus, the development of capitalism and the demands it placed on members of society ushers in a different family structure in Western societies, the nuclear family (Smith, 1997; Engels, 1972). The changes in relationship organisation that are brought by capitalism through modernisation and urbanisation (Blaut, 1989) were also present in South Africa. Modernisation and urbanisation had course-changing effects on marriages in Southern Africa to such an extent that by the 1930’s, polygamy, which was widely practised in many Southern African cultures, was already waning (Schapera, 1939). The men were no longer taking more than one wife as custom dictated, but they did have mistresses whom they did not intend to marry – a new phenomenon at the time (Schapera, 1939). These changes affected Southern African marriage patterns and family life and were a direct result of modernisation and urbanisation (Schapera, 1939). Therborn’s (2004: 177) assertion that “the African family was non-nuclear” and that “kin was always more important than spouse” is no longer as simple in South African communities. As demonstrated by Amoateng, Heaton, and Kalule-Sabiti (2007: 47) there has been a “nuclearisation” of the South African family. Even this “nuclearization” is not uncomplicated because although there is

“nuclearization” in the society, it exists amongst middle class South Africans, and is shaped by racial patterns in that white and Asian South Africans are more likely to live in nuclear families, while the extended family model is more common amongst black and coloured families (Amoateng, Heaton, and Kalule-Sabiti, 2007: 50).

It was only in the year 2000 that South Africa officially recognised customary marriages with the *Recognition of Customary Marriages Act 1998*. The “newness” of the *Recognition of Customary Marriages Act 1998* is demonstrated by the implementation problems experienced by citizens, like “community of property” terminology and interpretation – how does “community of property” play out in a polygamous marriage, particularly in the case of the divorce of one of five wives? (Himonga and Moore, 2015). The glitches experienced in the reading and implementation of the *Recognition of Customary Marriages Act 1998* are indicative of the tensions between traditional cultural practices and contemporary democratic ideals. The modern and the traditional wrestle for dominance in the post-apartheid landscape as South Africans, particularly black South Africans, create cultures and personal identities that are true to their respective cultures while also living out post-apartheid democratic ideals.

Modernisation and urbanisation did not mean the end of customary marriage practices, but it did mean the modification of many cultural practices that were once essential to marriages. One cultural practice that was (and in certain contexts still is) important with customary marriages in Southern Africa is bride-wealth as demonstrated by Mupotsa (2014). When a marriage is being negotiated between kin-groups, it is customary in a number of Southern African communities that the groom offers a “payment” for the bride (Krige and Comaroff, 1981; Kuper, 1987). The reason for the payment is rationalised differently in the varied Southern African communities. Although African marriages have evolved, this practise continues in some form in South Africa. The practise is however carried out differently than it used, to accommodate contemporary structures, and the issue is discussed at length in the ‘gender and marriage in South Africa’ section in this chapter.

### **4.3. The State, Marriage, and The Family**

The evolution of marriage has been shaped by the ways that societies conceptualise the notion of family. The debates about same-sex marriage have in large part been discussions about what constitutes a family. The relationship between the state, marriage as an institution, and the



family is a complicated one because these structures are all socially constructed and are subject to change as societies change. Like in many parts of the world, in South Africa the state regulates marriage, thereby designating which kind of relationships and units are protected and legitimate in the eyes of the law. This of course does not mean that there are no other types of relationships outside of marriage; indeed, there have always been such relationships, even before the idea of the nation state came into being. Engels's [(1972), originally published in 1884] seminal work *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State* is helpful in historicising, in order to understand the development of and the intricate links between the family, private property, and marriage. The battle for same-sex marriage was partly a battle for same-sex couples to be able to bequeath their private property to their partners, so Engels' arguments about marriage and private property are relevant to a discussion on same-sex marriage. With the help of Morgan's (1877) *Ancient Society*, Engels (1972: 87) argues that social institutions changed over time and that this change was influenced by the development of capitalism. Engels argues that capitalism ensures that the family becomes an exploitative institution, in which men are possessive and oppressive towards women. He saw the relationship between women and men in society resembling the relationship between the proletariat and capitalists.

Engels divided the development of the family into three periods, "savagery, barbarism and civilization". The first two epochs are characterised by three stages each in which human development takes place. According to Engels (1972), the first stage, the savagery stage, of the family consisted of what we, today, would call incest, where brothers and sisters, and male and female cousins became husbands and wives. The second stage, barbarism, was characterised by the prohibition of sexual intercourse between people of kin. People lived in groups and although the father of the children was sometimes uncertain, the mother was always recognised. Marriage was legitimated through her lineage. The third stage is what Engels called "the pairing family stage", which was characterised by the pairing of couples. In this stage, even though a man may have a number of wives, he will have a chief wife. Similarly, a woman with many husbands will have a chief husband (Engels, 1972). Increasing anti-incest prohibitions necessitated the development of strict laws around group marriages. These strict laws eventually displaced group marriages with pairing relationships, so although people could still be in polygamous relationships, one man lived with only one woman even if he moved between his wives.

An important change outlined by Engels is the right to infidelity. He argues that over time it became accepted that infidelity on the part of the man was acceptable but forbidden for women. As a result, over time the family inadvertently shrunk and, although the pairing family was too weak to exist independently without the support of the community, signs of monogamous unions began emerging. Engels enables us to see that monogamy is a fairly recent phenomenon, and that it came about because of particular social, political, and economic factors. If one reads the history sketched by Engels (1972) with Foucault's (1986) *History of sexuality*, where Foucault traces the "restrained" and "hypocritical" ideas around sexuality that prioritise heterosexuality within the confines of marriage we see the emergence of the architecture of heteronormativity as a system.

By the mid-twentieth century, the lean nuclear family structure, which consisted of a mother, father and biological children under one roof, was dominant in the Western world (Coontz, 2005). This type of family structure was in line with the requirements of industrialisation. In this setting, functions that were carried out by the family in the agrarian economy and early days of industrialisation, like education and medical care, became the responsibility of the state, leaving the family with only the responsibility of socialising offspring. The dominant contemporary idea of marriage being between two people who love each other is, according to Coontz (2005: 6), a relatively new development in Western cultures; historically, marriage was more about "getting good in-laws and increasing one's family labour force". As society changed and became more stratified, marriage became increasingly about "economic and political transactions" and cemented the division of labour by gender as dowry or bride-wealth became more important. Coontz (2005) argues that marriage – at this juncture – was similar to the market. It arranged the distribution of goods and people.

Therborn (2004: 133) also argues that "marriage is a major mechanism for settling the social status of adults" and that there exists a "historical political economy of sex-marriage family systems" in which women were predominantly the property of their father until they married and became the property of their husbands. Marxist feminists like Benston (1969), Morton (1971), and Bernard (1972) argue that while the family is the site of physical and social reproduction, it is women who shoulder this burden. Husbands are exploited in the production of goods for capital and wives are exploited by providing unpaid reproductive labour for capital in the home. Certainly, people fell in love, but as Coontz (2005) argues, this was not a

good reason to get married. Around the seventeenth century, these old ideas about marriage started to dwindle with political, economic and cultural changes in Europe. Personal choice and love now became reasons people were getting married.

It is in the eighteenth century and even more so in the nineteenth century that Western societies embraced the notion of two people marrying for love (Coontz, 2005: 7, 8). The family is clearly an institution that has never been stationary; it has undergone changes as society changes, although systems of consanguinity have been resistant to change. The history of the development of societies, the different stages of the family, the ways in which capitalism and private property developed, and the regulation of all of this by the state has led us to what we understand marriage, and in turn family, to be. The legalisation of same-sex marriage is not divorced from this history because through marriage, same-sex couples can inherit property and be sanctioned by the state as a family.

The legalisation of same-sex marriage in different parts of the world signifies the ever-changing definition of marriage (Coontz, 2015) and also the changing definition of family (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 1995; Weston, 1991). Over the past 50 years, social scientists have been documenting the shifts in what constitutes a family (Farrell, VandeVusse, and Ocobock, 2012; Morgan, 2011; Van Zyl, 2011; Weston, 1991). Morgan's (2011) book *Rethinking Family Practices* made us aware that what families do can be thought of as *practices*. Edwards, McCarthy, and Gillies (2012) reject any absolute definition of family, pointing out that the concept of family must remain open to possible future definitions and configurations. Weston's (1991) ground breaking work on gay and lesbian families is important, wherein Weston helps us understand that there are many forms of family, and we should talk about families (as a plural) instead of just one kind family. This is the environment in which same-sex marriage becomes a reality; same-sex marriage is possible because same-sex intimacies are seen as just another form of family in the spectrum of families (Adeagbo, 2015; Edwards, McCarthy, and Gillies 2012; Weeks, 2007).

#### **4.4. Gender Equality and Marriage**

It is stating the obvious that marriage as an institution has been heavily critiqued by many scholars. Feminist have wrestled with marriage as an institution and have critique the gender inequality inherent in the institution, critiques that now raise questions about same-sex

marriage. These questions include: what role does gender play in the construction of same-sex marriages? How is gender implicated in the construction of sexual identities vis-à-vis marriage? How does gender and heteronormativity affect the daily navigation of life for married gays and lesbians? Gender has been instrumental in how marriage has historically been organised. This thesis is interested in how same-sex couples wrestle with gender norms in marriage, understanding that marriage as an institution is underpinned by heteronormativity that same-sex couples must negotiate.

In contemporary societies it has been argued, “marriage as an institution no longer has the universal ordering and constraining power” that it used to have (Heaphy et al. 2013: 34). The transformation of marriage, and particularly ideas of gender within marriage, came about as a result of women’s movements pushing for reformation in the regulation of marriage. Marriage as an institution has evolved and “one of the defining features of late modernity is how gender and sexual identities, meanings and practices have become open” (Heaphy et al. 2013: 34). This was not always the case, and so a discussion about marriage requires a discussion about what led to the opening of meanings and practices with regards to gender and sexuality. This then necessitates a discussion on feminism and the historical contestation about the political and material effects of marriage on women.

The battle for gender equality is a battle waged against the state, but also within the family. The understanding of patriarchy as a powerful organising tool of modern society is crucial to understanding the history of marriage. John Stuart Mills’ [(1911) first published in 1869] influential work *The Subjection of Women* challenged patriarchal ideologies in Europe. Mills’ (1911: 29) goal was to show that the “legal subjection of women to men is wrong, and one of the chief hindrances to human improvement.” Mills’ work is a deconstruction of the nature of ‘woman’ and the naturalness of male power and speaks to the ignorance of society about the human character. Mills (1911: 8) also critiqued marriage as the “destination appointed by society for women” and noted the “evil effects of legal inequality in marriage” that women were subjected to. Following from Mills, another important work was published in 1879, by August Bebel. This work, *Die Frau und der Socialism* (Woman and Socialism), is regarded as pioneering text that challenged patriarchy and advanced gender equality. Bebel [(1910) first published in 1879] dealt with the question of what position women should hold in society and looked at ways in which women could become full members of society. In the introduction of

his book, Bebel asked: “in what manner should society be organized to abolish oppression, exploitation, misery and need, and to bring about physical and mental welfare of individuals and of society as a whole?” This question posed by Bebel remained at the centre of feminist inquiry for the next century. Bebel was very aware of the ideological constructions of female inferiority and was mindful that law reformation was a necessary but inadequate step in emancipating women. Bebel pointed out that economic independence – hindered by traditional conceptions of marriage and the family – was paramount to women’s emancipation.

The next decisive phase of the struggle for women’s emancipation occurred in the 1920s, described by Pollock (1972: 10) as “the period of prosperity and social change” where the economic and social position of women improved greatly. After the 1920s there was inaction in the progress towards gender equality. Pollock attributes the stagnation, and indeed backward movement, of feminism after the 1920s to the Depression and the Second World War. This stagnation and backward movement to which Pollock refers is the status of housewife to which women – particularly in the United States – were relegated in the 1950s, accompanied by monogamous marriages. The gender-rigid 1950s came after the relative economic freedom enjoyed by many women in the United States during the Second World War.

It is after the 1950s that we see the uprising of the second wave of feminism, characterised by the work of Betty Friedman (1963), *The Feminine Mystique*, which was in turn inspired by *The Second Sex* by Simone De Beauvoir [(2011) first published in 1949]. In *the Feminine Mystique*, Friedman took issue with the subordinate position of women in North America. Friedman’s (1963) critique centred on the manner in which the role and position of women were assumed to be limited to finding a husband, cooking, cleaning a house and bearing and rearing children. This led to what Friedman (1963: 61-70) called the “crisis in women’s identity” where a woman’s identity was reduced to someone’s wife, or someone’s mother, ensuring that women had no identity outside of those roles. Both of these roles depended on and were perpetuated by the manner in which marriage had come to be defined in the Global North. During the 1960s and 1970s, numerous scholars took issue with the subordinate position of women in society and presented arguments about the ways in which women’s liberation could be achieved.

In the second wave of feminism there was a strong reaction against monogamy and traditional marriage, as marriage was identified as an institution of oppression. It can be argued that these feminist reactions towards marriage and other gender issues were the seeds that would enable feminist and queer scholars to theorise heteronormativity in later decades. Greer's [(2006) originally published in 1970] *The Female Eunuch* substantiated the strong critique of traditional marriage as an instrument in the subjugation of women. Greer critically analysed the middle-class myth of love and marriage and argued against this widely-held societal belief. She traced the myth of love and marriage from the days of feudalism to the 1970's, by looking at societies, books, and plays that have supported this myth. She argued that the image of 'happily-ever-after' that was often painted of marriage was contrary to what actually takes place in relationships. Many women were not fulfilled in their marriages; many had inconsiderate husbands who didn't show them affection, "yet the myth of happily ever after is not invalidated as a myth" (Greer, 2006: 241). The societal pressure to marry and to stay married was a burden for many women.

Marriage is a different institution for women and men because marriage is shaped by patriarchy and reinforced by heteronormativity. Men benefit unfairly from marriage. It has been proven that heterosexual marriage has more benefits for men than it does for women; in fact, men benefit at the expense of women (Dempsey, 2002; Waite and Gallagher, 2000; Bernard, 1972). A study by Ploubidis et al. (2015) demonstrates that health-wise, marriage is still much more beneficial to men than it is to women. Furthermore, Lewis (2002) argues that equality remains elusive for women both in the work place and in the home. Moore (2016) argues that although caring work is more valued today, it is still undervalued, and it is women who still do the majority of caring work. So, although much has changed with regards to gender equity, women still fare unfavourably in marriage compared to men. Societal institutions like the church, corporations, and the state shape the subjective experience of marriage and endow men with power. Biological reasons were, and still are, used to rationalise the authority of men over women; Bernard (1972: 14) dismissed the categorical distinction between the "appropriate" roles played by women and men as a societal fabrication to bestow men with power. Arguing that marriage was good for men, Bernard (1972: 17) pointed out that "men have cursed at it, aimed barbed witticism at it, denigrated it, bemoaned it" but in all of that they have "never ceased to want or need it or to profit from it".

There are many facets to married life, as demonstrated by Moore's work on divorcing couples (2016), but often the realities and complexities of married life are masked by happily-ever-after discourses. Barrett and McIntosh (1982: 23) critique the rose-coloured view of marriage, arguing that people only see the "supportive and rewarding" side of marriage and refuse to acknowledge the "exploitative and destructive" elements of the institution. Barrett and McIntosh also take issue with the weight of the ideological notion that children need two parents, one male and one female, in order to grow up to be fully functioning members of society. They recognise that there is in fact a diversity of families – in many different shapes and sizes – and they trouble the nuclear family's design as functioning to satisfy the needs of capitalism. Barrett and McIntosh (1982: 132) built their arguments on the Marxist critique of the family under capitalism and the feminist critique of the family as a site of female oppression. However, they also highlight how even within socialism and feminism those who have a "radical critique of the family" find themselves often secluded.

#### **4.5. Gender and Marriage in South Africa**

The particularity of black women's experience with marriage in South Africa warrants attention. Black women had a racialised and gendered experience of colonialism and, then, apartheid laws. Simons (1968: 294) captures the complexity of black women's struggles when they argued,

"One of the most intractable problems inherited from the colonial era by the independence of states of Commonwealth Africa is that arising from the dual system of law in family matters, under which customary law is applicable in social conditions in which it is often neither appropriate nor effective. Under the traditional system, women may have been perpetual minors, but they had protection, which a paternalistic society afforded such minors. Now, with the steady disintegration of tribal society, they tend to have the worst of both worlds: dependence without security."

Simons here is speaking to the oppressive conditions in which black women find themselves after legislative regimes both under white minority rule, and also within the African traditionalist framework. Simons is referring to the ways that gender oppression works through different regimes to oppress women. Although Simons does not explicitly name marriage in the quote, the institution of marriage is implicated because in both

“Commonwealth Africa” and in “traditional systems” the institution of marriage was a site of oppression for women. Simons’ (1968) observations remain true in post-apartheid South Africa as research demonstrates that economically, within “underrepresented” groups black women are still worse off than white women and black men in South Africa, in that they are more likely to be unemployed and living in poverty (Seidman-Makgetla, 2004; Lalthapersad, 2003; Steven, 2003). This means that women, are still forced to attach themselves to a man (sometimes through marriage) in order to have financial security in South Africa and scholars have drawn links between domestic violence and poverty (Slabbert, 2016; Parkes, 2015; Williams and Mickelson, 2004).

The particular impact of colonisation on African women cannot be overstated. Oyěwùmí (1997: 122) emphasises that “African females were colonised by Europeans as Africans and as African women. They were dominated, exploited, and inferiorised as Africans together with African men and then separately inferiorised and marginalised as African women.” This is evident in the chronicles of black life in Johannesburg, in *The Disposessed* Longmore (1960) demonstrates part of the historical processes where black men live in hostels, supplying gold mines with their labour for low wages, while their wives and children are left in the Bantustans. The urban life described by Longmore is grim. Longmore (1960) speaks of the lives of black women who were not allowed to work at the mines like men, and had to resort to sex work, and low wages as domestic workers. Longmore (1960) also paints a picture of black women who did well in the urban environment, as well as can be expected in urban settings under apartheid. What Longmore (1960) enables us to see are the consequences of urbanisation, European demands for cheap labour in the gold mines, the development of capitalism, and impact of radical social change in South Africa.

With the understanding that culture, particularly in modern society, is dynamic and ever changing (Giddens, 1990), new ways of organising life have been and continue to be injected into African societies. Political, social, and cultural forces affect marriage and family life including the ways that gender is lived and understood within and outside of marriage. Marriage patterns are affected by socio-economic changes, including changes in women having economic power (Minguela, 2011; Lundberg, Pollak, and Stearns, 2016). In black communities’ costs associated with marriage like bride-wealth adversely affect poor people who desire marriage but can’t afford the bride-wealth. Particularly if we consider that



unemployment in South Africa sits at close to 30% (Statistics South Africa, 2017). This means that high bride-wealth prices can inhibit people from marriage. Indeed, Posel, Rudwick, and Casela (2009) attribute high bride-wealth prices as partly contributing to the decline in marriages in black communities in South Africa. Although bride-wealth has decreased, different kinds of monetary exchanges in intimate relationships are used instead of bride-wealth (Yarborough, 2017; Hunter, 2009; 2010). These monetary exchanges are gendered, in that it is men who have money – therefore the power – and through this power control their relationships. Gender inequality persists in society (Wildscut, Meyer, and Akoojee, 2015; Brinton, 2012), even though there are changes in the political and economic mobility of women.

In post-apartheid South Africa, the popularity of marriage has declined (Palamuleni, 2010; Hosegood, McGrath, and Moultrie, 2009; Posel, Rudwick, and Casela 2009). After analysing census data from 1996 and 2001, Palamuleni (2010) concluded that South Africans are marrying less, if they choose to marry at all. Palamuleni (2010) attributes these changes in marriage patterns in South Africa to the liberation of women, increased education levels, urbanisation and modernisation. The marriage patterns outlined by Palamuleni are similar to patterns found by Hosegood, McGrath, and Moultrie (2009) in rural KwaZulu Natal between 2000 and 2006. Posel, Rudwick, and Casela (2009) and Amoateng (2004) reached a similar conclusion, referring particularly to the decline in marriages of women. These scholars show that in South Africa, there is a postponement of marriage; young people are no longer marrying as they used to.

The declining marriage rates have been accompanied by an increase in cohabitation (Moore and Govender, 2013; Posel et al., 2011; Hosegood, McGrath, and Moultrie, 2009). The increase in cohabitation is racialized, in that black couples are more likely than white couples to cohabit outside of marriage. The reasons for the increase in cohabitation in South Africa are linked to changes in marriage in general, political changes, the economy, and social changes. Hosegood et al. (2004) attribute some of the changes in marriages in South Africa to the HIV/AIDS epidemic, which has seen many households lose adults to HIV/AIDS and family structures suffer, with children left to be heads of households.

Speaking particularly about urban black South Africans, Moore and Govender (2013) attribute the high unmarried-cohabitation to limited access to housing, and personal freedoms in the urban environment. The complex interaction of politics, economics, traditions, and changing laws is the background against which any analysis of contemporary marriage patterns should be conducted (Hosegood, McGrath, and Moultrie, 2009). Marriage customs change as people move away from rural areas to cities in search of a better life, and new systems of measuring bride-wealth are developed. These changes in marriage patterns in South Africa are in line with the ongoing evolution of the institution of marriage dictated by social and economic forces. The introduction of same-sex marriage in South Africa contributes to the evolution of marriage and introduces a “new”, state sanctioned option for organising intimate relationships.

In contemporary South Africa Mupotsa’s (2014) thesis aptly titled *White Weddings* provides a critical intervention in looking at black women’s personhood through the analysis of weddings. Looking at the aspirant consumption of the black middle class, troubling the divide between the “modern” and the traditional” in weddings, and paying attention to the racialised and gendered performance of black brides, Mupotsa (2014) ponders what South African weddings can tell us about the lives of black women. Mupotsa (2014: 28) argues that while others have looked at weddings in South Africa as “consumer rites” she argues that “they are a new freedom and a ‘right.’” Mupotsa (2014: 49) argues that the wedding is created through the movement of black women’s bodies and creates what she calls “presence/absence” as the wedding is about the women but also not about them at the same time. I read Mupotsa as highlighting the position of the black bride, that while she is at the centre of the wedding, she is also silent most of the time in the wedding ceremony while other family relatives are in charge of speaking. Using auto-ethnography, Mupotsa (2014), talks about her own experience as a black bride and how this position informs how she theorises black women in weddings. The intentionality of placing her own experience in her theorising positions her against the positivist stance of the researcher being far removed, therefore ‘objective’ in research. On the contrary, she is invested in the theorising because she understands, in true poststructuralist fashion, that one is never outside what one is studying, but always, at the very least, is in relation to it.

In writing about black women and their white weddings, Mupotsa (2014:53) is adamant that her “findings are speculative and intentionally intended to not offer an essentialist account”

because black women's experience cannot be contained, they cannot be summoned up in a simple single phrase as often demanded by academic research. Looking at the experiences of black brides Mupotsa's work opens up a space to be critical of, amongst other things, whiteness, dominant forms of femininity, and tradition, focusing on how these factors inhibit the freedom of black women. Furthermore, using Halberstam's (2005) theory on the queer art of failure, Mupotsa (2014: 67) argues that "there are failures and oppositional strategies implied in the work of weddings" and that "failure is inherent to the ritual." Here Mupotsa, argues the "failure" of these weddings to perfectly mimic European style weddings is a dislodgment of the dominance of simple single narratives about black women's lives. This is of course complicated, because according to Mupotsa (2014) white weddings, as in the dominant European style wedding with a white dress, guests, and speakers, performed by black people, are also about class. These weddings are a kind of pressure cooker where they signal a certain kind of "arrival" class wise. The pressure of the white wedding is so much that couples who had opted for a "traditional" wedding experience pressure from friends and family to do a white wedding, even years after marrying. Mupotsa (2014) links the growing demand for white weddings to class aspirations which are linked to consumption, as freedom is partly experienced through consumption or the desire for it in the post-apartheid era. Furthermore, Mupotsa (2014: 114) interrogates the heterosexual representations of the "idealized romantic couple." Her intervention seeks to understand what it means to be black women as they perform bride in a heterosexist culture. There is a wrestle with the institution of marriage for black women in South Africa, both historically and in contemporary South Africa. The evolution of marriage has made the institution more complex, thereby the relationships women have with the institutions also more difficult. Mupotsa's work raises questions with regards to race, gender, and class, and the intersection of these in the wake of the legalization of same-sex marriage. Questions whose answers are beyond the scope of this thesis but are important to think about, nonetheless.

## **5. Coming Out and Marriage**

When same-sex couples announce that they will be getting married, they experience the reactions and the emotions that follow as a sort of coming out again. This coming out again signals that the struggle experienced after announcing the desire to marry is akin to the struggle experienced after coming out of the closet. The participants in this study expressed similar

sentiments because at times the news about their impending nuptials was not well received. Also, same-sex couples express how marriage enables them to be more out, as they have to engage with the world as married people, which forces them to come out. This suggests that there is a relationship between same-sex marriage and coming out.

In contemporary social science, it has become a common view that sexuality, in its myriad permutations, is socially constructed (Sedgwick, 2008; Katz, 2007; Foucault, 1986). It is the meanings that people attach to sexuality and sexual acts that give meanings to people's sexualities. In a Foucauldian sense, sexuality is constructed through discourses and hence is not fixed but rather context-driven. Globally, there has been an evolution in thinking about sexuality including the phenomenon of coming out. This evolution was partly inspired by Kinsey's (1948; 1953) ground breaking research, which places sexuality on a continuum, where some people are strongly heterosexual leaning, while others are homosexual leaning. Still others are situated in the middle of the continuum without having a strong affinity with either end of the continuum. The continuum understanding of sexuality enabled people to come out, as there was a better understanding of sexuality. Our understanding of sexuality has broadened and has become even more sophisticated since the inception of the Kinsey scale. Recent research on sexual arousal has demonstrated that there is nobody that is really 100% heterosexual (Rieger et. al., 2016). Also, in our understandings not only do we separate gender from sexuality (Diamond, 2002; Butler, 1990), but we have also come to understand the multiplicity of genders (Browning, 2016) and sexualities (Horley and Clarke, 2016). All of this has meant that young people come out younger and younger, and their coming out is better received than when Kinsey conducted his research.

'Coming out of the closet' has been characterised as a core element of being gay in the twentieth-century western discourse of gay culture (Rossi, 2010; Savin-Williams, 1998, 2001; Trachtenberg, 2005). For a long time, coming out has been regarded as a rite of passage for sexual minorities (Meeks, 2006), in which they disclose, to family and friends, their differing sexual (and/or increasingly gender) identity. This means that coming out is a kind of wrestling with one's sexual identity for those in the closet as they debate with themselves who they are, and whether coming out is desired. Coming out has predominantly been a western phenomenon and through the globalisation of gay culture it has also become expected in other parts of the world. South Africa is no exception: albeit localised, gay and lesbian South Africans

embrace the discourse of coming out of the closet. Adopting the discourse of coming out is true for married same-sex couples in this study, but this does not mean that coming out means the same thing for all lesbian and gay South Africans. As demonstrated by Reid (2013), Matabeni (2011), and Kendall (1999), coming out means different things to different gay and lesbian people in South Africa, depending on gender, culture, location, race, and socio-economic status.

Many have tried to define coming out, like Oswald (1999: 66) who writes “coming out is a process of significant change for women who accept and disclose bisexual or lesbian identities, and for those to whom they come out”. Having a definitive description of coming out is impossible because coming out is as varied as the number of people coming out. Oswald’s description gives one a placeholder but does not encompass coming out for all lesbians, all the time, in all places. Nonetheless, coming out is seen as a lifelong process, where one continues to come out in everyday life as one encounters people who discover one’s sexuality (Vargo, 1998; Carrion and Lock, 1997; Johnson, 1997). According to Guittar (2013), many gays and lesbians describe coming out of the closet as transformative and crucial in identity-construction. In trying to understand ‘the meaning of coming out’ Guittar (2013) argues that coming out is like telling a story about the self. This is similar to Plummer’s (1995) idea of narrating sexual stories in the modern age, and how people create meaning in their lives and forge identities in the creation of stories.

The centrality of the closet and coming out to gay and lesbian identity has not gone without critique. From a queer perspective, the very notion of gay and lesbian identity as universal and fixed across time, place, and culture has been questioned (Seidman, 2003; Seidman, Meeks, and Traschen, 1999; Warner and Berlant, 1998; Sedgwick, 1990). We know from his work *The History of Sexuality*, that Foucault (1986) was sceptical of the confessional ethos that surrounded sexuality. He avoided labelling sexuality because identities can be used to marginalise and oppress as much as they can be sites of resistance. In an interview with Jean François and John De Wit in 1981, Foucault (Brion and Hancourt, 2014: 261) spoke directly about his scepticism of coming out as he answered a question about the “creation of the subject, the sexuated individual ... and the creation of the apparatus of sexuality.” Foucault states:

“On this point I have not always made myself well understood by certain movements for sexual liberation in France. In my opinion, as important as it may be, tactically speaking, to say at a given moment, ‘I am a homosexual,’ over the long run, in a wider strategy, the question of knowing who we are sexually should no longer be posed. It is not then a question of affirming one’s sexual identity, but of refusing to allow sexuality as well as the different forms of sexuality the right to identify you. The obligation to identify oneself through and by a given type of sexuality must be refused.”

In the above quote, Foucault refuses to pin down sexuality (both his and other people’s) by giving it a label. He rejects labels because he sees them as part of the regulatory discourses on sexuality that are sold as freeing, but their function is actually the direct opposite. Foucault (1991: 200) was critical of state regulation and argued in his seminal text *Discipline and punishment* that “visibility is a trap.” So, being legible to the state, the state can control you. Foucault (1991: 177) argued “discipline makes possible the operation of a relational power that sustains itself by its own mechanism.” Furthermore, that as modern societies we function under what Foucault called “régime of disciplinary power” (ibid., 182) which includes the “power of the norm” (ibid., 184). With Foucault’s ideas of discipline in mind marriage can be understood as a regulatory institution controlled by the state to control the population through providing certain incentives for those who marry. So, marriage (including same-sex marriage) can be seen as a disciplinary power that regulates both those who are inside and outside of the institution. The state, the married, the unmarried, and now gays and lesbians are all part of the disciplining mechanism of the institution of marriage. In this then it is not going on a limb to argue that same-sex marriage is a direct invitation to the state and society to regulate the intimate relationships of lesbians and gays. Ironically, the history of the gay and lesbian movement was characterised by the demand for the government to stop regulating the sexuality of homosexuals.

Fundamental to the reconceptualising of the closet and coming out is Sedgwick’s (1990) work aptly titled *Epistemology of the Closet* which, critiques appeals to universalising ways of being. Sedgwick argues against the simplistic readings of homo/heterosexual and male/female binaries because of their limits. Sedgwick also posits that coming out and the closet are linked to Western conceptions of private/public, nature/nurture, and need to be unsettled. For

Sedgwick, it is through a serious take up of queer theory that we can begin to appreciate the complexity of human sexuality far beyond the binary dimensions that have been part of dominant modern ways of knowing.

Seidman (2003) in *Beyond the Closet*, and Seidman, Meeks, and Traschen (1999) argue that the ideas of the closet and coming out are historically located with particular articulations. These scholars contend that the gay identity and its core elements like coming out and the closet have not remained static but have changed with the mainstreaming of the homosexual identity. Moreover, Seidman, Meeks, and Traschen (1999) argue that the framing of the closet posits a homogeneous homosexual coming out experience. With that said, coming out remains an important part of the lesbian and gay identity, particularly in the South African context where homophobia and prejudice are still commonplace. Thus, in this thesis there is a focus on the links between marriage and coming out. Particularly how marriage play a role in facilitating coming out. Whereas same-sex couples can live together without having to disclose the status of their relationship to others, with marriage, disclosure is often inevitable, and this has consequences for same-sex relationships and couples lived experiences.

## **6. Same-Sex Marriages, Queerness, Gay Shame, and Heteronormativity**

### **6.1. Marriage and Same-Sex Relationships**

The earliest documentation of a same-sex relationship in South Africa is the relationship between Klaas Blank and Rijkhaart Jacobsz on Robben Island between 1718 and 1735 (Ben-Asher et al. 2005). The two men were both imprisoned on Robben Island and were in a relationship on the Island for more than a decade before they were executed for committing unnatural acts. Klass Blank was a Khoi man, while Rijkhaart Jacobsz was Dutch. Their story was made into a motion picture called *Proteas*, directed by Greyson and Lewis (2004). Their love story ended tragically, in their execution by drowning. This was an example of what could happen when a same-sex relationship became publicly known. While the government's relationship to same-sex couples has radically changed since the days of Blank and Jacobsz, as same-sex marriage is legal now, there remains hostility towards same-sex couples.

Moodie (1988), McLean and Ngcobo (2001), Murray and Roscoe (2001) and Rankhotha (2005), have all documented same-sex relationships in Southern Africa in different

permutations. As documented by these scholars, same-sex relationships are complex and multifaceted. These relationships have existed in different times, under different cultural environments, permitted in some cases and shunned in others. What cannot be disputed is their existence even in hostile environments. Having no real blueprint, and often prosecuted, same-sex couples have had to be innovative in relationship constructions while simultaneously navigating homophobia. Weeks, Heaphy, and Donovan (2001:20) emphasised that “non-heterosexual people have had to be the arch-inventors, because so few guidelines have existed for those living outside the conventional heterosexual patterns”.

Halperin (1997) has argued that the sexuality movement has enabled people to skew oppressive conventional models and embrace what works for them. Furthermore, Weeks, Heaphy, and Donovan (2001:51-76) argue, “a friendship ethic, based on notions of individual autonomy and mutual involvement, is the key feature of the contemporary non-heterosexual world”. This ethic is responsible, in turn, for creating pathways for heterosexuals to embrace alternative relationship models. Weeks, Heaphy, and Donovan (2001:15) agree, “The achievements of the lesbian and gay movement have opened up possibilities for broader claims for validating a wide range of life experiences.” The gay movement has facilitated the creation of alternative ways of doing relationships. If same-sex relationships are the pioneers of alternative relationships, how do we make sense of same-sex marriage? What can same-sex marriage tell us about the evolution of relationships, particularly in reference to lesbian and gay identities? With the addition of marriage to the ways same-sex couples are fashioning their intimate lives, one is led to contemplate the words of Plummer (1995) – in particular, his ideas of people scripting themselves, creating stories about their lives, and living them. Plummer provides a helpful way of thinking about relationships. Plummer (1995: 20) states:

“We are constantly writing the story of the world around us: its periods and places, its purposes and programmes, its people and plots. We invent identities for ourselves and others and locate ourselves in these imagined maps. We create communities of concern and arenas of activity where we can make our religions, tend to our ‘families’, practise our politics, get on with our work. We experience our bodies and our feelings, as well as our behaviours and talk. And everywhere we go, we are charged with telling stories and making meaning – giving sense to ourselves and the world around us. And the meanings we invoke and the worlds we craft mesh and flow, but remain emergent:



never fixed, always indeterminate, and ceaselessly contested. Change is ubiquitous: we are always becoming, never arriving; and the social order heaves as a vast negotiated web of dialogue and conversation.”

Plummer’s ideas about our worlds never being fixed, always indeterminate, “ceaselessly contested”, and “becoming [but] never arriving” speak to the values of queerness. These ideas also speaks to Deleuze and Guattari’s (2005) concept of *becoming*: where they view life as a continuous movement, wherein every moment is a composition of its environment in that particular moment, never to be repeated as every moment is dependent on its particular assemblage. Plummer’s described state of being resists boundaries and being chained to discourses of what is supposed to be, instead embracing living in flux. Perhaps same-sex marriage should be seen as part of the multitude of ways that one can organise an intimate relationship. Perhaps Plummer’s (1995: 20) “never fixed, always indeterminate” can be read as to mean that even same-sex marriage will lead to further shifts in conceptualising of same-sex relationships in the future.

## **6.2. Debates About Marriage, Debates About Sex**

Warner (1999) posits that the debates about same-sex marriage are essentially debates about the regulation of sex: who can have it, when and where one can have it, and with whom one can have it. Mupotsa (2014: 23) further argues that “weddings are an act of public sex”. I would echo these scholars, that debates about marriage are debates about sex, even if those debates are about the sanitisation or concealment of sex. While some activists wanted marriage for legal and social benefits, others wanted non-heterosexual lives to be free of state regulation. These debates were central in jurisdictions where same-sex marriage was imminent. Theoretically, these debates were taking place in a historical context where there had been a sexual revolution (Allyn, 2001), where “sex wars” debates had taken place (Duggan and Hunter, 2006), also where the devastation caused by HIV/AIDS in gay communities (Shilts, 2000) had taken place. Presently, societies that have legalised same-sex marriage are grappling with what legal marriage means for same-sex couples and, ultimately, what it means for gay liberation. An illuminating point was made by Heaphy et al. (2013: 36) that “same-sex marriages as they are lived are more complexly shaped, patterned and made than many of those in favour of or against same-sex marriage suggest”. This suggests that the binary debate

about same-sex marriage is limited, and that same-sex couples are living far more complex lives than the accommodation and resistance binaries of the queer marriage debate suggests. The participants in this study, while at times seem to be invested in heteronormativity, they are at times disruptive of norms, even inadvertently. So, these couples are not neatly situated within the binary of assimilation and resistance.

Harding (2006) attributes the desire for same-sex marriage to the need for formal equality for same-sex couples. According to Weeks (2005), the reason that marriage equality became a focal point around the world is the need for human interaction. Weeks (2005: 197) argues,

“Despite the explosive impact of the internet and of cybersex, sexuality is ultimately about interacting with others. It is through that interaction that sexual meanings are shaped, and sexual knowledge produced. It is perhaps not so startling, in this context, that same-sex civic unions and marriage have in the new millennium become the symbolic focus of political controversy.”

Weeks suggests that even with all the alternative ways to experience one’s sexuality, experiencing it through marriage is symbolically valued. He suggests that although people are making connections and interacting on various platforms for varied amounts of time, marriage remains desirable as a demonstration of love.

While it might be too early to measure, fully, the impact of same-sex marriage on same-sex relationships, many have hypothesised about the consequences of same-sex marriage. This thesis, at least partly, was driven by the question, does same-sex marriage provide sexual freedom for same-sex couples? For the most part, particularly in the immediate surroundings of same-sex couples, the answer is in the affirmative. Same-sex marriage is a liberating instrument for same-sex couples. At the centre of queer marriage debates is really a debate about freedom, what freedom looks like, and how sexual freedom is to be practised and ultimately measured. Heaphy et al. (2013) are optimistic about the possibilities of same-sex marriage. They argue,

“Same-sex marriage is not the end of the creativity for same-sex relationships but is linked to the intensive vitalisation of heterosexual ones. At the root of this is how marriages have become increasingly vitalised in practice – where people must grapple

with conflicting demands, pressures and ideals, expectations, emotions, disappointments, and possibilities associated with the partnership” (Heaphy et al. 2013: 36).

What these scholars contend is that just as the gay movement provided alternative ways of doing relationships, same-sex marriage has the potential to do the same. The seduction of Heaphy et al.’s (2013) optimistic view about the possibilities created by same-sex marriage is palpable, but it does warrant scepticism. Particularly if we consider Duggan’s (2002) criticism of marriage that it is creating apolitical domesticated consumers who are invested in fitting in rather than question the exclusiveness of institutions such as marriage. Can same-sex marriage modelled on the nuclear family provide an alternative narrative to the nuclear family? There is disagreement on this: while Heaphy et al. (2013) seem to think it is possible, others like Lehr (1999) argue otherwise. Lehr (1999: 107) suggests that the “ability of gays and lesbians to play a role in constructing an alternative narrative about family requires that we reject making arguments about our worth as citizens on the basis of our ability to copy, albeit with some modification, the sexual family.” Lehr’s argument rests on the belief that gays and lesbians will only be able to succeed at marriage if they, and society at large, embrace the alternative families that gays and lesbians have been creating prior to marriage. Elia (2003), Jackson (2006), and Chambers (2007) all caution not to underestimate the power of heteronormativity and how it is positioned to overwhelm non-heterosexual sexualities as they increasingly mainstream. On the other hand, the mere entry of same-sex couples in marriage has a destabilising effect as the institution has to accommodate a “husband” and “husband” & “wife and “wife”. It stands to reason that the entry of same-sex couples into the institution of marriage *does something*. In this new order where same-sex marriage is legal, it is worth empirically investigating the impact of marriage on same-sex couples. Now that marriage is here, what are the ways that same-sex couples wrestle with heteronormativity and in their wrestling, what become of same-sex couples, what becomes of marriage?

### **6.3. Marriage and The Queer Marriage Debate**

Hochschild (2003) argues that the institution of marriage retains its power by extending and adapting itself to communities that were previously not allowed to marry. Considering Hochschild’s (2003) assertion, and the queer marriage debate, can marriage be queer? How

will same-sex marriage affect the sexual freedom of alternative sexualities? According to Barker (2012: 128), “The argument that the institution of marriage could be transformed is based on two, linked, premises. First that the increasing visibility of same-sex relationships will challenge heteronormativity and patriarchy; and second that egalitarianism within same-sex relationships will challenge its fundamental inequality and disrupt gendered norms.” Considering Barker’s (2012) assertions, there is much riding on the inclusion of same-sex couples into marriage, and one wonders how far gays and lesbians can succeed in queering the institution knowing that the power of heteronormativity is what underpins the institution.

Many queer theorists and activists are sceptical of gays’ and lesbians’ ability to transform the institution of marriage (Barker, 2012; Conrad, 2010; Duggan, 2002; Warner, 2000; 1999). When the legalisation of same-sex marriage was tabled, critical South African voices like Bilchitz and Judge (2008), Bonthuys (2008) and Gross (2008) questioned the ability of marriage to offer sexual freedom, especially to those who were not part of mainstream LGBTI communities. On the international front, particularly in North America, queer scholars like Warner (2000), Thompson (2003), Jeffreys (2004) and Wise and Stanley (2004) voiced disappointment at what they saw as short-sighted campaigns for marriage equality. They argued that the drive for the legalisation of same-sex marriage is ultimately assimilationist and heteronormative.

In the South African context, the overarching “heteronormative understandings predominantly manifest within religious and cultural discourses in which religious and cultural prescriptions are used to determine what is moral, natural and normal” (Donaldson and Wilbraham, 2013: 137). The dominant heteronormative standard achieves two things in society: “they are both definitional of a society, and a means of consolidating and anchoring it” (Cooper 2004: 93). According to Warner (1999), gays and lesbians in the United States context are yearning to be “normal” through accessing same-sex marriage. Warner argues that broader access to matrimony will not solve the heteronormative nature of the institution. On the contrary, he maintains that the legalisation of same-sex marriage through which same-sex couples could have their relationships legally recognised, would inevitably create a new normal, which some individuals with same-sex desire will not or cannot conform to, leading to renewed exclusions and marginalisation.

Barker (2012: 111) agrees that although same-sex couples will access marriage, the “unequal social structures in place” within marriage that “affirm the existing social order” remain intact. Barker asserts, “the underlying social structures are a key part of the problem so leaving them intact or possibly reinforcing them is not a way to create equality” (2012: 111). It would seem that for some same-sex couples getting married reinforce the supremacy of the institution of marriage. Same-sex marriage is limited to the same already-existing cultural and legal framework of relationship recognition, based on the model of the two-person, monogamous, borrowed from the heterosexual relationship.

Bonthuys (2007) warned that the legal recognition of same-sex marriage won’t disrupt norms but could strengthen them. Instead of challenging the heteronormative ways of existing in the world based on the binary logic of male/female, same-sex marriage buys into and perpetuates the status quo and the binary logic inherent in the status quo, albeit in a slightly amended form. Butler (1997: 17) further complicates the normalisation debates by insisting that even “failure to approximate the norm, is not the same as the subversion of the norm.” So even if one is seen or performs as non-normative, “there is no promise that subversion will follow from the reiteration of constitutive norms; there is no guarantee that exposing the neutralised status of heterosexuality will lead to its subversion.” The power of heterosexual norms is pervasive because “heterosexuality can augment its hegemony through its denaturalisation, as when we see denaturalised parodies which reidealise heterosexual norms without calling them into question” (Butler, 1997: 17). Possibly, same-sex marriage can easily be described as one such parody that reidealise heterosexual norms.

There has been much disagreement about the consequences of same-sex marriage, in that as much as some queer theorist believe same-sex marriage to be “normalising”, other scholars argue, as contained in Bernstein and Taylor’s (2013) *The marrying kind* edited volume, same-sex marriage is far from simply “normalising”. Similarly, to this thesis, the edited volume by Bernstein and Taylor is trying to make sense of the debates about same-sex marriage within the LGBTII movements. The volume displays a complicated picture of same-sex marriage that renders radical or assimilationist polarisation rather simplistic. An argument strongly supported by Bernstein (2018: 1942) in another article about same-sex marriage debates where she argues that marriage has a “powerful ability to provide meaning to social life.” The import being that same-sex couples shouldn’t be deprived of the ability to have meaning in their social

lives. Admittedly, when I first encountered the same-sex marriage debates, while sympathetic to the criticism of same-sex marriage, I was also mindful of the negative reflection these debates have on the LGBTI movements. I have since seen these debates as queer scholars and people in the LGBTI movements critically engaging with what the same-sex marriage moment meant for sexuality politics and ultimately for sexual freedom.

In the introduction to the Bernstein and Taylor (2013) edited volume the authors argue that there are six overlapping arguments made by queer critiques of same-sex marriage. The scholars term these arguments liberationist, queer, homonormative – which they see as all speculative of what would happen if same-sex marriage happens, as demonstrated by the paragraphs above. The other arguments put forth by queer critics are feminist and lesbian feminist critiques – that position marriage as oppressive to women. Lastly the arguments centre around the idea of the post gay youth whose identities are characterised as beyond the LGBTI movement. Bernstein and Taylor (2013) argue that empirical evidence demonstrates that same-sex marriage doesn't automatically mean the end of queerness as characterised by these queer arguments against same-sex marriage but offer, perhaps, other pathways to sexual freedom. This is demonstrated by the stratification of the LGBTI movement and the needs of the people within the movements distinguished by the intersection of geographical location, class, race, and gender identity.

What is obviated by the pushback towards queer critiques of same-sex marriage is the complexity of the politics of same-sex marriage – meaning that the LGBTI movement is stratified and the needs and therefore politics of LGBTI people differ (Bernstein, 2015). In other words, while a gender conforming middle class white gay man may adopt a 'post-gay' identity and attach no meaning to the 'gay' identity in 2019, a black gay man living in a peri-urban area might experience their claiming of a 'gay' identity as agential. What is clear then is that sexuality politics, pre and post same-sex marriage need an appreciation of intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1991; Scott, 2017). This becomes more visible when Bernstein (2015) argued for the disruption to heteronormativity that is produced by same-sex couples with children. Bernstein (2015: 323) argues that “the lived reality of same-sex couples with children and how same-sex marriage may propel them to be more “out” about their relationships and lives. What happens in public spaces ranging from schools and playgrounds to hospitals and neighbourhoods does not simply reproduce heteronormativity”. This is a direct challenge to

the idea that same-sex couples by entering the institution will automatically reproduce heteronormativity. In fact, the opposite is true, they openly challenge heteronormativity. What becomes clear here is that “material and symbolic change in one institution can affect cultural understandings and practices in other institutions and in society more generally” (Bernstein, 2018: 1944). Meaning that even though same-sex marriage might not radically alter the institution of marriage immediately, over time how people conceive of marriage and same-sex relationships will alter.

#### **6.4. Marriage and Gay Shame**

A group of queer theorists and activists came up with the concept and movement of gay shame, which led to the ‘Gay Shame Conference’ at the University of Michigan, which in turn led to the publication of *Gay Shame* edited by Halperin and Traud (2009). Gay shame is an alternative movement that positions itself against Gay Pride, citing commercialisation, apolitical ethos, and the general mainstreaming of gay politics as problematic. Gay shame is a re-radicalisation of queer politics, emphasising an anti-establishment, anti-capitalist, and anti-commercialised Gay Pride politics. Gay shame activism is a rejection of respectability politics, what Joshi (2012) calls respectable queerness, that comes with the mainstreaming of queer identities. Thus, the politics of gay shame are antithesis to mainstreaming institutions like marriage. Of course, before the queering of shame, in other words, before the productive use of shame, shame about one’s sexuality was/has been central to the lives of non-heterosexuals because of societal homophobia (Moore 2004; Warner 1999). Having a non-normative sexuality is a source of deep shame for many LGBTI people (Miller, 2013). The idea of coming out of the closet is a process of un-shaming oneself and taking pride in one’s sexual identity. Now, queer theorists have taken gay shame and used it productively to question assimilation, and corporatisation of the gay movement.

In the edited manuscript *Gay Shame*, Halperin and Traub (2009) argue for affirmative uses of shame. The authors in *Gay Shame* are in search of possibilities “to create new forms of community as well as new opportunities for inquiry into lesbian-gay-queer history and culture” (Halperin and Traub, 2009: 5). In the context of gay shame, problematizing corporate-sponsored gay pride and rejecting assimilation, same-sex marriage as an equality goal is rendered complicated. Contrary to popular belief, that marriage is an institution that can be

accessed by anyone who desires it, “marriage is not a neutral institution”, it is an institution that is “underpinned with structural inequalities of race, gender, class and ethnicity” (Platero, 2007: 337). Enabling gays and lesbians to access the institution does not automatically change the inequality inherent in the institution. Access does not change the structural inequality because, as Lehr (1999: 32) argues, “the extension of marriage rights would also extend an already existing status differential, one that is essentially representative of class status”.

Stacey (2011) observed that marriage in the United States and in South Africa is deeply racialized. Stacey remarks that “even now that marriage laws in the United States are racially neutral, marriage rates still vary starkly by race, as in South Africa. Whites are twice as likely as blacks to tie the knot” (2011: 112). This insight is supported by Bonthuys (2007: 531), who argues that in South Africa, debates around same-sex marriage have “failed to question the inequitable features of the institution”. According to these scholars, there is reason to believe that same-sex marriage will negatively affect same-sex relationships. They are sceptical about same-sex marriage possessing the potential to liberate the lives of same-sex couples as positioned by same-sex marriage proponents.

Phelan (1997:1) claims, “Gay men argue with one another about whether assimilation or transgression is the road to freedom, and indeed about whether freedom is the goal.” In many ways the question of sexual freedom is at the centre of the debates about same-sex marriage, because same-sex couples talk about their ability to marry as an equality issue (Harding, 2006). Although those who wish to marry can and do subsequently enjoy the legal and social benefits of marriage, those who choose not to marry do not get the legal and social benefits. In effect, same-sex marriage creates inequality between those who can and do choose to marry and those who cannot or choose not to marry. Lehr (1999: 12) notes, “the liberal, rights-based approach is an unsatisfactory approach to family issues because it cannot build bridges between those who wish to be conventional and those who desire greater freedom.” Lehr posits that the very approach we have to freedom is the problem, in that it is limited in its ability to free both those who embrace convention and those who do not. It is perhaps not fully possible to measure the consequences of the legalisation of same-sex marriage, because it is still in its infancy. The words of Kaplan (1997: 205) are still relevant and speak to our current predicament that, “whether lesbians and gay families conform to the normalising regimes of compulsory heterosexuality or act to subvert and challenge its gendered forms remains an open and



contested question.” It remains to be seen whether same-sex marriage will liberate or constrain non-heterosexual sexualities.

### **6.5. Heteronormativity and The Maintenance of Gender Inequality**

Jackson argues (2006) that we should see Rich’s (1980) concept of compulsory heterosexuality as a precursor to heteronormativity. According to Jackson (2006), much of the focus on institutionalised heterosexuality has been on how heterosexuality affects homosexuality. Jackson argues for a politics that pays attention to how institutionalised heterosexuality negatively impacts on heterosexual lives as well. In this, then, Jackson (2006: 105) argues that both those kept inside and those marginalised by normative heterosexuality are negatively impacted by its effects in a “double-sided social regulation”. It is crucial to understand that at the heart of heteronormativity is gender; the dominant operations of gender are what enable heteronormativity. The intricate relationship between gender and heteronormativity has been demonstrated in the works of Schilt and Westbrook (2009), Jackson (2006), Seidman (2005), Ingraham (2005), and Rich (1980). The policing of gender performance are an integral part of reproducing heteronormativity (Cameron and Kulick, 2003). The policing of gender is evident in the lives of same-sex couples from the moment they announce their desire to marry when they receive questions like “who’s wearing the dress.” The relationship between heteronormativity and gender is evident in both those who are invited to the wedding and the same-sex couples themselves as they, at times, adopt heteronormative strategies in their weddings couched in respectability politics. The wrestling with heteronormativity that same-sex couples are engaged in reveals the insidious nature of gender norms and their controlling effects. It becomes evident that in the construction of the wedding and in the navigation of life after the wedding by same-sex couples, the relationality of gender and heteronormativity become an important site for negotiating power.

According to Schilt and Westbrook (2009), the theorising about heterosexuality in sociology is brought about by queer theory, and they emphasise that heteronormativity maintains gender inequality. Research has demonstrated that sexuality and gender are not stable entities; indeed, according to Jackson (2006: 106), “sexuality, gender, and heterosexuality intersect in variable ways within and between different dimensions of the social – and these intersections are also, of course, subject to historical changes along with cultural and contextual variability”.

Cameron and Kulick (2003) argue that gender is incriminated in the construction of sexuality, and often theorized, but so is sexuality in the performance of gender, which they see as under-theorized. In examining the reactions of cisgender heterosexuals to transgender people, Schilt and Westbrook (2009) call us to look at the interactions between gender and sexuality. Marriage has historically been theorised as a site for gender oppression. Also, marriage is a sexual institution, in that it is often assumed that married people are sexual with each other. The questions around gender and sexuality raises questions about how we understand same-sex marriage vis-à-vis gender and sexuality, considering that marriage has historically been a site for gender oppression. In other words, how does the intersection of gender and sexuality play out in same-sex marriage considering that those involved in the institution are people of the same sex?

In this thesis, gender is understood as a socially constructed category. It is Simone de Beauvoir's (2011) first famous line, "One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman", in the influential text *The Second Sex*, which captures the idea of gender as a social construct. In other words, the category "woman" (the social things we attach to femininity), and consequently, the category "man" (the social things we attach to masculinity), is created through social processes. Butler (1990: 6) affirms de Beauvoir's (2011) contention that "gender is culturally constructed: hence, gender is neither the causal result of sex nor as seemingly fixed as sex". In engaging de Beauvoir, Butler (1990: 8) argues that implied in de Beauvoir's construction of gender is that "one becomes a woman, but always under a cultural compulsion to become one", whereas without the compulsion, there would be (and there are) a variety of genders to choose from or, put more starkly, gender would become a fluid and open-ended concept allowing for infinite variety. What de Beauvoir and Butler point to (and challenge) is the binary cultural construction of men as masculine and women as feminine, always, and the political consequences of this construction. This binary construction is naturalised through repetition in the socialisation process. So, gender is not sex (Butler 1990: 6), and according to Haslanger (1995: 130), "gender should be understood as a social category whose definition makes reference to a broad network of social relations, it is not simply a matter of anatomical differences".

The understanding of gender as socially constructed is used in conjunction with the queer definition of heteronormativity, "the myriad ways in which heterosexuality is produced as a

natural, unproblematic, taken-for-granted phenomenon” (Kitzinger, 2005: 478). For Ingraham (2005: 5) heteronormativity is “the belief system underlying institutional heterosexuality”. Heteronormativity is a continuous process of constructing heterosexuality as normal. Heteronormativity consists of people’s personal beliefs and practices of the primacy of heterosexuality, but it also exists and holds regulation institutionally. The heteronormative bias of social institutions is visible when Home Affairs, or the bank, have to create “new” procedures to incorporate married same-sex couples, because the already-existing mechanisms assume that all couples are heterosexual.

According to Jackson (2006: 107) “heteronormativity defines not only a normative sexual practice but also a normal way of life.” This “normal way of life” holds power that at times coerces same-sex couples to want to duplicate it, or at least construct their lives to mimic the dominant heterosexual norm as much as possible (Scott and Theron, 2017). Seidman (2002) argues that while gay rights gains like same-sex marriage have enabled homosexual love to exist, the dominance of heterosexuality has not been hampered. In the United States context, a context that we are exposed to via different kinds of media, Seidman (2002: 160) notes that “normalization” of gay characters in United States cinema requires that they be “gender conventional, committed to romantic-companionate and family values, uncritically patriotic and detached from a subculture”. Not only does this enable the gay characters to ease into a heteronormative world of friends and family, but they do not unsettle the normative order in the grand scheme of the social world. The question then becomes, are Seidman’s observations applicable to the married same-sex couples in Cape Town?

## **6.6. Marriage and The Normativity Debate**

The normativity debate is not only central to same-sex marriage debates, it is also the springboard for my doctoral research. My initial curiosity at the beginning of my doctoral research involved asking questions about the normativity debates. The queer debate engaged in this thesis was discernibly represented by Sullivan’s (1995) *Virtually Normal* and Warner’s (2000) *The Trouble with Normal*. Sullivan argued that homosexuality is normal and that it is society and the way it treats homosexual persons that makes homosexuality an aberration. Sullivan (1995) writes that although marriage is a personal pledge between two people, there is an element of social and public acknowledgement. He sees the denial of this public

acknowledgement of same-sex couples as the opposite of equality. He argued that same-sex couples are capable of carrying out the rights and responsibilities of marriage as well as any heterosexual couple. In fact, many homosexuals already are in such relationships [This is an argument also made by Judge Albie Sachs in the court judgement that legalised same-sex marriage in South Africa (Constitutional Court, 2005)].

Sullivan (1995) argued that the crucial element of the dignity of homosexuals will not be realised without marriage, and an opportunity to be fulfilled in life will be missed by non-heterosexuals if they do not have access to the right to marry. According to Sullivan (1995), same-sex marriage is the ultimate prize for the gay movement. Several years after writing his influential book, Sullivan (1998) launched a critique of queer theorists and activists in the United States, arguing that they are holding on to a bygone past by rejecting marriage and that gays need to embrace marriage as the only future. Sullivan (1998) responded to queer demands for sexual liberty by arguing that the freedom to have sex in public places is not a burning issue for the gay community. That the real issue is marriage rights, and that is what homosexuals should be fighting for.

Warner (2000) provided a critical response to Sullivan, detailing what he considers the pitfalls of same-sex marriage. In the book, *The Trouble with Normal*, Warner (2000) speaks of the control that society exercise over people's sexual practices and argues that this control is unethical. He takes issue with Sullivan's notion that homosexuals are normal or that they should yearn to be normal, and that marriage would make for good gays. A good gay in this case is "the kind that does not challenge the norms of straight culture" (Warner 2000: 113). Warner (2000) advocates for a political project that aims to go beyond struggles to attain the legalisation of gay marriage, as he sees it as limiting and against the gay movement's principles of questioning institutions, not simply joining them. Warner (2000: 88) insists on ethical queer politics "centred on the need to resist the state regulation of sexuality". He cautions that the state will continue to invade and police people's sexual lives as long as people continue to marry. This is no small matter, considering that gays and lesbians have fought hard for the state to stop regulating how non-heterosexuals have sex.

Warner (2000) rejects the common sense understanding of marriage as being between two people who love each other, and the notion that marriage has nothing to do with the

unmarried. Unmarried same-sex couples are impacted by marriage because same-sex marriage “makes lesbians and gays complicit in the labelling of casual sexual encounters as not responsible and it forecloses more imaginative kinship possibilities that move away from the privatised, nuclear family model” (Barker 2012: 15). Although Warner (1999: 108) agrees that the restriction of marriage to heterosexuals is discriminatory, he suggests that, rather than open up marriage to homosexuals, the institution of marriage itself should be challenged, as part of the “matrix of state regulation of sexuality.”

Warner is arguing against internalised homophobia, in that yearning to be normal (as per Sullivan, 1998) is a state of hating oneself that leads to the yearning for heteronormative institutions like marriage. Warner is not alone in his arguments against marriage: Ettelbrick (1997) argued that there are two major reasons why marriage will not liberate lesbians and gays. She says that firstly, “It will constrain us, make us more invisible, force our assimilation into the mainstream, and undermine the goals of gay liberation”, and that secondly, “It will not transform our society from one that makes narrow, but dramatic, distinctions between those who are married and those who are not married to one that respects and encourages choices of relationships and family diversity” (1997: 119). The alternative ways that non-heterosexuals have been arranging their relationships must be valued for what they are, not what they could be once they are married.

### **6.7. Marriage and Queer Theory – “Resisting Regimes of the Normal”**

How do we understand queerness with regards to marriage? Can same-sex marriage lead to a more liberated expression of sexuality? How do we square the transformational ethos of queerness with same-sex marriage, particularly understanding that queer theory developed in response to the limits of identity politics by writers like Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, Judith Butler, Michael Warner and David Halperin? Queer theory calls into question the centrality of heterosexuality in the ways people organise their gender identity and performance, sexuality, and the organisation of their relationships. Warner’s (1993: xxvi) describes queerness as a “thorough resistance to regimes of the normal.” Queer theory is a deconstruction of the taken-for-granted aspects of everyday life. Halperin (1995: 79) sees queerness as fluid and “an identity without an essence, not a given condition but a horizon of possibility”. Warner’s and Halperin’s ideas on queerness are committed to resisting heteronormativity, not buying into

its centralising power of what is considered normal behaviour. Warner (1993: xxvii) succinctly sums up queerness when he writes that queer “protests not just the normal behaviour of the social but the *idea* of the normal behaviour”. There are two ways in which queer theory tackles the issue of sexuality, sex, and gender in society: first, it addresses theoretical questions around these topics and, second, it postulates a political programme to deal with these issues (Mac-An-Ghail and Haywood, 2006). Queer theory seeks to strike at the foundations of the “socially given identities and categories” in an attempt to disturb them, and politically, it aims to advance the emancipation of individuals who experience same-sex desire, by attacking the limitations of an assimilationist political strategy that seeks emancipation through the validation and acceptance of gay and lesbian individuals by the broader society (Mac-An-Ghail and Haywood, 2006: 487).

As Halperin (1995: 81) puts it, the queer way of life has enabled non-heterosexuals to create relationships that “escape the ready-made formulas already available”. Queer theorists caution that same-sex marriage has the potential to erode these ideals. Foucault was very much attuned to the messiness of human relations and how we should rather embrace that messiness than try to sanitise it through social institutions. This sentiment is captured succinctly when Foucault (quoted by Halperin, 1995: 81) says that:

“We live in a relational world that institutions have considerably impoverished. Society and the institutions, which frame it, have limited the possibility of relationships because a rich relational world would be very complex to manage ... In effect, we live in a legal, social, and institutional world where the only relations possible are extremely few, extremely simplified, and extremely poor.”

Foucault argues for a different way of doing and organizing relationships. When Foucault spoke these words, it is perhaps fair to say that he was not imagining lesbians and gays marrying. The legal recognition of same-sex marriage, in the Foucauldian sense, runs the risk of narrowing the possibilities for different kinds of non-heterosexual relationships to flourish. However, others would argue that it opens up and increases the ways that lesbians and gays can organise their relationships. In fact, Bernstein (2018: 1947) “suggest that access to the institution of marriage, when situated within a broader context, may open space to challenge aspects of heteronormativity, so that sexual and gender norms are redrawn”. It would seem

that the challenge is to think critically about what the institutionalisation of homosexual relationships means for the continued struggle for sexual freedom.

Queer theory grew out of poststructuralist theory, and poststructuralist theory “tends to concentrate on the local and the specific and eschew universal and ahistorical accounts of oppression, definitions of homosexuality, and blueprints for freedom” (Sullivan 2003: 40). Sullivan (2003: 81) notes that, “queer theory aims to denaturalise heteronormative understandings of sex, gender, sexuality, and sociality and the relations between them”. Queer theory demands that we critically engage with the idea of same-sex marriage and ask questions related to the power of the heteronormative framework of same-sex marriage. Furthermore, does same-sex marriage disadvantage other segments of the queer community, particularly through the intersections of race, class, and gender identity? Marriage is a historically and culturally specific institution and should not be treated as something that is given. There has to be room to question what Whittle (2005: 117) calls “hegemonic centrism of heterosexism” in marriage as same-sex couples enter the institution. Considering the historical heteronormative framework of marriage how does same-sex marriage deal with what Whittle (2005) called “pathologies of sexuality and gendered behaviour” particularly as we consider the stratification of LGBTI people.

Queer theory questions taken-for-granted heterosexuality and its dominant institutions, like marriage, and aims to interrupt assumptions and practices that rely on heterosexuality as the backdrop for engaging with and understanding everybody’s sexuality. In the words of Dorothy Parker, “heterosexuality is not normal, it is just common”. Theorists like Butler and Wittig (quoted by Sullivan, 2003: 39) explain that “heterosexuality is a complex matrix of discourses, institutions, and so on, that has become normalised in our culture, thus making particular relationships, lifestyles, and identities, seem natural, ahistorical and universal.” According to Ettelbrick (1997: 120), “Being queer means pushing the parameters of sex, sexuality, and family, and in the process transforming the very fabric of society”. Using Ettelbrick’s description of queerness as a barometer makes us think critically about same-sex marriage and warrants us to ask, what are the implications of this institution for queer liberation?

## 7. Chapter Conclusion

The debates about same-sex marriage have not settled; instead, they are ongoing. While some see same-sex marriage as progress, others see it as assimilation to heterosexual norms. This chapter situates the debates about same-sex marriage, emphasising that same-sex marriage does not exist in a vacuum but rather forms part of the ongoing evolution of the institution of marriage. Now that same-sex marriage is legal, and lesbians and gays are marrying, we can make sense of the aftermath of same-sex marriage. A complex mixture of social, political, and economic issues has enabled the transformation of marriage. If we see marriage as an institution that responds to the climate of a particular moment, influenced by social processes like modernisation and urbanisation, then same-sex marriage is not only part of the evolution, but a signal that the institution will continue to evolve as it encounters different social revolutions.

The debates about marriage – including questions of whether or not same-sex couples should be allowed to marry, whether or not same-sex couples will transform marriage, and whether or not marriage will transform same-sex couples – speak to the multiple ways marriage as an institution is interpreted. While for some, marriage is underpinned by religious understandings and seen as the ultimate demonstration of commitment, for others it represents the merging of families where community is central, as in many black South African communities. For others still, marriage represents a way to access protections that the state provides through marriage, chief amongst these being citizenship and belonging. For many, it is a mixture of all of these. The debates about same-sex marriage exist in a culture that is heteronormative. In this thesis feminist debates and queer debates on marriage, and the queer critiques of heteronormativity provide theoretical pathways to think about same-sex marriage. The queer critiques of marriage highlight that same-sex couples need to be vigilant of the power of heteronormativity through the institution of marriage, and the possibilities of co-option. As Foucault once cautioned that at times the things that liberate us can also be part of the system that imprisons us.

The challenge is to think critically about what the state approval of homosexual relationships means for the continued struggle for sexual freedom. What does the wrestle against heteronormativity mean for same-sex couples, and what does it mean for sexuality politics?



Marriage may look like sexual freedom in that same-sex couples are permitted to enjoy the privileges of the institution but joining the institution might have other costs. In chapters four, five and six, I will demonstrate, using empirical data, how coming out shapes the experiences of marriage of same-sex couples; how they go about constructing the wedding; and how they are asserting their sexuality in public is important. This all takes place while same-sex couples are wrestling with heteronormativity. The next chapter, the methodology chapter, will detail the research process, and demonstrate how I, as a researcher, was implicated in the research process.

## Chapter Three

### Methodology

#### 1. Chapter Introduction

Kelly: (smiles) Out of interest do you believe that gay is the way that you are born, do you believe that it's nature?

*Lwando: Oh my goodness do we really want to go there?*

Kelly: Yeah, like your personal opinion.

In the extract above, Kelly, a participant in the research, asked me whether gayness was a product of 'nature' or 'nurture'. The extract is a reminder of the dynamics of the research process. Firstly, although while conducting the research, I asked the questions, in this instance Kelly turns things around and poses a question to me. Kelly means no harm, and the line of questioning is not hostile towards me, but nonetheless it challenges the supposed neat structure of researcher/participant. This extract demonstrates that in the interview setting there are power dynamics. The power dynamics between the researcher and the participant changes throughout the interview, and different power dynamics exists with different participants. One interpretation of Kelly's question is that she wants to know who I am, and what are my politics.

In the interview I was ambivalent about the question posed by Kelly, partly because I know there are raging debates about this question, and how I answer would position me in a particular way in Kelly's eyes. Kelly was aware of my ambivalence, and perhaps was even aware that in the answering of the question I might obfuscate behind academic jargon, and she asks for a 'personal opinion' on the matter. This even more clearly demonstrates how she wants to know who I am. This interaction shows how researchers are positioned, what their opinions are, and how they relate to the participants matters. The researcher does not disappear, they are in a relational relationship with the participants, and the participants care about the researcher's opinions, if only as so far as they can establish who the researcher is in relation to them. This is important to highlight because how participants view the researcher affects the responses from the interview, thus affects the data one collects. For example, if Kelly believes

that gayness is located in nature encapsulated by the phrase “born this way” and if my ‘personal opinion’ is that gayness is located in the nurturing process, then this could potentially lead to a shutdown from the participant. Thus, it is important to think critically about the research process and hence the importance of this methodology chapter.

In this thesis I am concerned with lesbian and gay couples as they wrestle with heteronormativity in marriage. In approaching this research, I was wrestling with my own ideas about marriage. Inspired by queer critiques of marriage, I pondered about the effects of assimilation, the expectations about the apolitical nature of couples choosing state regulation and questioned whether heteronormative domesticity would be the consequence of same-sex marriage. My approach to the research was very sympathetic to queer critiques of marriage and the power the institution would have over same-sex couples as they allow the state to regulate their relationships. After engaging with married same-sex couples a different picture emerges of couples challenging the assumptions about assimilation, challenging the rhetoric that same-sex marriage is apolitical, and challenging ideas of simplified normative domesticity. The decision to marry, the kind of weddings couples have, and the decisions that same-sex couples make about their daily living after the wedding tells a story about wrestling for sexual freedom within but also against the heteronormative society.

## **2. The Researcher as Insider/Outsider**

There is a wrestling of the outsider and insider dichotomy that I had to content with in this study. Linked to this outsider/insider tension is how my intersectional identities also plays out in the field during the research. I am part of LGBTI communities in Cape Town. Being part of the group that one is researching has its advantages and downfalls. I am not the first researcher to encounter the outsider/insider dynamics in the research process. The insider/outsider binaries are also demonstrated by Matebeni (2008) while discussing her positionality as a researcher/activist amongst black lesbians in Johannesburg. She doesn’t see the binaries as binaries as such, but connections, arguing that “these binaries are complex, layered and interlinked. Thus they are not just binaries, but linkages” Matebeni (2008: 94). While on the one hand it can sometimes make finding participants relatively easy, quick, and rewarding, it can also have pitfalls due to overfamiliarity. Also, there is a need to be sceptical of the neat binary between insider and outsider (Hayfield and Huxley, 2015) because I was at

times an insider and other times an outsider. This position can be attributed to my intersecting identities and how they positioned me differently depending on who I was interviewing. As demonstrated by the case of Horsley and Dyson (2007), lesbian researchers working with lesbian health issues, there is often a need for insider researchers when researching people on the margins. Being insiders helped Horsley and Dyson (2007) because they were more knowledgeable and more sensitive than non-lesbians about lesbian health issues while researching lesbians. Being an insider also has drawbacks: there is the potential to drown out participants' voices in what Denzin (2000) calls "compulsive extroversion of interiority" (quoted by Horsley and Dyson, 2007). Matebeni (2011; 2008) highlighted the pitfalls of being the insider when reporting on her fieldwork, she noted how participants who were familiar to her would take it for granted that she knew what they were talking about in interviews. Clearly being on the inside and being on the outside has its own advantages and disadvantages (Dwyer and Buckle, 2009). So as demonstrated by Dwyer and Buckle (2009) how the researcher is perceived as insider/outsider is depending on context specific variables like the participants, the relationship to the participants, and the subject matter, as all of these create a unique research context with its own ethical considerations.

Intersectionality as a theoretical lens is helpful to understand my position as a researcher, as the intersection of my identities and the participants identities were part of the research. Intersectionality was first developed by Crenshaw (1991) and describes how people's lives comprise of different social identities; through experience those identities interact to inform the social location of the individual. So, one's social position is determined by the intersection of one's race, gender, sexuality, class, bodily ability, nationality, and the list can go on. Weston (2011:15) encapsulates intersectionality succinctly when she notes "gender is about race is about class is about sexuality is about age is about nationality is about an entire range of social relations." Thus, people's lives, both those who are marginalised and those who are privileged, are enveloped in what Weeks (2010: 96) calls "overlapping, interweaving and multidimensional forms of power" that structure people's lives. During the research for this thesis, the multiple identities of the researcher – black, queer, relatively middle class, relative high level of education – positioned the researcher to the participants. How the participants reacted to the researcher was partly dependent on these identities as demonstrated by the examples about gender identity and race below. Thus, intersectionality is linked to the dichotomy of

insider/outsider because how the researcher's identities are read by the participants, whether they are seen as insider or outsider, is dependent on how the researcher's identities position him in relation to the particular participants being interviewed.

In retrospect, the insider/outsider dynamic in the research process was evident as far as recruitment. As an insider in LGBTI circles I was able to access an LGBTI NGO mailing list in order to recruit participants for the research and this method secured some participants. This method also provided particularly middle class LGBTI participants, as they are the ones who are on the databases and responded to the recruitment message. I am a budding black Xhosa speaking queer academic with a non-conforming gender identity. I am not married and have no experience of marriage because I wasn't raised within the confines of a marriage. The participants in the research knew some of these particulars about me. The identities were of consequence as participants interacted with these identities in the interviews. This is in line with Kerstetter's (2012) arguments that identities matter in community-based research, and how the community being researched will perceive researchers' identities will depend on the context.

While researching same-sex couples, the insider/outsider binary was not stable, in that the researcher was at times taken as an insider, while in other occasions was seen as an outsider. All participants saw the researcher as an insider as a "gay" person doing "gay" research. My "visible" sexual orientation, read through mannerisms such as speech and nail polish, but also because I am studying same-sex marriage, helped to create an insider sense. Not once was I asked if I was gay or not, it was always already assumed. The insider status was demonstrated by how some participants asked if I was married or was I doing the research because of the desire to marry. This was another assumption being made, that an interest *in* marriage means a desire *for* marriage. The intersection of the sexual orientation, race, gender, and language ability become very evident here. The researcher was also considered an insider through race/cultural background and language by some participants, as demonstrated by the language choices of some participants in the interview. While the majority of the interviews were conducted in English, there were some interviews conducted fully in Xhosa and others partially in Xhosa. These interviews were translated in the transcription process. There was plenty of language code switching in these particular interviews. The language code switching in the interviews had multiple functions. It was used to communicate a particular point in the

mother tongue of the participants; it was also used to signal that I was in on whatever the participants were talking about. It was a way to establish a connection, to affirm that I was “one of ours”. This was one of the ways that the researcher was considered an insider. The extract below demonstrates this.

Sphoki: It’s not always something I always want (they both laugh). You always say things that I want to address. (We all laugh). It’s not because I want to be the opposition. Believe me when I say she is your hard-core typical township lesbian. Butch.

Lwando: Butch. (We say that simultaneously).

Sphoki: So that needs challenging, *nhe* you agree? (Sphoki speaks to me almost forcing me to agree)

In the extract above Sphoki establishes that she and I are on the same side. As she was speaking, she was looking at me, and also smiling and laughing. Sphoki was code switching throughout the interview. In this particular anecdote she codes switches to establish a relationship with me, a connection, or even to confirm that we agree with the ‘*nhe* you agree.’ The “*nhe*”, lacking a more precise description means “yes”. It is a yes that Sphoki communicated with both her words but also her body and facial expressions. It is a yes that almost forces the researcher to agree with what she is saying. Here, I am an insider twice fold. I am an insider with the couple as black same-sex desiring people, but also I am an insider with Sphoki individually as she claims the researcher in the discussion about ‘hard-core typical township lesbian’ needing to be challenged. The discussion above is about the need to challenge hegemonic masculine tendencies displayed by butch lesbians in butch/femme relationships like the one Sphoki has with her partner. The butch/femme issue is a dynamic that Sphoki assumed that I understand. There are assumptions made by Sphoki about my gender identity in that it is assumed, jokingly, that I will agree with Sphoki, because we are both femme. This example demonstrates the complicated nature of the insider/outsider dichotomy and how intersectionality plays a pivotal role in understanding identities in the field.

As mentioned, I am relatively gender non-conforming in that although I am classified male, my mannerisms and way of dress can be considered femme or fluid or even queer. This of course affects how the participants react towards me. In all instances, the “visibility” of my queerness has ensured immediate rapport with participants. My gender identity and possibly

performance influenced how Sphoki related to me as she jokingly pulled me in to side with her during the couple interview. In the “dispute” it was taken for granted that I, because I am visibly femme, I would side with Sphoki, the femme participant. The assumption here is that I, as a femme queer person, who also dates men that are butch or masculine, and that I know the femme/butch struggles in same-sex relationships. There is a gender assumption that all those who are femme, regardless of sex, are in the same club in dealing with the butch. There’s laughter in the interview as this all takes place signalling that we were all in on the gender joke. The gender joke being that masculine gays and lesbians partake in the hegemonic masculine traits of South African society, and that femme gays and lesbians have to deal with the gender struggle within their same-sex relationships. Sphoki is highlighting that heteronormativity is also visible in the same-sex relationship. This example demonstrates how I was seen as an insider in the research process. Of course, these markers of “recognition” that enable the participants to read me as insider are themselves normative in a sense and buy into overarching constructions of blackness/Xhosaness in the first instance, and a linking of gayness with femininity in the second instance. Demonstrating once again the insidiousness of normativity.

The history of South Africa has meant that all South Africans are aware of race and how race functions and intersects with all aspects of one’s life. It was then expected that race would also be a fact in this research because I am black and would interact with South Africans from different racial backgrounds. My outsider status was primarily through race. The majority of the couples interviewed were white couples. While race relations in post-apartheid South Africa have become better, South Africans remain racially separated by race through geography and through culture. This is no different in the LGBTI communities (Scott, 2017; Tucker, 2009; Salo et.al., 2010). The complex intersection of race, class, and gender within the LGBTI communities in South Africa is best demonstrated by the disruption of Johannesburg Pride in 2012 by a group of black feminist lesbians (Scott, 2017). Differences through race are ever present in the interaction of South Africans, and this was evident in this study.

I was welcomed into the homes of white South Africans, to talk about their daily lives as married people. Reflexive white researchers often write about the quandaries of studying and writing about black people because of the historical legacy of racism and Eurocentric ethnography (Pachirat, 2017; Agyeman, 2008; Edwards, 1996). This is probably demonstrated best between a conversation Loïc, a white French man and Mitch, a Jewish American man,

where Mitch expresses scepticism on white researchers researching black people. Mitch asserts “I am sceptical that any white researcher could ever really know what his poor black subjects think of him on the basis of the things they say to him” (Pachirat, 2017: 59). Mitch was signalling that although “poor black people” might act like they are willing participants in research, but in actual fact might not be forthcoming with information required in the research. Take the example below of how I was viewed by one white participant, Martin, while the participant was answering a question about his relationship with his neighbours.

Martin: So the neighbors don't know, I don't view my neighbors; this is the South Africa that I live in, maybe you live in a different South Africa. My neighbors are not part of my life.

I am a black South African and was aware that entering the interview space with white South Africans would entail a navigation of racial dynamics. In the extract above it is clear that I am partly seen as an outsider when Martin was talking about their non-existent relations with their neighbours. What is established here by Martin is that him and I live in “different” South Africa's. Unlike, me, the black researcher who possibly has relationships with his neighbours, because he lives in a “different” South Africa, in Martin's neighbourhood, a white neighbourhood, there are no strong neighbourly relationships. This comment might seem innocent enough, but contained in it is how Martin, a white participant positions me, the black researcher, as an outsider. Firstly, I am positioned as someone who does not live in the same neighbourhood. Secondly, I am positioned as someone that culturally will have strong neighbourly relationships where I come from. As a black South African it is expected that I reside in a township as designed by the apartheid government through the *Group Areas Act* 1950. Martin also assumes that the neighbourly relationships that I am used to in the black neighbourhood where I would be from are different from the ones that exist in the predominantly white suburb, where Martin resides. Ironically when the interview was conducted I lived in relative proximity to Martin. So, although martin and I lived in close proximity, although we are both gay, although we are both middle-class, racially/culturally I was constructed as an outsider by the participant. What is demonstrated in the research process is that because of the diversity of South Africans, and also the stratification of South African society, I was at times insider and other times outsider. The intersection of my identities meant that I was treated differently depending on the reading of those identities by the participants being interviewed. My position of straddling both insider and outsider is



afforded by the black-yet-university-educated-middle-class position I inhabit. A position that is particular to the post-apartheid democratic moment, where black, queer, educated, and middle-class can intersect in ways they didn't in the past.

My position of a researcher as described above has consequences in terms of the kind of data collected and also how one should read the data. The same question asked by different people can elicit different answers from the same participants because of how the researcher is read. This necessitates that the researcher is sensitive to the ways that they are constructed by their participants in order to understand what they mean. As demonstrated above, in the reading of the researcher by the participants as insider or outsider, there are things that the participants take for granted. This confirms that the researcher is never outside of the research process, that they shape the data they collect. This is considered in the analysis process as meaning is gleaned from the data. The research process is a give and take process; so, inhabiting the insider/outsider position is not a loss but an opportunity to see how the stratification of South African society plays out and affects how married same-sex couples navigate life. Particularly, the insider position of being read as “queer” enabled me to gain trust from participants, and in the process, they were forthcoming with their stories. At one point, one of the participants made an endearing comment of how I was like a therapist for the couple in the interview session.

### **3. Research Questions**

There have been a number of studies that have looked at same-sex marriage in South Africa since it was legalised (Scott and Theron, 2017; Scott, 2013a; 2013b; 2018; Van Zyl, 2011a; 2011b). This thesis contributes to this growing scholarship about same-sex unions in South Africa by asking questions about the impact same-sex marriage has on the lives of gays and lesbians. In order to theorise same-sex marriage in South Africa in relation to heteronormativity, this thesis was driven by three research questions. Firstly, why do same-sex couples marry? Secondly, how do same-sex couples construct their weddings? What about the construction of same-sex weddings reveal about heteronormativity in making the weddings. Lastly, what is married life like after the wedding for same-sex couples? How do married same-sex couples negotiate married life in a heteronormative social climate.

Why marriage<sup>2</sup> is a research question that focuses on the reasons why same-sex couples chose to marry. This then necessitates an engagement of the socio-political environment in which the decision to marry is made. In answering this question, we see that same-sex couples are responding to the particular time in South African history. So, it is not only what influences the decision to marry that this thesis takes seriously, but also what impact it has on the couple.

The second research question is concerned with what is involved in the construction of the weddings of same-sex couples. To what extent are the things that make up same-sex weddings shaped by heterosexual white weddings? The majority of same-sex couples in the sample had what Mupotsa (2014) and Ingraham (1999) call a “white wedding”, the kind of wedding ceremony that included guests, food, new clothes, speeches, and dancing. According to Ingraham (1999), traditional white heterosexual wedding ceremonies are sites that reproduce heteronormativity. With Ingraham’s (1999) arguments about the wedding in mind, this research question grapples with the meanings in the construction of same-sex wedding ceremonies.

The final research question focuses on couple life after the wedding. How do same-sex couples navigate life once married, and what does that experience tell us about the everyday life of same-sex couples in the first decade after same-sex marriage was legalised. While some couples do not see or feel a difference in their lives pre and post the wedding, some couples have an acute awareness of the difference pre and post marriage. Some couples go as far as to say that the difference was almost instant. What does this tell us about some same-sex couples, and what “marriage” means for couples? Married life is a battleground against heteronormativity for same-sex couples. So, in answering the question “how is married life?” we gain an understanding of how same-sex couples deal with a heteronormative world and gain a perspective on how they transform those around them as they navigate the heteronormative post-apartheid South Africa.

#### **4. Qualitative Research Study**

This is a qualitative research study. According to Kaplan and Maxwell (2005: 30) qualitative research uses “data in the form of words rather than numbers” in order to understand the behaviours of people in specific situations. Kaplan and Maxwell (2005: 30) argue that the power of qualitative research methods lies in “understanding the meaning and context of the

phenomenon studied, and the particular events and processes that makes up this phenomenon over time, in real-life, natural settings.” Qualitative research provides an opportunity to dive deeper into a social phenomenon; in this case same-sex marriage, much more than a researcher could in more quantitative research. This thesis uses a qualitative method where the data from interviews was interpreted in order to understand the social reality of married same-sex couples. Qualitative research is useful in unpacking complex human issues like contradictory feelings, personal relationships, intimacy, gender roles, gender performance and social norms. All of these issues were apparent in the study of same-sex marriage.

As a qualitative study this thesis provides a textual description and analysis of the data from interviews that were conducted with same-sex couples. Also, since the research process was conducted by me from start to finish, the elements of visiting couple’s houses and seeing where they live, what they were wearing, seeing photographs on the walls, being offered tea or wine, and the kind of pleasantries they share before the interview enriched the data because I was enabled to see couple’s domestic life. This was a study of same-sex marriage, where gender and gender performance were important in certain aspects of understanding the couples, for example whether a couple or a partner in a couple was gender non-conforming, so interacting with the couples provided a richer tapestry of the lives of same-sex couples.

## **5. An Interpretative Approach**

In their research, Thanh and Thanh (2015) demonstrate the interconnectedness of the interpretative paradigm and qualitative research methods. The interpretive paradigm in social research places emphasis on the subjective experiences of those studied and emphasises the importance of the environment in which they live out these experiences (Willis, 2007). Since the interpretative paradigm aims to “eschew the idea that objective research on human behaviour is possible”, the context in which the behaviour takes place is taken seriously as it is understood as playing a role in shaping human behaviour (Willis, 2007: 110). As demonstrated by the extract at the beginning of the chapter, the question I was asked by Kelly forces me to understand that I am not neutral that I have an opinion. Meaning is what the interpretive paradigm seeks, so qualitative research methods, like interviews as in this thesis, are a complementary tool. This thesis then is a qualitative study interpreting interview data of

married same-sex couples, in order to understand the meanings of same-sex marriage and impact of heteronormativity on same-sex couples.

Further enriching my approaches to the study of same-sex couples is Luker (2008), who engages with contemporary social structures that include technological development, different ways of viewing knowledge, and accessibility of knowledge, as forces that influence research methods. Luker (2008: 3) in her book *Salsa Dancing into the Social Science*, describes an approach which is “holistic and attentive to context, conceptually innovative, methodologically agnostic research that sees itself as socially embedded, is strongly committed to building theory in a cumulative way, and is deeply attentive to questions of power”. Luker’s qualitative approach to research speaks to the interpretative paradigm in that there is an understanding that the data collected for research purposes do not exist in a vacuum; this data is located in a particular culture, time, and place, which reveals much about social life in a particular moment. Luker’s approach is used in this study to speak to same-sex marriage as a snapshot in time, the decade that follows the legalisation of same-sex marriage in South Africa.

The interpretative paradigm is a holistic approach that pays attention to context. Sexuality scholars have emphasised this approach, such as Engebretsen (2008) and Blackwood (2008), focusing on different contexts but both on the topic of transnational sexualities. Engebretsen (2008) argues that in transnational sexualities studies, Anglo-US analytical tools are not adequate to address the nuances of sexualities in post-millennial Beijing. Engebretsen argues that researchers from the west working on sexualities in China, indeed in the Global South, need to take into consideration the context in which the study is taking place. Similarly, Blackwood (2008) demonstrated how western scholars do not take transnational discourses on sexuality and gender into account in the theorising about queer life in Indonesia. This points to the need to understand same-sex marriage at the local level, to understand how the history of South Africa shapes the lives of the couples in the research sample.

There is emphasis by Luker (2008) that social reality has changed from the late 20<sup>th</sup> century into the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The ways in which social reality is shaped now require different ways of thinking in the social sciences that are in line with the new social reality. According to Luker (2008: 7), there are two research time periods, which she calls the pre-Foucauldian era and the post-Foucauldian era. The difference between the time periods is that in the post-Foucauldian

era many things that were taken for granted in social science are no longer positioned as natural. De Beauvoir (2011), Code (1991), and Foucault (1972), amongst many others, have critiqued how knowledge is produced; and this critique has had consequences on our ideas of knowledge production. Chief amongst these critiques is that the researcher can never be entirely objective when conducting research because researchers themselves have ideologies, political opinions, and biographical histories that shape who they are and how they see the world. This is demonstrated by the anecdote in the beginning of this chapter.

Society is ever evolving, and our ways of knowing society are changing, so the tools we use to analyse society need to be on par with the new social reality. Methods in the social sciences are located in a particular history, social reality, and politics. According to Macleod (2001: 525), “there is no such thing as atheoretical research. Methodology – the way in which you conduct the research, the design you decide on, the tools you employ, the analytic process you engage in – are all intractably linked to how you theorise the world”. In other words, the choosing of a particular methodology is influenced by the politics that the researcher wants to advance with a particular research project.

## **6. Data Collection**

### **6.1. The Interviews**

The main instrument of data collection used in this research was interviews. There were forty-four interviews conducted for this research, both couple interviews and interviews with the individuals in the couples. Interviews are advantageous because they provide rich and detailed data on the experiences of people, and also how people feel about those experiences. There is an advantage when the researcher who analyses the data is also the researcher who collected the data, in that they have a visual context of the interview. This is important because when researchers analyse interview data, they analyse more than just *what* was said, but also *how* it was said, in what context was it said, and what emotions were displayed when it was said. Studying people is complex, partly because researchers are also people. This is why it has become standard that researchers reflect on their own identities and how their identities play out in the research field. Social position influences how people react towards researchers, because I did not stop being a social being when I entered the field. Marshall and Rossman (2016: 117) go so far as to say that a researcher must reflect on their identity and positionality

even while designing the research. The reason for this reflection, of course, is for the researcher to be aware of biases they might possess that will probably filter through the research. The meanings that are generated in the interview are not only from the participant, but also the researcher, so there is a joint creation of meaning in the interview space.

According to Mishler (2009: 54), interviews progress “through mutual reformation and speculation of questions, by which they take on particular and context-bound shades of meaning.” So, in order to be able to understand participants’ answers to particular questions, we must understand the interpretation of the questions by the participants. The interviewer cannot take for granted that the question in the interview schedule means the same thing to the interviewer and the participants, or even between participants. Mishler (2009: 53) argues for an “analysis of the interview process in order to determine the meaning of questions and answers”. According to Mishler (2009), how the interview is conducted, that is, how questions are phrased, and the speed of the questioning, will affect the answers that participants give. For example, if a participant understands an open-ended question that is supposed to elicit a narrative as a question that requires a “yes” or “no” answer, that tells us about how the participant understood the question, and how the participant understood the question is important for analysing the data from the interview.

For this thesis, I understood that talking to couples was the best possible way to acquire a better understanding of married same-sex couples and same-sex marriage. Since the research interest was about understanding the impact of marriage on lesbian and gay lives through married couple’s decision to marry, their weddings, and generally how married couples live their lives. The best way to get a better understanding was in-depth semi-structured interviews with married couples. This research aimed to garner an in-depth understanding of same-sex marriage by eliciting rich experiences from various married research participants. Interviewing couples also provided an opportunity to visit couples in their homes or other spaces they inhabit like their office spaces. Since state sanctioned same-sex marriage is a new phenomenon in South Africa, interviews provided the best avenue to reach the depths needed to understand the intricacies of this kind of union. Marriage is an intimate and contextual experience and conversing with same-sex couples was seen as the best way to elicit information about people’s experiences of it.

For this study, twenty married same-sex couples were interviewed together, and then some of the spouses were interviewed individually. The interviews are subjective accounts of the married lives of same-sex couples. The couples sampled in this study are all based in the greater Cape Town area. They are diverse in race - although majority white -, gender, and age. The data for this study was collected through recordings of in-depth interviews with participants. The goal was to interview all couples three times, one couple interview, and two further interviews, one with each individual spouse. While all couples were interviewed as couples, not all individuals availed themselves for the individual interviews. The couples sampled were sourced through various means including social networks, LGBTI NGO's, and the radio. The interviews were predominantly conducted in the homes of participants, but there were couples and individuals who wanted to be interviewed elsewhere for personal and practical reasons. The transcription from the interviews with the participants is the source of data for this thesis.

## **6.2 The Couple Interview and The Individual Interview**

For this study, the interviews were broken into three phases. The first interview (termed the couple interview) was conducted with both partners at the same time. The couple interview was conducted first in order to establish a relationship with the couple, and to ensure that the couple is centralised because the research is about the marriage of the two people. The couple was given time to talk about their marriage without any interruptions. Follow up questions in the couple interview were based almost entirely on what the couple shared in the interview. The couple interview was a co-construction of their marriage, an opportunity for the couple to produce their personal view of marriage. This method of data collection was used by Chadiha et al. (1998) while examining the divergent marriage patterns between white married couples and African American married couples in the United States. Chadiha et al. (1998) examined the narrative themes of newlywed couples as they made meaning of their first year of marriage. Similarly, Orbuch et al. (1993) analysed meaning making in marriages by looking at stories told by couples in the first year of marriage. Chadiha et al. (1998) and Orbuch et al. (1993) provide a useful blue print for this research, more so Orbuch et al. (1993) because they also conducted individual interviews with the married partners.

The individual interviews consist of an interview with partner one alone (phase two), and another individual interview with partner two alone (phase three). The interview schedule for

the individual interviews was semi-structured and focused on the individual partner's take on marriage. The individual interviews focused on how the individuals negotiate everyday married life. The individual interviews illuminate the trajectory of the individual that led them to marriage. The partners often had different reasons and influences that led them to marry; also, they often had different perceptions of married life. The individual account of the relationship provides a different view into the relationships of married same-sex couples. In the end, the goal was for each individual to be interviewed twice, once with the partner, and again without the partner present. The rationale behind this interview structure is to enable the researcher to understand the couple story and how they tell it, and also to understand it from the perspective of the individual in the marriage.

Interviewing the members of a couple separately poses some serious ethical issues. These are dealt with in the upcoming 'ethical considerations and limitations' section. As mentioned, twenty couples were included in the study. Of the twenty couples, twelve are gay male couples and eight are female lesbian couples. In two of the couples in the sample, one of the partners is foreign. Interviewed were three black couples – two female and one male; three coloured couples – all male; ten white couples, and three interracial (white and coloured) couples – two male and one female. There is an overrepresentation of white couples in the sample. This is probably due to the recruitment strategies used in this study – which was a radio show, snowballing, LGBTI NGO mailing list, and pamphlets at gay establishments. All twenty couples were interviewed as couples. Out of the twenty couples eleven couples were interviewed both as couples and also both individually. Seven couples did couples only interviews. Two couples did couple interviews and one half of the couple availed themselves for the individual interview. The nature of this study is invasive, and some participants might have felt comfortable with the couple interview, but not comfortable to be interviewed individually. In some couples, one partner was not willing to be interviewed individually and in other couples, neither partner was interviewed individually. In the end, a total of forty-four interviews were conducted and analysed.

### **6.3. The Pilot Interviews**

Before the main collection of data began, pilot interviews were conducted with two couples, a lesbian and a gay couple. The lesbian couple was the first interview for this research project,



and after that initial interview, the interview questions were modified. This pilot interview was left out of the study partly because of the subsequent changes made to the interview schedule. The interview with the gay couple was followed up with two individual interviews with the individuals in the couple. The pilot male gay couple interview is included in this thesis.

The pilot interviews were used as a resource to refine the interview schedule. Conducting the pilot interviews was helpful in tightening the research questions and the interview schedule. Through piloting the study, it became apparent, firstly, that creative ways of locating couples would be required; secondly, that some of the questions (particularly the initial question in the couple interview that is supposed to elicit a narrative about the couple from the couple) needed modification. The pilot study revealed that this question was a bit ambiguous for the participants. The question asked the couples to speak about their lives together, and some couples wondered which part of their lives they were supposed to speak on. Thirdly, after engaging with couples it was clear that a question about monogamy needed to be included.

Initially, it was thought that a question about monogamy would be a leading question, and so it was avoided. Monogamy came up in all the pilot interviews, and the researcher decided it was necessary to include a monogamy question in the interview schedule. Lastly, the pilot interviews enabled the researcher to think about the interview sequence: whether to interview the couples together first and then individually, or the other way around. In the end, the couple interview came first. This method proved to be the best way of doing the interviews; initially, the researcher attempted to conduct individual interviews first, but discovered that starting with the individual interview was not organic. Researchers disagree on which interview should be the first. Carrington (1999), in his research on same-sex couples in San Francisco, preferred the individual interview first because he found that the couple interview influenced the individual interview in ways the individual interview could not influence the couple interview. Couple interviews can be limited by the concurrent presentation of accounts by a couple, which is why an individual interview in addition to the couple interview is valuable.

Daniels (2015) found that using a dyadic interview structure helped to deepen the understanding of the experiences of couples in her research project. In this thesis, starting with the couple interview was preferred as it set the tone for the following interviews. In the couple interview, trust was developed as the couple interacted in their familiarity with each other, and

this enabled a smooth transition into the individual interview. Also, conducting the couple interview first allowed the researcher to ask questions about the couple interview in the individual interview. For ethical reasons, during the couple interviews, ‘follow up’ questions, or ‘verifying’ information that was said in the individual interview was forbidden. The individual interview with one spouse was not to be discussed with the other spouse. The individual interview was important to allow individuals to speak “freely” without having to censor themselves because of their partner.

## **7. Analysis and Presenting the Findings**

The analysis process began immediately after the interview was concluded. After every interview, notes were compiled on how the interview went, where the interview took place, what was striking about the interview, what could have gone better in the interview, and also what worked well. This first step of the analysis process brought to the surface what was striking and important in the interview. This is also where notes were made about the body language of the participants, their nervousness, where they sat, who spoke most of the time, what were they wearing, and anything else that was seen as relevant to the research. This was particularly important after the initial couple interview; because the researcher had a sense of the couple and was beginning to think about follow up questions to important issues raised in the interview. For example, one of the couples had to disinvite parents from the wedding because one of the partner’s parents were having a difficult time with the thought of their son marrying another man. A note was made to engage the participant whose parents were disinvited in the individual interview and ask detailed questions about the disinvite and what that meant for the couple.

The interviews were then transcribed and analysed (Reissman, 1993 and Kvale, 1996). After the transcribing was completed, the Braun and Clarke’s (2012) six-phase thematic analysis structure was followed and initial codes were generated. After the initial codes had been created, a mind map of the data was created using the software *MindMup* (2015). This tool assisted in strengthening the codes and themes that were initially found using the phases of Braun and Clarke (2012). The Braun and Clarke method is relatively linear. The linear structure was used alongside the mind map to optimise the results of the study. The two methods of generating codes were complementary, and they brought up the same big codes and themes.

The mind map did produce more specific and smaller codes that were not consequential enough to warrant big theme development. For example, with the phases of Braun and Clark (2012) words directly from the participants were used to create themes like: “All of a sudden getting married meant that they (the family) had to come out” – this would later become the discussion in chapter four about ‘marriage and coming out.’ I had a different theme called “I don’t use that gender-neutral term partner and say husband” – this would end up part of the discussion on the using of monikers ‘husband and wife.’ In the *MindMup*, these themes were colour coded red, and were not separate but were subheadings. The theme was called “Coming out/ Public acknowledgement/ the use of ‘outing’ words like husband/wife.” In the end, the ‘marriage and coming’ and ‘the use of husband and wife’ were separated as independent themes. In the *MindMup* there were also smaller themes around ‘race’ and ‘monogamy’ but were not big enough to develop into sections for this thesis. They could possibly perhaps be part of a future project.

## **8. Locating the Couples**

At the beginning of the study, the homes of the participants were thought of as the research “field.” During the data collection process, I was forced to rethink what constitutes the field because of couples requesting different places around the city of Cape Town to meet and talk. The places that couples requested to meet at were spaces that they frequented in their daily lives; these spaces were part of their lives. In the end, couples requesting spaces they inhabit outside of their homes enriched the research. What constitutes the field is subjective. For example, if a research project is on ‘campus life of postgraduate students,’ the university will probably be the field; if a research project is ‘nursing practises,’ the hospital will probably be the field, and so forth. As a researcher, one needs to conceptualise the field, and it is not always clear what the field is or where it starts and ends. In the piece *The Trouble with Fieldwork: Queering Methodologies*, Jackman (2010: 118) recounts his struggle with boundaries in the field that he had created for a research project with queer subjects. Jackman struggled with what constituted the field as the set boundaries were preventing him from being fully involved in the research. This is an example of how the field is not as fixed or static as we would sometimes like to believe. In fact, what we understand as the field depends on many variables: chiefly, what is being studied. “The meaning of the word fieldwork is changing”, is the opening line in the aptly titled book *People Studying People* by Georges and Jones (1980) that captures the

ever-changing nature of the way we think about “the field”. In this study, the homes of the couples interviewed are not considered the only field space; the city of Cape Town and the places that couples frequent in the city are considered part of the field as they inform the narratives of the couples.

Through personal networks, the researcher was able to source two married couples. These couples formed the pilot study, and, as mentioned earlier, only one of the couples is part of the final sample for this research. Another strategy for finding research participants was printed flyers placed strategically at gay-and-lesbian-frequented establishments. In the beginning, it was challenging to find couples, so other strategies had to be devised. The use of social media platforms like Twitter and Facebook proved fruitful for locating couples. Through a contact at the local LGBTI NGO, it was arranged that an email be sent to their mailing lists to get the attention of married couples. Another successful strategy adopted was going on a popular radio station in the afternoon; this led to a number of couples making contact. The last strategy used was snowballing – asking couples already part of the study to recommend other married couples that would be willing to be interviewed for this research. Some of these strategies recruited one couple, while some enrolled more, but at least one couple was sourced through each of the strategies.

The locating of couples proved more challenging than initially thought. I had to devise other strategies to locate and access couples for the research project. For example, the strategy used to locate couples through the radio was not part of the initial strategy to locate couples, but was added, as the other recruiting methods were slow in bringing in participants. The thought that couples would be easily accessible was fuelled by the statistics on couples married under the *Civil Union Act 2006*. Statistics South Africa (2011) reported that by 2011, five years after the adoption of the *Civil Union Act 2006*, Civil Union marriages were steadily increasing with every year. In 2011, Gauteng province had had 381 unions while the Western Cape province had 238. With these numbers in mind it was assumed that accessing married couples would be relatively easy. It proved more challenging. According to Flick (2002), it is harder to access individuals for research because unlike, say, employees in a particular firm where willingness is the only issue, individuals are harder to access because “the main problem is how to find them” (Flick, 2002: 57).

## 9. The Couples

This thesis presents the experiences of twenty married same-sex couples living in Cape Town, South Africa. These included ten white couples, of which five are gay male couples, and five are female couples. Three of the couples are interracial couples: two of the interracial couples are gay male couples and one of them is a female lesbian couple. Three of the couples are coloured couples; all of them are gay male couples. Three of the couples were black couples, two female lesbian couples and one gay male couple (in which one of the partners is a foreigner from another African country). Lastly, there is a couple in which one of the partners is a white South African married to a foreign national from South America. This is a gay male couple. The age range of the couples was broad: the youngest participant was twenty-six at the time of interview, and the oldest was over sixty years old. The majority of the participants were in their mid-thirties at the time of interview.

All of the couples live and work in and around Cape Town. The majority of the participants were all gainfully employed. Only two participants were not employed and were being supported by their respective spouses: one did not work because he had health issues and was advised by doctors and by his partner to stop working; the other had gone back to university for post-graduate studies. Both of the men who were unemployed were part of the white gay male group.

The couples in the sample were in various stages of their marriages. Since marriage was only legalised in 2006, and most of the interviews for this study were conducted in 2014, all of the marriages were under eight years old at the time of interview. Many of the couples had been together for a number of years before they were married. One of the couples had been together for fourteen years before they decided to marry. At the time of the interview, seven of the couples had children. Some of the children were acquired through adoption, some were from earlier same-sex marriages and were products of sperm donation from someone known to the then-couple, and some were from previous heterosexual relationships. Of the couples without children, about half of them were in conversation about having children in the future, while the other half did not want children.

## 10. Ethical Considerations and Limitations

### 10.1. Ethical Considerations

A good demonstration of the complexity of ethics in research is in the examples given by Mfecane (2015) who describes the relationships he had with the HIV-positive men he was researching and whom he befriended during the research process. By becoming friends with the research subjects, Mfecane (2015) crossed a line; some would say this is ethically compromising, but Mfecane (2015) speaks to the limits of social science ethical guides in contexts like the one in which he found himself. The nature of this thesis is ultimately invasive because it is interested in the private lives of married same-sex couples. The study sought information about marriage, something many people regard as sacred and exclusive. This research was approached with the understanding that marriage means different things to different people, and the different ways that people view marriage are to be respected. It was only after spending time with couples that it became clear why couples might be reluctant to speak to an outside person about their marriage. It took interviewing couples to partly understand why couples would shy away from a research project that examined their intimate lives. Participating in this research required couples to be open about their lives not only to me, but also to themselves.

I was a key instrument in the research process; and as such, there are a number of ethical considerations. Chief amongst these is the importance of understanding reflexivity in social science research. A number of factors my history and biography might have influenced my approaches in this study. I am a young black queer person living in Cape Town. The way I speaks, the way I presents himself, the fact that I am a doctoral candidate at the University of Cape Town, all had impact to the access I had to participants and, crucially, how participants saw me. How participants saw me had implications on the kind of information participants chose to share during interviews. As part of the LGBTI community, I am committed to a queer politics that is invested in the sexual liberation of queer Africans and a politics that is critical of hegemonic structures that seek to oppress queer South Africans. This has the potential to create a bias towards certain schools of thought that support my thinking. This doesn't however mean those schools of thought are not valuable in understanding the phenomenon of same-sex marriage in the South African context.

The intrusive nature of this study necessitated a critical look at the ethical implications of the study for the participants. All participants chose to participate in the research voluntarily. All participants were informed of their choice to opt out of the research at any point if they wished to do so. There were no monetary gains from participating in the research. The participants were informed that the research was important in that it has the potential to contribute to the better understanding of same-sex marriage in South Africa.

As mentioned earlier, the individual interviews necessitated serious ethical considerations about how the data is presented. While participants had access to their own individual interview and the couple interview, they did not have access to their partner's interview. This was to ensure utmost confidentiality of the information shared by individuals. It was desired that the participants share their individual thoughts and journeys towards marriage without feeling like they should censor themselves because they might upset their partner. So, to eliminate the possibility of self-censorship as much as possible, the individual interview was not to be discussed with the partners. However, there is a risk of revealing a partner's interview with the presentation of the data. There is a risk that a partner will be able to recognise their partner in the research, despite the use of pseudonyms, because they recognise their joint story. To prevent this, the researcher made sure that the quotes used in the presentation of the research do not pose danger or possible harm for the participants. Information that the partner specifically mentioned they did not want their partner to know has not been quoted in this thesis.

In the beginning of every interview, all potential participants were given a pamphlet about the study. Included in the pamphlet were details about me and the study. Also included were notes about confidentiality and anonymity, and also my contact details in case participants wanted to ask questions about the research, during or after the research. Lastly, the participants were informed that they would be notified when the research was completed, and the written product would be available through the university library.

Upon entering the field, it is not possible to foresee all of the issues that might come up in the field. By entering the lives of participants, I had to be aware and reasonably ready to deal with different kinds of personal and domestic issues. I was conscious of the responsibility and prepared a list of LGBTI organisations and their contact details and the details of the support

and services they provide to members of the community. This information would have been availed to participants as needed. As someone whose research focuses on the lives of LGBTI people, I was well versed with the LGBTI organisations in Cape Town. The questions in this research were personal and I was aware that they might trigger traumatic memories from past experiences for some participants. Fortunately, no such situation arose from the interviews.

## **10.2. Limitations**

The study is a retrospective kind; an exploration of how same-sex couples experience marriage, from the vantage point of months or years after the wedding, and involves, at times, unravelling a process which has taken place in the past. As such, it runs the risk of participants reconstructing the past from the vantage point of the present. This is something most of us do when we remember something from the past because the past is often about the present. The researcher is cognisant of how memory can sometimes be unreliable, but what is important for this research is the stories that people tell, and how they make sense of their lives through those stories as constructions from the past.

The majority of the couples in this study are middle-class couples. Their experiences reflected their class status, and the results of this study are limited to the lives of middle-class couples. Furthermore, middle-class couples were easier to access as a result of their proximity to different kinds of media that was used to recruit couples, like a popular radio station in the afternoon, twitter, blog post advertising, LGBTI NGO email lists, and word of mouth. It is possible that all of these, at the time of posting or recruiting, did not reach all segments of the LGBTI population, particularly those who do not have access to these communication mediums.

Another limitation of the sample is that the participants are self-selecting. All participants were actively involved and probably were keen to express their experiences of marriage. This may introduce a prejudice towards participants who wanted to but weren't able to talk about their experiences, for whatever reason. The self-selecting sampling strategy may create a bias towards both those couples who are happily married and also those who are struggling with marriage. Those managing relatively well are more likely to be willing to participate in interviews than those who are struggling with their marriages. Those who are struggling in their marriages are more likely going to avoid being part of a research study that will potentially



“scrutinise” their marriage. Despite these limitations, the research tells us much about the lives of married same-sex couples in Cape Town.

The focus of this study was on same-sex married couples. While conducting the study, many people asked whether it was important to understand same-sex couples that were together in the long-term but were choosing not to get married. This was a legitimate question as it presents the opposite of asking why do same-sex couples marry. Perhaps it could have been useful to understand this question and its answers from both sides: why do some same-sex couples choose not to marry, even as marriage is available to them. Furthermore, while Statistics South Africa (2015) reports on the numbers of brides and bridegrooms who marry through the *Civil Union Act 2006*, they fail to report on the divorce rates under the *Civil Union Act 2006*. This means that there is no clear idea of the divorce rates of couples that are married under the *Civil Union Act 2006*, a question of importance, considering how the few couples in this sample seemed interested in discussing divorce.

The thesis is also limited geographically. All twenty of the couples interviewed in this research are located in the greater Cape Town area. The results of the study are localised, so although the experiences of these Capetonian couples can help us think about same-sex marriage in South Africa in general, they are particular to Cape Town. The inferences that can be made using the results of this study are limited as Cape Town is not representative of South Africa, and twenty couples is a small sample to generalise nationally. Although there was a desire to include Johannesburg at the beginning of the research, time and financial constraints did not permit. Cape Town is a metropolitan area, the second largest city in South Africa, and so the study only demonstrates what takes place in metropolitan areas and does not account for same-sex marriages that could be taking place beyond/outside of this area. This is not without consequences, particularly considering the headlines in 2016 in which the Chief Mwelo Nonkonyana announced that married same-sex couples will not be allocated land, as is customarily done for married heterosexual couples, in the rural areas where Chief Nonkonyana and others rule over communal land. This was an attack on Xhosa same-sex couples that would rightfully deserve land if they were to get married within the jurisdiction of Chief Nonkonyana. This study does not engage these politics as it is situated in the metropolitan area. Now that we have a general understanding of the methodology used in the study, the next three chapters in the thesis will focus on the findings.

## Chapter Four

### Same-Sex Marriage and Coming Out

#### 1. Chapter Introduction

This looks at the ways that same-sex couples utilise marriage as a vehicle to come out, and also how marriage creates a platform for same-sex couples to come out. Through marriage same-sex couples engage their sexual identity in ways perhaps they wouldn't have if they weren't married. Coming out is a process that is characterised by a kind of wrestling with sexual identity. It is initially a wrestle with self-acceptance in a world filled with homo prejudice. In a heteronormative world the process of telling other people about your same-sex desires is a wrestle with rejections and at times self-loathing. Much has been written about the coming out process in the latter half of 20<sup>th</sup> century (Guittar, 2013; Savin-Williams, 2011; Carion and Lock, 1997). Coming out has been, and continues to be, an important part of the LGBTI experience. Naturally it is also a preoccupation of LGBTI people because the heterosexual assumption remains the standard assumption leaving the burden on "other" sexualities to announce their visibility. In this chapter, not only does same-sex marriage enable couples to be 'fully out' (Guittar, 2013) but in some cases the desire for marriage is what instigates coming out to parents and loved ones.

In this chapter, coming out is linked to the use of the moniker's "husband" and "wife" by same-sex couples. Why same-sex couples use this particular language at a time where many people in "modern" relationships opt to use "partner" is engaged in this chapter. What is the function of these words for same-sex couples and how are they linked to coming out? The answer is linked to the fact that these monikers are used to assert the visibility of same-sex desire. Also, in their desire for matrimony, these terms speak to how married lesbians and gays are entangled in respectability politics that are hinged on heteronormative ideas about intimate relationship construction.

Although reasons for marriage are often couched in a language of personal choice, there are systemic social and political pressures that drive the decision to marry. The decision to marry for same-sex couples is one that is intricately linked to coming out because a marriage, even more so a wedding, is a public thing. In same-sex marriage the metaphor of coming out is truly

apt because when a same-sex couple announce that they are to be married, that is a kind of coming out. In the process of organising the wedding, booking venues, organising a priest, ordering a cake, etc, same-sex couples are constantly coming out to service providers. The marriage of a gay son or lesbian daughter forces family and friends to also come out, particularly if they hadn't done so before, because as they plan to host or attend the wedding, they are forced to open up. Marriage is a social institution, the wedding is a social event, and it forces family and friends of gay and lesbians to engage the sexuality of those in their lives.

While conducting interviews, it was striking how defensive some same-sex couples were when they were asked why they decided to marry. The reply was often a defensive rhetorical question of "Why do straight couples get married?" The couples were quick to highlight that heterosexuals are not asked to justify their desires for marriage, and so same-sex couples should also not have to explain why they want to marry. This reaction came across well-rehearsed by same-sex couples which gave the indication that they had been asked this question multiple times about why they wanted to get married. The reactions from same-sex couples suggest that couples believe questions about why they want to marry are grounded in homophobia. While heterosexuals may at times have to justify why they want to marry, the question is never grounded in homophobia, and there is nothing sinister or suspicious about their desire for matrimony.

## **2. "Until That Day We Were Not Publicly Out": Marriage and Coming Out**

Coming out of the closet is regarded as an important step in many LGBTI people's lives. Same-sex marriage brings an interesting dimension to coming out for a number of reasons; for example, if a couple or one partner within the couple is not out, marrying has the potential to change the out status of the couple. So, many couples at different stages of coming out have to deal with the repercussions of coming out that marriage might have for the couple. The experiences of same-sex couples show that same-sex marriage has an intricate relationship with coming out, in that same-sex marriage affects the out status. The complexity demonstrated by same-sex marriage and coming out gives an idea of the evolution of sexual identities of lesbians and gays in South Africa. In other words the protection of sexual orientation against discrimination in the Constitution, and the subsequent freedoms in post-apartheid have enabled lesbians and gays to craft sexual identities. Indeed, the Constitution

“contributed to the constitution of lesbian and gay identity” (De Vos, 2000: 196) in democratic South Africa. Below is an example of the ways in which same-sex marriage has affected Gerda and Glenda. Gerda and Glenda are a lesbian Afrikaans couple living in the northern suburbs and they have an adopted daughter. They are practising Christians and they experienced challenges when they shared with their congregation that they wanted to marry. Gerda and Glenda experienced their wedding as a kind of coming out as they displayed affection for each other in public for the first time.

Gerda: The first time we had public affection was on the day of the wedding in front of the church. It's the first time our friends and family saw us holding hands, kissing when we had to kiss, and all that, the first time. So up until that day we were not publicly out, we were in words a couple, but we were private and no public affection. Not even in a safe space with our friends, it was a huge risk for us because it's not that we didn't want to offend them because it's their problem if they've got a problem. It was just that the stakes were very high for them to lose people. And we've lost a lot of friends.

Gerda and Glenda lived in a small town before they moved to Cape Town. They admitted that it took a while for them to admit to themselves, let alone other people, that they were in a romantic relationship. They had a relationship with each other for years before they shared their relationship with anyone else. Their living in the closet was exacerbated by their affiliation with a conservative Afrikaans church. Living in the conservative Afrikaans world, they felt that coming out was not possible, but when same-sex marriage was legalised, Gerda and Glenda saw this as an opportunity to come out and affirm their sexuality. The intersection of Afrikaans-ness and sexuality was revealing in this study as many Afrikaans couples spoke about marriage as an institution in which they grew up in, and for many of them, getting married was like coming out, or fully coming out of the closet. This was mentioned in reference to relatives, friends, and also colleagues at work. There was something striking about the pattern of marriage and coming out in that all of those coming out through marriage shared an Afrikaans background. This reveals that there is much work to be done on the intersection of Afrikaans identity and sexual identity in South Africa. This can perhaps be extended to other ethnic identities in South Africa, like Xhosa-ness, and how that particular culture informs the ways that Xhosa LGBTI people see their sexual and/or gender identities.

In the extract above, Gerda shares that their wedding was the first time their friends and family saw them showing affection to each other. This was an important moment for the couple. For some same-sex couples, public affection is political (this is engaged further in chapter 6). The political import of the statement made by Gerda when they married is demonstrated when Gerda states that they took a ‘very high risk’ and in the process ‘lost a lot of friends’ over their sexuality and subsequent marriage. The lost people close to them in the process of living their truth. The idea of risk and loss is associated with coming out because coming out for many lesbian and gay people is to risk rejection. The risk that Gerda is talking about is a well-founded risk, made even more pronounced by their involvement in the conservative church. What is striking is how the couple uses marriage as a vehicle to perform public intimacy in front of family and friends. It is salient that it is marriage that enables this couple to live out their sexuality in public.

According to Guittar (2013: 185-179), “Self-acceptance is a pre-requisite to coming out” which is then followed by public disclosure to friends and family. The extracts above demonstrate that marriage for some same-sex couples is demonstrably linked to coming out. The abstract above demonstrates that couples might see marriage as a way to become publicly out. The wedding is a place for public affection, and so Gerda and her partner are finally able to be publicly out. Gerda’s assertion that “up until that day we were not publicly out” is significant for the couple because marriage represents a claiming of their sexualities in front of their family and friends. It is an assertion of their sexuality in the presence of loved ones, and they paid a price of loss to be able to live their truth in public.

Gerda talks about the couple coming out, and the subsequent marriage as almost seamless, as if the marriage is an extension of coming out, what Guittar (2013) calls “fully” coming out. Marriage grants some sex-couples familiar words to talk about their intimate relationships; especially same-sex couples in conservative environments, where the ideology of marriage is strong. In some cases, same-sex couples are forced by the desire to marry to assert their sexuality. Consequently, marriage is a radical act of self-proclamation, where sexual identity is wilfully engaged. Marriage, or the process of getting married, assists couples in claiming and asserting their sexuality. Susan’s experiences (below) exemplifies this: marriage pushed her to come out to her mother. What is striking about Susan is that she struggled to come out to her

mother, but she already had a younger brother who was out to the family as a gay man. Susan's desire for marriage was ultimately what pushed her out of the closet.

Susan: Last year was 2014, in 2013, he just said, oh ok, so you are gonna be before me, and then he said, you want to get married but you haven't talked to mom yet and then he was laughing (both laughing). And then he says when are you gonna do it, I said I don't know. My courage just leaves me every time I am trying. He was just laughing.

Susan is married to Trinka and they are an Afrikaans lesbian couple living in the northern suburbs. Susan and her partner contemplated marriage before Susan had even come out to her mother. Marriage, and particularly the wedding itself, is often envisaged to take place with friends and family in attendance. Getting married without first coming out seems counterintuitive. Susan's brother who quipped 'you want to get married but you haven't talked to mom yet' highlights the ridiculousness of the idea of getting married without coming out first. The brother is signalling that if Susan wants to marry, she will have to come out first. In the retelling of the story, both Susan and her wife Trinka laugh as Susan recounts how her brother teased her about her desire to marry while still being in the closet. The brother had also laughed while talking to Susan about the marriage before coming out. The laughter in both accounts emphasises the absurdity of marrying while in the closet, because getting married often involves family and friends. It is funny because the brother is alluding to Susan having skipped a step, the coming out step, in her journey towards marrying someone of the same sex. In this instance, we see how marriage impacts on coming out, that same-sex couples have to think about how marriage will affect their out status. It would seem that you cannot be married and be in the closet at the same time, so in this instance Susan was pushed out of the closet by her desire to marry. It would seem marriage encourages same-sex couples to be more honest about who they are. Rupert, too, demonstrates this by admitting pressure from his marriage status to become fully out.

Rupert: Yeah but we also come from a more conservative background almost so like I find myself now at work you know, are you married, yes, you know that kind-of conversation and how it goes quite. I kind-of force myself to follow that conversation where I used to, because I'm not so open about my sexuality I mean it might be obvious but I am not open about it. So I don't, I think getting married forced me to be more honest and open about it. Where just dating it was easy in that environment to kind-of hide away.

Rupert is married to Jo, and they are an Afrikaans couple living in the winelands. Rupert admits that he was 'not open' about his sexuality, that even though people might know that he is gay, he did not talk about it. Marriage enabled Rupert to live a more honest and transparent life. The assertion that 'getting married forced me to be more honest and open about it' reveals how marriage for some same-sex couples is a way to have a conversation about their sexuality. This is similar to Susan coming out to her mother. The conservative world that Rupert admits to being part of has implications on how he lives out his sexual identity. The implication is that Rupert in part holds particular ideas about love, relationships, and marriage. He understands what marriage means in this conservative environment, and he utilises the already-familiar ideology of marriage in the conservative environment to fully come out. While it might seem organic that one would be fully out before marriage, the experiences of the couples in the study show that there is no linear sequence of events from the closet to marriage. The process of coming out and marriage are highly dependent on the social identities of the couples or an individual within a couple. The relationship between coming out and marriage is remarkable because with marriage there is an assumption of already being out, but as we see with these couples, coming out is an ongoing non-linear process. Grace who is married to Kelly further demonstrates this.

Grace: ... I was in a relationship with a girl before this and I didn't really tell people. I would either tell people I was with a boy or I would tell people I wasn't in a relationship ... So Kelly is the very first person that I have told everybody that I am in love with and I told everybody that I am marrying.

Grace and Kelly are a newlywed couple. They are white English speaking lesbian couple that resides in the southern suburbs. They do not have children but have a pet dog. They live a quiet life of working during the week and visiting friends and volunteering over the weekend. It is significant that Grace had lied about her relationships before she was in a relationship with Kelly. The relationship she has with Kelly is the relationship that pushes her to come out to people in her life because perhaps this relationship means more than the previous ones. Relationships that are significant in one's life are relationships that one shares with loved ones. People live relational lives and want to share parts of themselves with those they love, which is why Grace wanted to come out. The inability to be out can place a burden on same-sex relationships, when couples are not able to share their love with those around them because of prejudice. Additionally, Grace speaks about Kelly being the 'first' person she introduced to

her family. In a number of accounts, couples spoke about many “firsts” in their journey of marriage: first time to introduce a lover to family, first time doing public displays of affection, some guests experienced their first same-sex wedding with the couples. The “firsts” are linked to couples being bolder in their sexual identities and finding strength in each other as partners to be fully out. The first are also linked to the fact that state sanctioned same-sex marriage is a new phenomenon in South Africa. Peter demonstrates how the relationship with André was instrumental to him coming out.

Peter: Because I mean I didn't really come out properly to my family yet. I came out because of him, but that's fine and they loved him. And I'd never considered a relationship until André.

Peter and André are a white gay couple that lives just outside of Cape Town. Peter's relationship with André and the seriousness of the relationship is what pushed Peter to 'come out properly' to his family. What is clear here, as in other anecdotes, is that marriage affects the sexual identity of same-sex couples, in that it forces them to be out of the closet. It pushes those who are reluctant to be open about their sexuality to be bolder. Peter had had difficulty dealing with his sexuality. He had never imagined that he would be with someone. When Peter met André, he was preparing for a trip abroad, which he cancelled when he fell in love with André. Peter's mother was not enthusiastic about Peter leaving the country, so André received a warm welcome as Peter's lover because he was the reason for Peter staying in South Africa. Telling the family about one's sexual orientation and telling the family about wanting to marry one's partner, are both emotionally-charged moments for lesbian and gay people. What is salient is that marriage also affects the coming out of the family. Marriage, unlike dating or partners living together requires that family members share the news that their daughter or son is marrying. This is contentious because as demonstrated by Rupert and Jo, now families have to come out.

Jo: I mean there's never been any issues but the moment we said we were gonna get married, it was fireworks and we didn't understand it. We really did not know why they reacted so badly to the fact that we said we were gonna get married. And then we realised that even though they accepted our relationship, they had never come out to their friends. It was very easy for them to say yes Rupert is living with

Rupert: His friend.



Jo: His flatmate in Stellenbosch. But they never had to label it as Rupert's partner and all of a sudden the fact that we decided to get married meant that they had to come out, they had to face the music, I think it was quite difficult for them.

Although Jo and Rupert were a couple for years before they decided to marry, when they told Rupert's parents about their plans to marry the parents didn't take it well. This was surprising for the couple because the parents had previously been supportive of the couple. The issue was that the parents themselves had to come out. Although the couple had spent time with the parents, and had dinners together, the parents still had difficulty dealing with the idea of their son marrying another man. The parents reacted this way because although the parents had accepted the gayness of their son, they were never open about it. When lesbians and gays come out, the family members of lesbians and gays also negotiate coming out. The parents in this case had never really come out to their friends about their son being gay. So, when the gay couple announced their plans to marry, the parents had a hostile reaction because now they were being pushed out of the closet. The stigma (Goffman, 1968) on homosexuality means that not only do those who are gay and lesbian feel shame, but those who are associated with homosexuals as a friend or family member also feel shame. Rupert's parents were no longer able to hide behind words like "partner", "flatmate" or "friend" to describe their son's gay relationship once he was married. The coming out of the parents is a consequence of same-sex marriage.

Same-sex marriage becomes a vehicle for lesbians and gays to come out because they live in a heteronormative society that demands that people must hide their sexual orientation when it is not the norm. Also, the burden to come out lies with LGBTI people. While the same-sex couples find courage to come out through their desire for marriage, it would be amiss to ignore the heteronormativity that these couples are wrestling with in their coming out. Same-sex marriage provides an impetus for some in same-sex couples to come out, but the coming out also highlights the inequalities that non-normative sexualities have to contend with in their daily existence.

### **3. "No Way I Can Change My Name If Nigeria Is Still Homophobic" - Negotiating Surnames**

The change of maiden names used to be a requirement for women when they married their husbands. Although the practise of women taking their husband's name is not enforced, it

remains an option some couples opt for. The change of maiden name was and continues to be a sign that someone became married. In other words, the change of maiden name is a way to “out” someone’s married status. Today the law in South Africa gives women three name-related options after marriage. I say women because the majority of men do not take their wife’s surname and it is often assumed that the women will take the husband’s surname. Women can keep their maiden name, they can construct a double-barrelled surname, or they can adopt their husband’s surname. These three options are also available to same-sex couples who marry under the *Civil Union Act 2006*. It was in 2016 that Home Affairs made it compulsory for marriage officers to intentionally ask couples about surname changes. This came after a woman complained that her maiden name was changed without her consent after she married her husband. A woman being able to keep her maiden name is therefore a relatively new enforcement in South Africa. In the United States, women in Tennessee were obliged to take their husbands’ surnames up until 1975 (Goldin and Shim, 2004). Although the burden for women to take their husbands’ surnames has lessened, Goldin and Shim (2004) argue that the pressure to do so still exists.

The historical demand that woman must take their husband’s surname is rooted in patriarchy as part of heteronormativity. The driving force behind women wanting to keep their surnames in marriage is the preservation of their identity (Akerlof and Kranton, 2000; Stafford and Kline, 1996). For many women, taking a husband’s surname was a loss to their sense of self. Foss and Edson’s (1989) research shows that the different choices women make with regards to taking their husbands’ surnames depended on the women’s identities. According to the Foss and Edson (1989) study, women who kept their maiden names were concerned about their self-identity more than anything else, while women who took their husbands’ surnames prioritised the relationship as a unit, and women who constructed a double-barrelled surname were resisting cultural expectations. An empirical study by Scheuble and Johnson (2005) found that whether a married woman uses her maiden name or her husband’s surname is dependent on their current social environment. For example, some women will use their husbands’ surnames when interacting in a family environment or with friends but will switch to their maiden names when they are in a work environment (Scheuble and Johnson, 2005). The situational use of surnames highlights the complex interplay between the different roles that women play in contemporary society.

The question of whether to change one's surname after marriage has been something heterosexual couples have been wrestling with since women were legally allowed to keep their maiden names. In same-sex marriage, couples negotiate why they will change surnames, why they will not, and why at times they are still undecided. While the majority of couples in the sample (thirteen) opted not to change their surnames, seven couples chose to change surnames. These seven couples comprised two white female couples, three coloured male couples, one black female couple, and one black male couple. So, of the seven couples that changed their surnames, five of them were black and coloured couples.

There were multiple strands of thought around surname-changes that emerged for couples: Some said changing surnames is a sexist practice, some rejected changes for professional reasons, some couples rejoiced at the ability to take their partner's surname, and some refused to change surnames for aesthetic reasons. Although there were discussions about double-barrelled surnames, not even one couple chose this option, mainly for aesthetic reasons. Double barrelling was rejected because it led to long and strange-sounding surnames. For some couples, the idea of children was suggested as a possible reason to double-barrel surnames in the future, so that the child could carry both the partners' surnames. Two couples in the sample were still considering whether to change their surnames or not. There were no striking gender differences between gay and lesbian couples with respect to name changes. Part of the negotiation of name change is captured in the example of Richard and Jack below. Richard and Jack are a middle-class upwardly-mobile white gay couple. They own a house on the Atlantic Seaboard in Cape Town. They both work in corporate jobs and frequently go on overseas trips. This is what they said about surname changes:

Richard: I think when we roughly spoke about the name thing was, we looked at, I mean Jack is Lieven and I am Tree, for me the Lieven-Tree sounded like Lavatory and that's not gonna work (Jack leans back in his chair and laughs). So we looked at the Lieven-Tree and then yeah we spoke about it before the wedding and then we said, ahh no, I think it was more of going through the effort to actually change it.

Jack: But there wasn't much desire.

Richard: No we kind of just said again we know we [are] married, if we had kids we would look at double barrel for them, just to give that child an identity cause then what does the child take in terms of the surname. But for us it was just a name so. I don't need to change my name, he doesn't need to change his name, it just kind of wasn't...

The passage above touches on two important factors that some same-sex couples think about when they negotiate name changes: How the potential double-barrelled surname will sound, and how the couple contemplate dealing with the surnames of children in the future. Firstly, the sound of the double-barrelled surname was important for Richard and Jack, and the “lavatory”-sounding surname was not good enough. Other couples also mentioned that they contemplated the double-barrelled surname and decided against the idea. Double barrelling was the only other option for Richard and Jack, as neither of them wanted to lose their own names. They did not want to lose their identities through marriage. Secondly, they imagine revisiting the double-barrelled surname discussion when they are ready to have children. The creation of an identity for their future child is cited as a good reason for possibly double-barrelling their surname in the future. Similarly, women who don’t take their husband’s surname often change their surname at the arrival of children to avoid name confusion (Goldin and Shim, 2004). In cases where surnames are not double-barrelled, some women give their children their surname, particularly if they did not take their husband’s name, but the majority of women give their children the husband’s surname (Johnson and Scheuble, 2002).

Richard’s statement that “for us it was just a name” signals that names do not matter, but the very negotiation that Richard and Jack were engaged in when they rejected ‘Lieven-Tree’ shows the contrary. Names are important, and there are consequences to the decisions couples make about changing names. Name changes affect identity (Stafford and Kline, 1996) and this is part of the negotiation. While for Richard and Jack, the discussion was whether or not to change surnames, and what that change would look like, for Nathi and Tim it was only a negotiation of who would take whose surname. It was taken for granted that one partner’s name would change; which formation they would take was the only discussion. The decision that Nathi and Tim made with regards to the name change is rooted in practicalities and reveals much about inequality and the state of LGBTI politics on the African continent.

Nathi: It was easy. Surnames? It was easy because I wanted his surname because it was easy for me change my stuff to Kalahari for him he would have to go to Nigeria.

Tim: Go to Nigeria and say why you are changing your name, you are married to a man, so there’s no way I can change my name if Nigeria is still homophobic.

Nathi: See for me it is easy I can use the two surnames; my old ID and I can use my ...

Tim: So then we just added his surname with mine.

Nathi: So that's it. So I have two surnames (laughs).

Tim: Yeah because that would've meant I would have to go back to Nigeria, change my qualifications, change my ID, and then you have to provide reasons why you are changing, so you are married, that's understandable where is the certificate and says married to a man.

Nathi and Tim are a black gay couple living in Cape Town in a granny flat. Nathi works full time in health care, while Tim works in the NGO sector and is also a part-time student. Nathi is South African while Tim is from Nigeria, and Tim's foreign status is factored into the decision about the surname change. The decision for Nathi to take Tim's surname was based mostly on practicality, in that it would be an administrative and homophobic nightmare for Tim to change his surname. Richard and Jack's social position, and that of Nathi and Tim vis-à-vis nationality, show the difference in the oppression couples face.

Nathi taking Tim's surname is about avoiding homophobic consequences for Tim when he returns home to Nigeria. When Nathi says, 'Nigeria is still homophobic', he is referring to the creation of anti-homosexuality laws. In 2014, Nigeria's president Goodluck Jonathan effected anti-homosexuality laws with up to fourteen years of imprisonment for those in same-sex relationships. In the same year, an anti-homosexuality bill was proposed in Uganda but it was struck down as unconstitutional by the Constitutional Court. Under these circumstances, a surname change for Tim would at best lead to imprisonment in Nigeria, and at worst cost him his life. In other words, the surname change would out Tim in his home country. The ways that Richard and Jack and Nathi and Tim approached the changing of surnames highlight the inequality inherent in their social positions. The concerns around surname change for Richard and Jack unveil their privileged position as South Africans, which shield them from the xenophobic/homophobic violence experienced by those who are from other parts of the African continent. This points to a need for an intersectional understanding of how social identities through nationality affects the lives of same-sex couples. Although not unimportant, the concerns about name changes for Richard and Jack are grounded in aesthetics, while for Nathi and Tim it is a decision to avoid prosecution.

Changing one's surname has the possibilities of outing an individual. This outing can have life or death consequences for some same-sex desiring individuals. The negotiation of surnames

means that some individuals, even if they desire to change their surnames, they decide against the change to avoid persecution, as changing of surname can arouse suspicion. Although no such report has been noted with same-sex couples since same-sex marriage was legalised, but Home Affairs is notorious for changing maiden names without permission. It is situations like the one described by Tim and Nathi, where Tim's life could possibly be in danger, that the gravity of the carelessness of Home Affairs is revealed.

Similar to heterosexual individuals, particularly women, same-sex couples are concerned about the partners' identities, children's identities, and couple identity. Surname changes are a negotiation about changing identities, a change from being viewed as single, or only dating, to being viewed and referred to as someone's wife or husband. The concerns about surnames are really concerns about the potential loss of identity through marriage, something feminists like Greer (2006), Bernard (2007), and Friedman (1963) were very much attuned to in their criticisms of the institution of marriage. Surnames are not the only issue that arises with marriage; same-sex couples have to also negotiate whether "wife" and "husband" are fitting terms to use as married couples. How couples navigate the monikers of "wife" and "husband" reveals much about gender politics and its relationship to heteronormativity.

#### **4. "It Felt Like We Were Appropriating Heterosexuality" – Using the Monikers "Wife" and "Husband"**

The monikers "husband" and "wife" are imbued with social meaning and interpretation. They are often required for all kinds of applications, like at the bank, when booking a flight, and when buying insurance. This means that these monikers are exposing of the marital status for those who choose to use them. Thus, in a way, same-sex couples who use "husband" and "wife" out themselves as same-sex married spouses. Although same-sex marriage has existed for more than a decade in South Africa, when someone is introduced as being someone's husband or wife, many people still hold heterosexual assumptions. Same-sex couples challenge the heterosexual assumption of husband being paired with wife built on heteronormativity. Similar to many heterosexual couples, some married same-sex couple's use the gender-neutral term "partner", while other couples insist on "husband" or "wife". The use or non-use of "husband" or "wife" in the context of same-sex marriage has political consequences. There are multiple reasons why same-sex couples choose to refer to themselves or their partners as

husband or wife, ranging from practical to political. Bosley-Smith and Reczek (2018) have argued that spousal titles like husband and wife have symbolic benefits for same-sex couples. In their research with married same-sex couples, these scholars argue that couples had an “emotional connection to the ability to say ‘my husband’ or ‘my wife.’” Demonstrating that there is power in these spousal titles that same-sex couples desire. To a degree, this was similar to research participants involved in the research for this thesis. One of the many functions of using the socially embedded term “husband” when one is a man married to another man is to assert visibility as a gay couple. To out oneself.

Coming out literature (Rossi, 2010; Savin-Williams, 1998, 2001; Trachtenberg, 2005) tells us that coming out is an ongoing process whereby gays and lesbians come out whenever they meet someone new. Coming out is central to many gay and lesbian people’s lives, so coming out was an ongoing narrative in the interviews with same-sex couples. This section focuses on how coming out is linked to the use of the terminology such as “husband” and “wife”. It is striking how Bob and Martin deal with the term “husband” differently in their respective work places. Bob is an expatriate married to Martin, who is local; they are a middle-class gay couple living on the Atlantic Seaboard. Martin is a doctor and works in a liberal research environment, while Bob works in a creative environment where he has to interact with ‘builders’. Whereas Martin uses the term “husband” to refer to Bob, Bob does not use the term in his work environment; their choices are determined by the different cultures in their respective work environments.

Martin: Yeah, I work a lot around human rights, health and experiencing just the benefits of our Constitution. Once married then people know that I am a husband.

Bob: This is something that I myself am not completely comfortable with every aspect of my life is that I work with builders and I don’t refer to Martin as my husband.

Martin: Not even like as your special friend? (smiles)

Bob: As they refer to their wives as wives, for me I never say my husband is waiting for me (laughs).

*Lwando: (laughs)*

Bob: So this kind-of-like the kind of fear of being discriminated against ... I think it’s very difficult. To attribute to that, to behave as yourself.

Martin is comfortable to introduce Bob as his husband, while Bob fears discrimination if he were to introduce Martin as his husband. The fear of discrimination is also a fear of violence. Elsewhere in the interview, Bob says that ‘you can use the Constitution for practical things, but you can’t use it when someone wants to beat you’. This signals that Martin is aware of the homophobic violence that takes place in South Africa, and how that exacerbates his fear to come out. When Martin says, ‘then people know that I am a husband’, he is speaking to society’s common understanding of what it means to be a husband. There is also a source of pride in Martin’s exclamation ‘I am a husband’, almost a badge of honour. Perhaps the laughter signals that Bob would actually like to be able to say that Martin, his husband, is waiting for him at home. By calling himself a “husband” Martin is tapping into a historical reservoir of societal ideology of what is attached to the term. Bob is not comfortable using the term “husband” at work because he works with ‘builders’, builders being code for heterosexual men. He fears ill treatment if he comes out as having a husband instead of a wife. The term husband is an outing word if you are a man married to another man and might have homophobic repercussions for Bob. Coming out at work is stressful and it is highly dependent on the work environment and the discrimination policies in place (King, Reilly, Hebl, 2008; Day and Schoenrade, 2000). The work place is a space where married same-sex couples now have to negotiate their married identity (Marrs and Staton, 2016; Bouzians, Malcolm, and Hallab, 2008).

Bob’s narrative unveils the South African conundrum of same-sex couples being able to marry but still having to navigate a homophobic society. Although the law has changed, Bob still can’t invoke the term “husband” the same way his co-workers invoke “wife” for fear of persecution. The irony is that he is married but he is unable to access the boasting privileges associated with having a husband. So even married to another man Bob is not free from the stronghold of heteronormativity that demands that he be silent about his love because he is gay. This example demonstrates the limits of the law in changing certain aspects of society (Makofane, 2013). As demonstrated by the report *Progressive Prudes* conducted by the Other Foundation (2016), although South African society is more tolerant of homosexuality in 2016 than it was in 2006, many South Africans are still prejudiced towards LGBTI people. There are still headlines in the papers about the assault – even murder – of LGBTI people in South Africa. So, although Bob and Martin enjoy marital benefits in terms of the law, their social



world is yet to catch up with the progress of the law, and this affects how they experience the progressive benefits of the law. While the couple enjoys formal rights, they do not enjoy informal privileges. The extract above demonstrates how same-sex couples negotiate a world dominated by heteronormativity, wherein it is safest for Bob to leave out parts of himself in order to survive in the workplace.

Martin humorously asks if he is not known at Bob's work 'even like as a special friend', and we knowingly smile at his question. This question pokes fun at Bob that his co-workers possibly know he is gay even without Bob coming out to them. There is laughter when Bob says 'I never say my husband is waiting for me' because there's an awareness of the gendered cultural script of 'my wife is waiting for me.' There is an understanding of how the gendered script positions Martin as the "wife" who is supposedly at home. There is laughter because in the imagined scenario with the builder co-workers, Martin would be given the "feminine" role if Bob disclosed he was married to another man. The musings underscore the rigid gendered ideas in South African society. The laughter also functions to mask the pain that comes with the erasure of Martin as Bob's lover, and Bob not being able to fully be visible at work, while the co-workers have the heterosexual privilege to speak freely about their lives as they fit in neatly into heteronormativity. Heteronormativity demands that men are only masculine and only fall in love with women, and women are only feminine and only fall in love with men is restrictive and rigid and demands compulsory heterosexuality (Rich, 1980). Belinda, who is married to Anna, are a lesbian couple. Belinda is aware of the restrictive gender ideas of South African society, and she deliberately uses the term "wife" to upset people she comes across. Belinda is purposefully disruptive of compulsory heterosexuality.

Belinda: It's funny, I like to call Anna my wife and I know that it sounds like so old school. But I get a bit of kick out of it.

Anna: Of course, you do my darling, you pee right on me.

Belinda: I get a kick out of it because I know that is. First of all it takes people a little of guard and it ruffles people's feathers a little bit and you know I kind of like that. I want people to kind of think a little bit about it. So you know, I'm happy to actually introduce her as my wife, you know. Because for me she is my life partner, she is legally my wife, my wrecking ball you know. And I it's kind of my way of taking a little you know jab at the man on the street.

When Belinda notes that “wife” ‘sounds like so old school’, she is signalling that even heterosexual couples in modern relationships use “partner” rather than “wife”. She is also signalling that she is conscious of the moniker’s ‘old school’ gender rigidity. The restrictive ideas about gender are present in both Belinda and Anna’s scenario and also in Bob and Martin’s, but the social and professional worlds of the couples are different. Both Belinda and Anna work in the arts; Martin works in the medical field, and Bob sometimes works with men in construction. The connotations of “wife” and “husband” for Belinda and Bob respectively are shaped by the cultures of the places they work. Furthermore, it matters that Belinda is a woman, while Bob is a man, because although their same-sex love is policed through gender rigidity, this policing operates differently for women and for men. The difference can be seen in the ways that lesbian sexuality, through misogyny, can be used for heterosexual male gratification, while gay male sexuality is read as perverse. In both instances same-sex love is seen through a heteronormative framework that diminishes the relationships of same-sex couples.

Belinda is aware that using the moniker “wife” ‘ruffles people’s feathers’ and she admits to getting ‘a bit of kick out of it’. There is a political consciousness when she notes that it is a way of ‘taking a jab at the man on the street’. In this, Belinda is challenging compulsory heterosexuality that seeks to place restrictions on her desire for women. Rich (1996) argues that compulsory heterosexuality characterises women as naturally sexually attracted to men, thereby invalidating women-to-women relationships. Rich (1996) argues that compulsive heterosexuality is maintained by male power through coercive and violent mechanisms. In South Africa, compulsory sexuality is demonstrated by the sexual and physical violence that is directed towards gender non-conforming individuals (Mkhize, Bennett, Reddy, and Moletsane, 2010; Muholi, 2004). Belinda’s use of “wife” is political. It is outing. It asserts her sexual identity and disrupts the bias inherent in compulsive heterosexuality.

Same-sex couples have different approaches to the use of the terms “husband” or “wife”. While some couples claim these terms, albeit some with initial discomfort, other couples completely reject them. What is striking in the following two anecdotes is how both those who use these terms and those who reject them see themselves as speaking back to normativity. For most couples the struggle to find the right language first appears when couples introduce their partners to others who might not be aware of their sexuality and/or marital status. The

struggle for terminology that might be “appropriate” reveals that couples are aware of what the terms “husband” and “wife” convey and their historical trajectory. This is true for both those who use these monikers and for those who reject them. While the term “partner” is currently used by homosexual and heterosexual couples alike, some of the same-sex couples in the study find the term “partner” does not carry the same weight as “husband” or “wife”.

The following couples, Heinz and Brady, and Mary and Sarah, have different approaches to the “husband” and “wife” terminology. While Heinz and Brady wanted to use the term “husband” for each other, it took them three years to finally feel comfortable using it. Sarah and Mary, on the other hand, reject the term “wife”; they do not want to be associated with heterosexual terminology, preferring the term “partner”. These couples come from different places, and it is their social locations that explains their approach to the terms. Social location is the position that is created by the intersection (Crenshaw, 1991) of different identities inhabited by the individual and the couple. In both cases, the couple’s gender plays a role in how they see and use these monikers. Heinz and Brady are a middle-class upwardly-mobile white gay couple living in downtown Cape Town. They both work in corporate South Africa and have no children but are open to having children in the future. Mary and Sarah are a self-described queer couple. They are white lesbian women living in the southern suburbs of Cape Town. They work in academia and the arts respectively and have no plans of having children. Their relationship is mostly about the two of them at the exclusion of family and friends, so much so that they did not invite any family or friends to their wedding. These two couples are interesting because they represent polar opposite approaches to the term “husband” and the term “wife.” Here is what Brady had to say:

Brady: What was interesting was the vernacular; it took us two to three years before we became able to use the word husband. That was, that felt, it felt like we didn’t have the right to say it. And we could say it. And it’s so funny in our identity, in our gay identity we have both become a lot more militant around defending it and around our ability to say it without feeling apologetic. You know when we travel, when we used to travel we used to go oh my partner and now if I make a booking I say my husband. It is an obvious thing and you shouldn’t feel ashamed to say it, but it felt like we were appropriating heterosexuality and we had no right to own it as husband and husband.

The term “partner” is associated with progressive modern values; the same values of which same-sex marriage as an idea is a product. It is striking then that some same-sex couples desire

to associate themselves with what some would call a traditional (read, heteronormative) term like “husband”. Brady is ‘more militant’ in defending his ‘gay identity’ as he speaks about the right to use the word husband, meaning that this term is particularly important. What value does the term husband have for the couple? What does the use of the term do? The answer to these questions is linked to the social power of the word husband. Clearly here the term husband is outing because the reasons that Brady wrestled with using the term was because of the fear of being outed by the moniker.

Brady references feelings of shame as a possible reason why they were reluctant to use the term “husband”. A feeling that is associated with how people with same-sex desire feel about their desires before they come out. Brady speaks about how they were probably ashamed of their gayness, which is partly why it took them so long to feel comfortable using the term “husband”. The issue of gay shame and how it impacts the lives of gay people has been theorised by queer scholars like Sedgwick (1993), Halperin and Traud (2009), and Moon (2009). These scholars have written about gay pride, both as a movement and as a feeling, and about the “residual experiences of shame” many gay people feel even as they profess gay pride (Halperin and Traud, 2009: 4). This is evident in Brady’s statements that although as a couple they had moved as far as having a public ceremony to publicly declare their love, they were dealing with issues of gay shame. This necessitates the question, what is the function of gay shame in the era of same-sex marriage? Warner (2000) engages with this question in *The Trouble with Normal*, cautioning against the assimilationist ethos of same-sex marriage in the United States context. Warner (2000) argues that same-sex marriage is a way of dealing with gay shame, of trying to cloak same-sex relationships, particularly gay sex, with the respectability of marriage. While Warner (2000) is correct in pointing out that same-sex marriage could be used by same-sex couples to try and assimilate themselves into a heterosexual norm, his view might not take cognisance of the possible transformative and politically powerful effects that the performance of same-sex marriage could have in a deeply conservative and homophobic society like South Africa. It is affirming and transformative when Brady articulates that they no longer allow ‘heterosexuality to prescribe’ to them how they ‘should feel about’ their marriage. The couple has become ‘militant around defending’ their gay identity. This militant ethos is a product of same-sex marriage; as a married couple, they feel more self-assured in

their relationship, and in their gay identity. This echoes the arguments made by Bernstein (2018, 2015) about the radical power of same-sex marriage in the face of heteronormativity.

Brady sees their use of the term “partner” as a married couple as being evasive, hiding the fact that they are gay and married. They policed their own use of the term “husband”, conscious of the heterosexual gaze. They feared their use of “husband” was appropriating heterosexuality. The desire for the term “husband” also reveals the importance couples attached to the “correct” terminology. This is why during the same-sex marriage debates in South Africa, there were debates about the term “marriage” and “civil union”. So much so, that same-sex marriage is only legal under the *Civil Union Act 2006* and not under the *Marriage Act 1961*. Language matters because language is political (Reddy and de Kadt, 2006). Brady and Heinz’s desire to refer to each other as “husband” is radically different from Mary’s and Sarah’s rejection of the term “wife”. Mary and Sarah reject the “wife” label as traditional and belittling, and prefer to use the term “partner”:

Sarah: I don’t know. But we don’t like the word wife. Yeah, it’s too like old school, traditional, it’s more partner or this is Mary.

Mary: Yeah.

Sarah: It’s just it harkens too much back to the whole male female thing and it’s not about that, it’s about partners, life partners. So we are very conscious of our adjectives, our nouns or whatever it is, we don’t wanna, because it’s demeaning to call someone your wife, in my mind.

Mary: (Laughs)

Sarah: It’s cause like when we filled out the paper work, it says partner A and partner B and that’s very, it’s the whole paradigm of male and female. So we like joke about it some time like I am partner A and she is partner B (they both laugh) but it shouldn’t be like, it’s just that we are equal partners in a relationship, so and wife does not even connote that. Even if we call each other wife, the connotation of wife is husband and wife and the wife must defer to the husband. So it’s sort-of sexist, it’s a sexist term. We feel (both laugh).

Marry and Sarah are a white lesbian couple that resides in the southern suburbs. They describe themselves as a queer couple. While Brady and Heinz reject the term “partner”, Mary and Sarah are most comfortable with it. Mary and Sarah agree that “wife” is a sexist term. Both couples are aware of the social power of these terms. The contradictory approaches to

marriage terminology embodied by these couples are similar to contradictions observed by Harding (2006) where some couples embraced marriage whilst others rejected it on feminist grounds. It is not unremarkable, then, that the female couple, Mary and Sarah, reject the term “wife”, while the male couple embraces the term “husband”. The terms have different historical and ideological locations; although both terms signal that someone is married, they are used in different ways and mean different things. Sarah’s gripe with that the term “wife” is, historically, ideologically associated with patriarchy. It is a gendered term that many married people reject because of its historical association with gender inequality. As Sarah explains, the term “wife” is associated with the hierarchy in the heterosexual relationship, where the wife is subservient to the husband. In *Language and Sexuality*, Cameron and Kulick (2003) emphasise that the enquiry of language and sexuality is intimately associated with the study of language and gender. These authors demonstrate how heteronormative power rests in language and how language continuously reinforces gender – and, in turn, sexuality – norms. Cameron and Kulick (2003: 50) remind us “Heterosexuality (prototypically in the form of marriage) is the key social institution for which and through which gender complementarity is produced”.

In this study, the gender of the couples and their subsequent adoption or rejection of these terms are not unrelated. “Wife” is different to “husband”; “wife” has a history associated with the belittling of women, while “husband” uplifts men, usually at the expense of their wives (Zipp, Prohaska, and Bemiller, 2004; Tichenor, 1999), and entrenches a hierarchical superiority of the husband. So, adoption of the term “husband” is not necessarily progressive. Linked to the superior position of husband in marriage, some research studies show that men are more satisfied in their marriages than women (Fowers, 1991). So, marriage has historically been an oppressive institution for women for the benefit of men. What is revealed here is that for lesbians, “wife” can possibly function as a way to assert their lesbian-ness as married people (as in Belinda’s case), but the term “wife” is also demeaning to their sex (as pointed out by Sarah). For women, marriage has been historically constructed as their “natural” home (Greer’s 2006; Friedman, 1963), while for men, marriage is seen as a domesticating instrument that they need in order to become fully-grown and responsible (Bernard, 1972).

Patriarchy constructs men as “naturally” wild and in need of taming; this is used to justify men’s denigration of marriage while simultaneously allowing them to benefit the most from the institution. With the advancement of the Women’s Liberation Movement, the gendered

ideology centred on being a husband or a wife has changed, but remnants of it remain. The term “husband” is even more important for gay men because – despite being men and therefore part of the privileged class of people in a patriarchal society – they have been denied the privileges attached to becoming a husband. Gay men have historically been viewed as promiscuous and as a threat to family life (Patterson, 2000; Golebiowska, 2001, 2002), and “husband” as a term serves as an antithesis to this characterisation. “Husband” is viewed as a positive term by some married gay men like Heinz and Brady; they get to be associated with the status of being a husband – unlike women as wives. Even when used by a lesbian, the phrase “wife duties” contains sexist and demeaning connotations. Furthermore, a study by Pollitt, Robinson, and Umberson (2017) of same-sex and different-sex couples demonstrated that although all the couples in the study had positive associations with shared power in their relationships, gender does matter. The study found that in both different sex couples, and male same-sex couples, maintaining hegemonic masculinities and inequalities was noticeable in these marriages. These inequalities were noticeably absent in female same-sex relationships. This further supports the idea that gender in the use of monikers “husband” or “wife” is implicated in gendered power dynamics.

Heinz and Brady, who wanted ownership of the term husband, are a white male couple in South Africa. Their race is not inconsequential in their desire for the use of the term “husband”. It was Rubin (1984: 293) who noted that, “even the most privileged are not immune to sexual oppression”. What Rubin is alluding to here is that sexual oppression transverses other identities such as class, race, and gender, and orders social life according to its own rules. In other words, regardless of race, and class, monogamous heterosexual relationships are placed at the top on the social hierarchy of relationships. In heteronormative environments, where both lesbians and gays are seen as deserters of their gender, gay men in particular (constructed as feminine by patriarchy) are seen as forsaking a powerful social position (Cameron and Kulick, 2003).

In *Shame and White Gay Masculinity* Halberstam (2005) critiques how white gay men’s subjectivities have been centralised in queer theorisation of shame at the expense of women and people of colour. Halberstam (2005: 223) argues, “the subject of gay shame is often a white and male self whose shame in part emerges from the experience of being denied access to privilege”. This denial of privilege is particular to white gay male subjectivities, as they are

the ones who are denied full participation in white male privilege. Halberstam (2005: 226) argues that unlike women who have scrutinised shame through feminism, and people of colour who have dealt with shame through dealing with racism, white gay men are “the only people lacking a politically urgent language” to deal with shame because of their proximity to privilege. So, the use of the term husband by a white gay couple can be read as accessing, or trying to access, the full extent of white male privilege that they have been denied.

According to Kitzinger (2005), heterosexual couples use the terms “wife” and “husband” to demonstrate their un-remarkableness. This is done through talk, by continuously inserting these terms, and therefore heterosexuals continually produce themselves. Of course, being able to demonstrate un-remarkableness is a privilege; being “ordinary” is a privilege. Being seen as ordinary requires that you demonstrate possession of the dominant norms that are the criteria of ordinariness. In this sense, having the ability to present as ordinary is a privilege; a privilege that couples like Brady and Heinz yearn for. Ordinariness is dominantly presented as white, male, cisgender, middle-class and heterosexual. Characteristics Brady and Heinz inhabit. With the legalisation of same-sex marriage, some same-sex couples that adopt “husband” terminology are cloaking themselves with ordinariness, wanting to be seen as un-remarkable. As Cameron and Kulick (2004: 153) remarked, “one of the privileges enjoyed by dominant groups in general is that their identities and modes of behaviour are rarely scrutinized in the same way as the identities and behaviours of subordinated groups”. In this context, being read as unremarkable is appealing, which is what words such as “husband” do. So, the adoption of “husband” is not innocent; the term “husband” is encumbered with cultural and social power that demonstrates a whole range of perceived qualities about the husband. Thus, the use or non-use of the terms “husband” and “wife” is implicated in negotiating dominant systems of power.

##### **5. “There’s No Drag Queens Here”: Coming Out and Respectability Politics**

In responding to the accommodation and resistance polarisation in same-sex commitment debates Lewin (2001: 51) argue that “gay weddings often present complicated intersections between resistance and the quest for acceptance, intersections that cannot be readily be teased apart, even within a single ceremony.” The couples interviewed by Lewin, demonstrate a complicated relationship between wanting normative ideas but also resisting some of those



ideas. While similar complexities can be seen in the Cape Town context, there was an incredible pool towards embracing respectability politics. In a piece in *The Guardian*, Simpson (2009) wrote “in the 21st century, respectability is fast shaping up to be the New Closet.” Simpson (2009) argued that the pursuit of same-sex marriage, the sanitised gay movies like *Milk*, and gay men moving into the suburbs are all desires for gay respectability. The link that Simpson draws between the “new closet” and respectability is important here because the closet describes the status of not being out. In other words, Simpson is arguing that respectability politics, through its demand for decorum, it ironically sends gay and lesbian people back into the closet, a new closet, but a closet nonetheless. Simpson’s arguments bring up visuals of invisibility or camouflage or assimilation. Taking into account Simpson’s ideas of same-sex marriage as an extension of respectability politics, how does the experiences of same-sex couples in Cape Town speak to respectability politics.

In *Respectable Queerness*, Joshi (2012) argues that the recognition of gay people and their relationships is dependent on gay people having a respectable social identity. Joshi argues that same-sex couples have to appeal to the social decorum established by the heterosexual norm to be acceptable, and it is gays and lesbians who do not disrupt the norm that are deemed good gays. Similarly, Seidman (2005) argues that the gay that has been acceptable in mainstream America is middle-class, white, and apolitical. The performance of the sexual identity is non-threatening to the heteronormative system. In other words, “respectability politics reflect neoliberal, white, bourgeois normativity, and provide a frame for understanding subordinated group behaviour from a gendered, classed, and racialized perspective” (Pitcan, Marwick, and Boyd, 2018). Therefore, respectability politics deepen sexist, classist, racist practices because they demand those who are marginal to conform to dominant ideals while suppressing their marginal identities.

In the South African context, Scott and Theron (2017) also argue that lesbian couples use marriage, in a discursive process, as a way to access heteronormative respectability. Scott and Theron (2017: 13) conclude that “heteronormativity offers a promise at a price” for same-sex couples in that there are sacrifices to be made in order to be respectable. Since marriage as an institution relies on those who are part of it to practise respectability, part of the debates about same-sex marriage have been about the impact respectability politics have on same-sex couples. The same-sex couples in this study negotiated respectability politics in noticeable

ways. At times, same-sex couples are aware of their position as married same-sex couples, and how this sets them apart from unmarried same-sex couples, and how this positions them in a world that prioritises married people. Brady and Heinz, for example, are aware how their heterosexual friends perceive them, and they do not appreciate how they are treated as the married gay exception.

Brady: I do think that a lot of straight people go oh you're fine, you're normal because you are married. Because you do and I do find, we do find that astonishing. It is much easier for gays, for straights to go and put us, box us in and go they're normal because they are married like us.

Heinz: PLU's

Brady: What is it?

Heinz: People like us.

The anecdote above demonstrates that married same-sex couples do not have control over how their married status is read by society. Here Brady and Heinz, relay how their heterosexual friends see them as 'normal' simply because they are 'married like us'. Being married places the couple on par with the heterosexual couples, they are deemed worthy; hence they are 'people like us'. Although Brady and Heinz protest being seen as 'PLU's' by their heterosexual friends, they are aware of the benefits of being seen as 'people like us': they are acceptable; they are respectable as a married couple. There is clearly pressure on Brady and Heinz to be "normal", and normal here can be seen as cis-gender, white, and middle class. Marriage is a respectable institution, and it is as if those who enter it are immediately sanitised (read, normalised) by it upon entry. Of course, the normalisation of Brady and Heinz is contingent on them adopting the particularly middle class, cis-gender, racially appropriate heteronormative behaviour that is expected of them; being, as Warner (2000) calls it a "good gay". The adoption of respectability politics is complicated because at times it is a way to avoid homophobic prejudice. However, for it to work there has to be an investment in heteronormativity. The way that Paul (below) talks about how people were curious about what the grooms would wear at the wedding is revealing about the way respectability politics can censor lesbian and gay people from full expression.

Paul: A lot of people came out of curiosity to see what this was all about, to see if Alex and I are gonna pitch up in our dresses. And if our friends were gonna be there in

dresses as well, are we gonna have drag queens and all of that. And if there were we would have been OK, we're not gonna prescribe how anybody should dress. But there wasn't and I think a lot of people were disappointed, but there's no drama at this wedding, you know, there's no drag queens here, you know, Paul hasn't got high heels on or anything.

Paul and Alex are a gay couple and they are also part of the drag culture community. They are gender non-conforming in that they are effeminate men. Alex has done drag in the past. When Paul was talking about their wedding in the extract above, there was a sense of self-censorship. Although Paul states that he 'would have been ok' if someone wore a dress at the wedding, in other words, if someone had come in drag, in the interview it seemed that he was glad that no one did, particularly his delivery of 'a lot of people were disappointed'. He wanted to 'disappoint' those who were disappointed, he was glad they were disappointed. He was glad no one was in drag because he wanted the wedding to be taken seriously, to be respectable. The performance of respectability is important in displaying that gays can also take the institution of marriage seriously. There is a sense that campy things like drag queens will sully the institution. What is significant here is the rejection of camp-ness, yet a wedding by its very nature is a camp event in line with Susan Sontag's (1987) description of camp. In *Notes on Camp* Sontag (1987: 275) describes camp as "the essence of Camp is its love of the unnatural: of artifice and exaggeration. And Camp is esoteric – something of a private code, a badge of identity". Here the emphasis is on "artifice and exaggeration" which in a way speaks to the nature of weddings in that they are an elaborate and exaggerated performance of love and commitment for the benefit of others. The art of "artifice and exaggeration" is also part of the art of drag, so it is noticeable if not ironic that drag was not desirable at Paul and Alex's wedding.

In Paul's excerpt the respectability politics are palpable. Drag culture is seen as something that is not befitting a respectable event like a wedding. Even though Paul says that he didn't tell anyone not to wear a dress, it was clear that drag queens were not desired at the wedding because it was constructed as a respectable event. The respectability politics render drag culture, of which Paul and Alex are part of, as something that must be hidden. This is what Scott and Theron (2017) mean when they argue that there is a "price for the prize", meaning that at times same-sex couples like Paul and Alex sacrifice a part of themselves to fit into a respectable frame. Marriage then, as a heteronormative institution, is the death of queerness.

Similarly, Kurt, who is also a drag performer, did not see his wedding as an opportunity to do camp, but instead viewed the wedding as a place to perform respectability. In fact, Kurt saw camp-ness as something that would make a mockery of the wedding.

Kurt: I never wanted to wear a dress cause I am not that type of, you know for me, marriage for me is something that's, it's something that we were afforded to do, to get married in this country. And it's something that first it's instituted by God so why must I make a mock out of it by walking down the aisle in a wedding gown and I never wanted to do that. And everybody was surprised what I had on when I walked down the aisle with a suit, a three-piece suit. A pants, a waistcoat, and a blazer, and they were like, we were waiting for this big like Lady Diana creation with a trail as long as a twenty five foot trail, but that's not me and knowing that my husband is like, he wouldn't appreciate that as well.

Kurt is married to Chris. They are a coloured gay couple. They have an adopted daughter. In the first sentence of the extract, Kurt does not finish his sentence. He cuts himself off as he says 'I am not that type of' ... and does not finish his sentence. One could speculate what was going through Kurt's mind, and why he decided to stop midsentence. Looking at the extract as a whole, it sounds like Kurt was about going to say 'I am not that type of gay' before he catches himself. Kurt might have thought that this phrasing would hurt me, because I could easily be "that type of gay." What is arresting is how this phrase is not unlinked to the concept of "good gays" and "bad gays", and bad gays being the kind that Kurt doesn't want his wedding to be associated with. Kurt is an important figure in the drag community, to the point where he often is invited to be a judge in drag beauty pageants. He mentioned that when he first met Chris, his husband, Chris was not happy that Kurt would sometimes be in drag. After being together for a while, Chris eventually accepted that Kurt would sometimes be in drag. In Kurt's individual interview, he acknowledged being effeminate, to such an extent that he takes on the "wife" and "motherly" duties in their household. However, similar to Paul, Kurt did not see the wedding as an opportunity to camp it up; he saw the wedding as something instituted by God, and therefore to be treated with respect. Camp and respect seem to be mutually exclusive. Some of the reasons provided by Kurt as to why he wouldn't wear a 'Lady Diana' dress to the wedding have to do with treading the line, performing decorum, and being, in a word, respectable. This belies their investment in heteronormativity. Although they are same-sex couples and disrupt heteronormativity through drag in other parts of their lives, with marriage they are disciplined and adopt respectability politics.

Part of the art of drag is to make a mockery of gender norms. Drag unveils some of the ways in which gender, as described by Butler (1990), is a performance, a show, more a social construct than a biological reality. Although Kurt takes part in the art of drag (and he admitted not to doing it as much since he married), he did not envision drag as part of his wedding. In the extract, Kurt mentions that his friends and relatives were expecting him to wear a 'Lady Diana creation' with a long trail, but he did not. The Lady Diana creation Kurt is referring to is the wedding dress that Lady Diana wore at her wedding to Prince Charles in 1981. Elsewhere, Kurt mentioned that as a little boy, the royal wedding of Sarah Ferguson and Prince Andrew made an impression on him and made him want his own wedding. So, the idea of the royal wedding was a strong reference for Kurt. With Kurt's love for royal weddings, and him being a drag entertainer, it would seem that the wedding was a missed opportunity to have a camp wedding infused with drag culture. Kurt opted for a more respectable representation of himself on his wedding day. It is a representation that takes into consideration the feelings of the man that Kurt is about to marry, who would not appreciate a drag queen groom. The respectability politics are unavoidable. The implication is that while dressing as a woman might be a good idea on a Friday night out, it is not appropriate for the wedding day.

Marriage is associated with being a good gay and good gays do not wear dresses and embarrass their partners. Kurt is disciplined by respectability politics. He adheres to the heteronormative system that marriage is an institution to be revered. These forces demand that people like Kurt tone themselves down so that they can be admitted into the institution of marriage, where they can be seen to be taking marriage seriously, and not making a mockery of it. The respectability politics that same-sex couples navigate are linked to heteronormativity, in that although same-sex couples in their very construction defies norms; they try to appropriate them. The respectability politics do not end at the wedding, they continue after the wedding as demonstrated by Paula and Andiswa. After Paula married Andiswa, she cut ties with her friends who were not married. Paula and Andiswa are a Xhosa lesbian couple, and according to Xhosa culture marriage rules, when people marry, they can no longer be friends with their unmarried friends, and must make friends with people who are also married. This is Paula's experience:

Paula: The friends that I have now are super matured, it's married people obviously, and because I don't have something to talk about with my old friends because they are

not married. What would I say to them, oh my partner, in the marriage, I will bore them [with tales my marriage] and they will bore me with her gossip because she is not married. So now it's different in that sense because these people [the married people] know exactly what I am talking about. If I speak to Sphoki for example, Sphoki knows because we gossip about them (the married partners) when they are not there, our conversation is in sync unlike someone who is not married you understand, so yeah.

When Paula says 'obviously' in the excerpt above, she is signalling that what she is saying is a known fact to me, that what she is saying is a given. Paula is speaking about the obvious that exists in Xhosa culture marriage practices and assumes I "obviously" knows what she is talking about because Paula is Xhosa speaking, the researcher is also Xhosa speaking, and the interview was conducted in Xhosa. Paula is indicating that she is stating a known fact about marriage in Xhosa culture, that when a woman gets married, she only associates with other married women. This is something I know, Paula knows, and Paula's wife Andiswa knows. The adhering to Xhosa marriage rules, or the desire to adhere to the rules, demonstrates Paula's seriousness about her marriage. Although Paula is in a same-sex marriage, in other words an untraditional relationship, a relationship Paula says her mother doesn't understand, Paula respects Xhosa cultural norms of how a wife must behave. The adhering to the rules of Xhosa culture is striking because one can argue because the couple is in a same-sex relationship, they have an opportunity to escape the marriage set up by heteronormative Xhosa culture, but instead they adhere to them.

Paula frames and justifies the decision to befriend only other married women because she would bore the unmarried women with married life stories, and they will bore her with their unmarried life stories. The justification is replete with respectability politics. The justification also buys into the hierarchy of relationships, where marriage is prized, and all other relationship forms are secondary. The friends that were once Paula's friends all of a sudden bore her, and she bores them. Boring, as a term is not without import, because it denotes monotonous, repetitive, and unexciting, which it would seem Paula associates with the new married life. There is an interesting similarity in the way married life is linked to boredom to the way husband is used to denote un-remarkableness as discussed earlier in this chapter. There is power in these seemingly mundane descriptors. This state of being boring is contrasted with the life of Paula's friends who are still not married, and how their lives are still exciting. Here boring is proxy for stability and being a wife, and excitement is associated with

singlehood. The boring life that Paula is living is the respectable life of a married woman. Although Paula is in a same-sex relationship, an unconventional relationship, which it can be argued offers her immunity to “boring” heterosexual demands; she opts for respectability to structure her relationship.

Paula, Kurt, and Paul all disciplined by the desire to be respectable. They adhere to the structure and ideologies designed by the heteronormative system. A heteronormative system, that for most of recent history was adamant about the inferiority of same-sex love. Same-sex couples discipline themselves as they access marriage. What Paula and other same-sex couples in this study demonstrate mirrors the arguments of Scott and Theron (2017: 13) that respectability politics within same-sex couples are present because couples at times “employ a heteronormative lens to understand, interpret, and communicate the value of their relationship.”

## **6. Chapter Conclusion**

At the heart of this chapter is the question, ‘what does same-sex marriage do for same-sex couples’. The answer to this question is that same-sex marriage does multiple things for same-sex couples. Most obvious is that it enables same-sex couples to come out. Same-sex couples utilise same-sex marriage as a vehicle to be more open about who they are. This coming out is facilitated by marriage, because as demonstrated in the sample, it is marriage that creates the impetus to come out. The relationship between same-sex marriage and coming out is striking because it seems obvious that one must be out before one marries, but that logic does not take into account the multi-layered nature of coming out. The experience and the metaphor of coming out speaks to same-sex couple’s experiences of marriage because in marriage, as in everyday life, coming out is a struggle that same-sex couples wrestle with it as they claim their sexual identities. Same-sex marriage enables a platform for the declaration of love between same-sex couples, and this enables an assertion of public same-sex sexuality.

Marriage is an institution that is replete with ideological underpinnings. The ideologies of marriage include the meanings that people ascribe to terminology like “husband” and “wife”. It also includes how marriage is viewed as the ultimate commitment demonstrating seriousness and maturity. It is an institution that people feel must be treated with respect and not be soiled by drag culture. While not all married couples subscribe to these ideologies, they remain

powerful. Marriage ideologies are culturally specific. For example, in the Xhosa culture, once married, a woman can only associate with other married women. An ideology that is taken up by Paula after she marries her wife Andiswa. Marriage ideologies are constructed through a culture's history, influenced by the socio-political environment. South African society has different ideas about marriage depending where you are situated geographically, socially and economically, although across the spectrum of South African cultures gender is rigidly policed (Bhana, Zimmerman, and Cupp, 2008). Although marriage has evolved over the years, some of the hallmarks of the institution remain the same. It is striking that same-sex couples, who by virtue of them being same-sex have license to break traditional rules about being "husbands" or adhering to traditional Xhosa customs in marriage, yet same-sex couples gravitate towards these. This is a demonstration of the power of the ideology of marriage.



## Chapter Five

### The Same-Sex Wedding: Putting on a Show

#### 1. Chapter Introduction

Kurt: ... I've realised that I think after the first few months after getting married. It is not a fairy tale ... it looks so easy on TV and everybody ends off, it's so beautiful. But ... like my mother, ... said to me, the wedding is eight hours long, and then the marriage starts. ....

The wedding is a particular event. It is a planned event where couples publicly declare love to each other and register their love with the state, which in turn provides a litany of rights and responsibilities to the couple. It is usually quite expenditure to put together the wedding. For example, in 2018, Welgelee was charging R78 000 for a wedding for a hundred guests or less as a starting price (Welgelee, 2018). The hefty prices of weddings have not quelled people's desire for them, in fact people are willing to incur in debt to be able to put on the perfect wedding. The expensiveness of weddings has led to many op-eds and advice videos on how to have a South African wedding on a budget (see Damane, 2017; Ruzicka, 2018; Fisher-French, 2018). The wedding is an event that is loaded with social meaning, both in the myths surrounding the wedding ceremony and the actual production of the wedding. In the western white wedding, historically, the groom is not supposed to see the bride before the wedding. It is seen as "bad luck". In Xhosa culture the bride wears a turban that covers her forehead and is often silent for most of the wedding. While contemporary couples challenge many of the "traditional" wedding practices, these traditions remain in practice.

In the abstract above, Kurt demonstrates firstly how weddings gain their mythology and meanings and secondly how they are passed down through generations. In the anecdote Kurt speaks with a certain kind of seriousness about the wedding and the marriage. It is a seriousness that depicts an awareness of the enormity and expectations of marriage. In this study, marriage was talked about as a serious endeavour, an act that is supposed to say something meaningful about the couples' relationships. In Kurt's narrative, there is a tension about the flamboyancy and fleeting nature of the wedding and the seriousness and hard work of the marriage itself after the wedding. The tension is captured in Kurt's extract, in that the

wedding, characterised by popular culture ‘on TV’, he says ‘it is not a fairy tale’ in contrast to popular depictions. Speaking of television, ironically, there is a popular television show DSTV’s Mzansi Magic called *My Perfect Wedding* (Mzansi Magic, 2018). Each week an engaged couple shares their wedding journey for South Africa to see. The show is filled with all the ups and downs of the road to the alter and it is singularly focused on the wedding day. In the excerpt Kurt cautions against the idea of the primacy of the wedding and warns couples, as his mother advised, to think about the life after the wedding. The line ‘the wedding is eight hours long’ almost sounds like an idiom, an idiom that was used by Kurt’s mother that has stayed with Kurt. It is an idiom that facilitates the mythologisation of the wedding in that this idiom has stayed with Kurt and it is how he sees weddings. Kurt’s understanding of the wedding, and then married life after the wedding is filtered through this idiom. The words ‘the wedding is eight hours long’ is in line with other wedding “proverbs” like, “it’s the best day of your life” and “you’ll never look as beautiful as your wedding day”. The idiom from Kurt’s mother, like other wedding sayings, forms part of the ideology of marriage. Kurt’s extract demonstrates how long before couples embark on their wedding journey, they already have been negotiating wedding meanings through family and popular culture discourse.

This chapter is all about the wedding. The chapter interrogates to what extent are the contents of same-sex weddings shaped by heterosexual white weddings. The chapter uses the metaphor of “putting on a show” to speak about the wedding as a production site. This chapter is arguing that the wedding is a heteronormative event, but as same-sex couples participate in it, elements of this event are destabilised as same-sex couples retain some aspects of the white wedding while doing away with others. In the construction of the wedding, perhaps more clearly than anywhere else, the wrestling with heteronormativity becomes apparent partly because the wedding is a historically gendered ceremony (Mupotsa, 2014; Ingraham, 1999).

This chapter is interested in how are same-sex weddings affected by the history of the heterosexual white wedding? What are the factors that play a role in the making of same-sex weddings? What can these factors and the role they play tell us about same-sex weddings in the heteronormative context of post-apartheid South Africa? It would seem that on the one hand the wedding of same-sex couples resembles the “putting on a show” of heterosexual white weddings (Mupotsa, 2014; Ingraham, 1999). Simultaneously the weddings of same-sex couples provide new possibilities that provide an alternative interpretation to the heterosexual

white wedding. It becomes apparent that same-sex weddings are similar to white heterosexual weddings to the extent that it is two people coming together through the state with the presence of family and friends. They differ to the extent that the content of same-sex weddings challenge heteronormativity. They provide a space to make visible same-sex desire in a context of normativity.

In constructing the wedding same-sex couples have to navigate tradition, gender, and the heteronormative framings of the wedding ceremony. To enable a better understanding of same-sex weddings ceremonies, Bell (2010) and Comaroff and Comaroff (1993) are employed to make sense of the data. To help with understanding the power of performance in same-sex weddings, the theories of Goffman (1956) from his influential text *The Representation of Self in Everyday Life* are also employed. Weddings are often ceremonies that contain much symbolism. Same-sex weddings are not homogeneous (Lewin, 2001). The constructions of same-sex weddings range from going to Home Affairs to sign legal documents to two hundred guests at a wine-lands wedding. All of these weddings are putting on a kind of a show, even at Home Affairs. The kind of show that couples construct tells us much about the couple, their social surroundings, and about wider politics. According to Heaphy (2013), weddings are part of a couple's identity, and what takes place at the wedding is a conversation with that identity. This chapter will demonstrate how couples see themselves, how couples want to be seen, and how weddings illuminate the social world of the couple. In the meaning construction of same-sex weddings, same-sex couples have taken the wedding ritual, they have deconstructed it, and they have reassembled it to fit with their own ideas. Out of this reconstruction something new emerges, maybe even something queer emerges.

## **2. About The Weddings**

Same-sex weddings do not differ from the white weddings described by Mupotsa (2014) and Ingraham (1999) in that they contain celebrations and symbolic performances like the exchange of wedding bands, an officiator, and kissing. Same-sex weddings take place in the wine country, in the city centre, at Home Affairs offices, and some in the suburbs of Cape Town. These weddings are diverse in scale; some have eighteen guests in attendance while some have two hundred guests. The majority of the weddings in the sample were crafted events, where there was a story being told by the couple. Even when there is no wedding

ceremony, or simply a reception-like gathering, as in the case of one couple in the sample, that also tells a story about the couple. The story the couple demonstrates through the wedding, or non-wedding, is a story about their lives and ultimately how they want to be perceived as a couple, what Goffman (1990) would call idealisation. Below are examples of how couples constructed their weddings to demonstrate their identities and how they want to be seen. First, Willem, who is married to Ruan, and they wanted an ‘intimate’ wedding. Then there is Belinda, who is married to Anna, and they desired a wedding that is ‘representative of who they are’. Lastly, there is Martin, who is married to Bob, and how they wanted a ‘party’ rather than a ‘wedding’.

Willem: The marriage [wedding] itself was very intimate because we don’t; we’re not all out there having a lot of friends. So it was the perfect day for us ever since and it was, it didn’t really feel to me, it didn’t feel much different than before. It was just, I knew probably after the first year of being together with him that I wanted to be together forever.

Willem continues in another interview ...

Willem: Yeah, so that was important, we didn’t do any extra effort to make it kind-of like flashy but a lot of people still talk about that wedding as something that is very dear to their heart because it was unpretentious and just happy for everyone.

Belinda: We really wanted it to be about us and not about everybody else’s version of us. So I suggested something that was very representative of who we are as a couple which is food, we love to cook and to you know invite friends over for dinner and. Anna is, I think it’s the Van Der Merve in her, she is one of those people who is fond of making jam or chutney you know, or something. So we did what is known as a food jam.

Martin: I was involved with food and drinks and Bob was responsible for decorations, all the plants we grew ourselves but then a friend of ours collected all the tins for instance. And with music we got friends to DJ, Bob and I didn’t want any speeches, we didn’t want to do a first dance, so we did the first set, we were the DJ’s of the first set. Instead of people throwing confetti on us we threw it on them and that was really fun, I remember that. ... So, because music is very important to us, friends are very important to us, dancing is important, and food is important.

Willem, Belinda and Martin, speak about constructing wedding that reference their identities and how they see themselves as couples. In all of the construction of the weddings, there is a visible ‘us’, the couple, and an outside world, friends and family. This is evident even as Martin

describes a more democratic 'party' where some of the wedding roles are reversed, like the throwing of the confetti. In constructing a couple identities through the wedding, willingly or not, the couples create what seems like an inevitable binary of "others" and "us". The creation of an 'us' is necessary to distinguish the couple, therefore also the wedding, from others, in other words to establish that this is a special union, about a particular couple, unlike the others. Willem makes reference to his wedding as the 'perfect day for us', Belinda speaks about 'we really wanted it to be about us' and Martin admits that music and friends 'are very important to us.' In the construction of the wedding, the couples emphasise personal iconography in order to solidify the couple identity in the eyes of the guests. The wedding is partly a demonstration of the in-sync nature of the couple, so an emphasis on an 'us' demonstrated through the choreography of the couples "favourite" things is necessary.

In the construction of the wedding, the inclusion of friends and family is important because the wedding is as much about the guests as it is about the couple. While the wedding is centred on the two people marrying, the guests at the wedding are also important. In popular discourse, the guests at the wedding are there to share in the joy of the couple and celebrate love. This is true, but much less talked about is the witnessing that guests do at the wedding. The guests play an important role as witnesses in affirming the couple and their choices, not only at the wedding but also in the coming months and even years. Willem demonstrates the importance of the witnessing of guests when he fondly recalls that 'a lot of people still talk about that wedding as something that is very dear to their heart'. In this statement, the choices the couple made about the wedding are validated. The wedding is seen as a success in the eyes of their friends, their witnesses. This is no small matter because this approval from friends long after the wedding has taken place says something significant about the couple and their union. It is almost as if a successfully executed wedding says something about the couple, therefore something about their married life.

Both the idea of an 'us' as a couple, and also the role played by guests at the wedding are strongly linked to the ideas about monogamy. The determined construction of the couple identity through the wedding demonstrates those in the couple as taken, or a more popular term "off the market." Similarly, the guests are there to witness and affirm that the partners are married therefore "belong" to someone. While "monogamy" is often not blatantly mentioned at the wedding (although there is the traditional wedding vows that state "forsaking

all others”), it is almost always implied. As Ruan, who is married Willem, pointed out in the interview, ‘monogamy is the point of the exercise’. The taken for granted nature of monogamy in marriage is historically expectation from being in the institution, even if people sometimes don’t practise it. While monogamy is a desired relationship state for many couples, the heteronormative history of marriage, and the taken for granted nature of monogamy, warrants questioning.

The majority of the couples in the sample, sixteen of them, had a wedding similar to the dominant idea of the heterosexual wedding – one characterised by a reception with food, speeches, and dancing. Couples either registered with a law representative prior to the wedding day or signed their papers on the wedding day. These couples then went on to have a ceremony officiated by a marriage officer, relative or a friend. The sixteen couples crafted their weddings differently: eleven of the weddings took place in the city/suburbs of Cape Town and five of the weddings took place on a wine farm. The city/suburb weddings were a mixture of gay and lesbian weddings, while all of the wine farm weddings were of gay couples. The four remaining couples in the sample crafted something different for themselves.

Bob and Martin, a white male couple in which one partner is a foreigner, decided to throw what they call a “party” for their wedding instead of having a “real” wedding. Their party didn’t include speeches or gifts. Guests could contribute towards the party in the form of a dish or assisting to cook and serve. It was seen as a congregation of friends to celebrate their love. Adam and David, an interracial couple, on the other hand, made an appointment with Home Affairs and went to register their marriage with Adam’s mother and sister as witnesses. Adam reflects, ‘It was not perfect, but it was perfect for us. It was funny and exciting and really romantic at the same time’. The couple then decided to ‘book out a restaurant and have few friends and a few friends turned into fifty friends’ to celebrate their marriage.

Zanele and Sphoki, a black lesbian couple, also went to Home Affairs to register their marriage but didn’t inform their families about it until after it was done. ‘We are not really formal people where you sit people down and discuss things’ is how the couple describe themselves and their approach to signing their papers. Some of their relatives only discovered on Facebook that the couple was married. Subsequently, the couple was invited to lunch by friends to celebrate their nuptials. Lastly, Mary and Sarah, a white lesbian couple, registered their marriage at Home

Affairs after making an appointment. They arrived at Home Affairs sans witnesses, friends, or family, and asked another couple waiting in line to be their witnesses. The couple went out for coffee afterwards. Their family and friends were only told that they were legally married after the fact, and they maintain that they want no fuss because for them, their commitment is solely about the two of them.

The descriptions above show the different ways that same-sex couples approached their weddings. From the ways that couples construct their weddings, as in the examples shown above, the couple's identity becomes visible. Same-sex couples' script themselves, they provide a narrative about themselves through the creation of the wedding. Discussed in the rest of the chapter are the politics in the decisions that same-sex couples make in constructing their weddings. This chapter argues that in the South African context, same-sex weddings are political acts. Some couples, through the wedding, are engaged in politics of defiance and assertion of same-sex love in contexts that are hostile to same-sex relationships. Also, a conversation about weddings necessitates a conversation about religion. In many parts of the world, including South Africa, religion has been a point of contention in same-sex marriage debates (Corvino and Gallagher, 2014; Good, Jenkins, Kittredge and Rogers, 2011; Judge, Manion, and De Waal, 2009). In this study, while some couples completely rejected religion, some couples embraced religion, and so some wedding rituals included religious symbolism.

### **3. "Who's Wearing the Dress?" - Wedding as a Performance**

The idea of a same-sex wedding unsettles notions of gender performance in the heteronormative wedding frame. When heterosexual couples announce their impending nuptials, although people may be curious about particulars of the wedding, they usually have accurate preconceived ideas about who is the groom and who is the bride and what they will wear. This is not the case with same-sex couples. The same-sex couples in the sample noted that for many of their guests, theirs was the first same-sex wedding they had attended. This is not surprising considering that same-sex marriage was legalised only in 2006. Same-sex couples received queries from their guests who were curious about the sartorial choices of the brides and grooms. Below Belinda demonstrates how some of their guests were preoccupied with what the brides will wear at their wedding.

Belinda: I was amazed at how many people said to me, who's wearing the dress, and I was like what do you mean who is wearing the dress? Have you met Anna and I? Does it look like either of us are gonna wear a dress? But it's your wedding day. I'm like and? I got married, we got married in a pair of Superga.

Superga is a comfortable sneaker brand. Some have described the brand as “very lesbian”, evoking lesbian stereotypes to mean the shoes are not particularly stylish. Ironically, Belinda is referring to Superga in the same light in the extract above, to illustrate their ordinariness and highlight how much they were not interested in a white-dress-wedding. The question of ‘who’s wearing the dress’ is a strikingly multi-layered question that is at once heteronormative and gendered; there’s an expectation someone will wear a dress, as in the dominant image of heterosexual weddings. The question assumes gendered roles that Anna and Belinda would have to perform at the wedding. It is a question that looks beyond their personal styles. As Belinda humorously asserts ‘have you met Anna and I?’ to those who ask the dress question, she illustrates that a white wedding dress style is not who they are as a couple.

This incident is a reminder that a same-sex wedding disrupts the dominant gender order of the heterosexual wedding. The announcement of same-sex nuptials creates angst around gender performance at the wedding. The dress question, amongst other questions, tells us that the wedding is an important site where meaning is created and contested around gender (Goldberg, 2013). As already discussed in chapter four, when the question of what to wear at the wedding came up for gay male couples, it was in context of the gay men pushing against the idea that they might wear a white dress at the wedding. They wanted their weddings to be respectable. Paul and Alex feared that some people only came to their wedding to see if the grooms would wear dresses or if there would be drag queens at the wedding. For many gay male couples in the sample, what they wore on the day of the wedding ranged from everyday clothes, to custom-made suits. Not one among them wore a dress. The questions couples ask themselves about weddings are related to how many people to invite to the ceremony, the budget, small or big wedding, no wedding ceremony at all, signing of papers and then a reception, or just a visit to Home Affairs. These questions are interrelated because the budget affects the size of the wedding and the size of the wedding affects the venue. The decisions surrounding the wedding ceremony consider the couple’s finances, what the day means to them, who they are as a couple, and most importantly, what story they want to tell about themselves as a couple.



Bell (2010: ix) argues for a systematic analysis of ceremonies because doing this has the potential for “new insights into the dynamics of religion, culture, and personhood”. Therefore same-sex weddings are a crucial site to gain insight into the meaning-making modes of same-sex couples. A wedding ceremony is a series of planned events, and a kind-of performance in the Goffman (1956) sense. Goffman (1956: 13) used the term performance “to refer to all the activity of an individual which occurs during a period marked by his/her continuous presence of observers”. If we consider Goffman’s (1990) theory of “front” stage behaviour, then a wedding is an amplified illustration of Goffman’s theory. Goffman (1956: 19) argues that in the presence of others, people will often lace their actions with “signs which dramatically highlight and portray confirmatory facts”. In the context of a wedding, these facts being portrayed are about love and commitment and other signifiers associated with marriage. So, in a way, we can say that weddings are a dramatic display of love and commitment, a performance of love for those in attendance.

Linked to the idea of “front” stage, Goffman (1956: 23) talks about “idealisation”: when people perform for an audience there is a “tendency for the performers to offer their observers an impression that is idealised”. This means that those performing for an audience will often “incorporate and exemplify the officially accredited values of a society” (Goffman, 1956: 23). The wedding itself is “officially accredited” in South African society; even as heterosexual marriage rates decline, and divorce rates are high (Hosegood, McGrath, and Moultrie, 2009; Statistics South Africa, 2013), marriage remains a revered institution. Also, in the production of a wedding, only the ideal sides of the relationship are on display; this speaks to Goffman’s argument about idealisation that when people perform for an audience, they portray a self that will not disrupt the social order. When people perform for an audience, they choose what must be displayed and what must be hidden. It is also important to remember that while the couples are the performers and the guests are the audience at a wedding, the guests are also performers, performing “wedding guest”, which includes being happy for the couple and bringing gifts. The point here is that when we hear someone is marrying, we get into character, and we perform a certain role, in other words put on a show, depending on the relationship we have to the bride/s or groom/s. Here is an example of an intricate role played by friends at a wedding:

Richard: They [friends] had basically printed pretty much from Facebook a picture of all the guests and they had made a big thirty-second board game. And over the last or the previous three or four months they had stolen from my house little things, trinkets like my magic eight ball, and they had basically placed those as the kind of pieces and we all had a game of thirty seconds on this big game of all of our faces. It was all so touching that, Jack and I love games, me probably a little bit more but it was just so touching.

The friends demonstrate that they know the couple very well by orchestrating the gift of a personalised board game for the couple. The friends know the “rules” of what friends are supposed to do at a friend’s wedding. In any performance that people do, there is what Goffman (1956: 13) calls a “setting”, and in the context of same-sex weddings, the setting is the wedding venue. In a performance, there is what Goffman (1956: 4) calls a “working consensus” that has been established over time, about what the interaction should be. Of course, with a heterosexual wedding, everyone knows their place, including the invited guests. With the same-sex wedding, people can be unsure, in fact the questions about “who’s wearing the dress” are linked to the invitees’ confusion about the “working consensus” because the heteronormative wedding script has been flipped when there are two brides. According to Goffman (1956), “When an actor takes on an established role, usually he finds that a particular front has already been established for it”. Same-sex couples take “established roles” of “bride” and “groom” and turn them on their head. So, the dress question is, of course, partly out of curiosity built on dominant heteronormative assumptions, but the guests also ask so that they can have a “working consensus” and know how to gender appropriately at the wedding. At the heart of the question, who’s wearing the dress, there’s an assumption that once the guests know who is wearing the dress, something profound about the gender order of the same-sex couple will be revealed. Something that will settle their angst about gender at the same-sex wedding.

A wedding is a customary event (Collins, 1988, 1990), which is linked to the idea of a wedding as a performance. Goffman’s (1956) ideas about how people perform for each other, are connected to Davis-Floyd’s (2003) assertion that rites are made significant by their extreme stylisation and deliberate acting by participants. It is through stylisation and dramatic staging that rites, like weddings, capture the attention of those performing and witnessing them. According to Bell (2010: 16),

“A ritual is a type of critical juncture wherein some pair of opposing social or cultural forces comes together. Examples include the ritual integration of belief and behaviour, tradition and change, order and chaos, the individual and the group, subjectivity and objectivity, nature and culture, the real and the imaginative ideal. Whether it is defined in terms of features of 'enthusiasm' (fostering groupism) or 'formalism' (fostering the repetition of the traditional), ritual is consistently depicted as a mechanistically discrete and paradigmatic means of sociocultural integration, appropriation, or transformation.”

Bell's description encompasses all of the real, idealised, and imagined qualities of weddings, including same-sex weddings. A customary event can also be linked to the metaphor of putting on a show as those who perform sacraments, they are often in the company of others who understand the importance of the custom. For Davis-Floyd (2003:8), a rite is a “patterned, repetitive, and symbolic enactment of a cultural belief or value; its primary purpose is transformation”. Furthermore, Davis-Floyd (2003) argues that rites are primarily about sending messages symbolically rather than verbally, which serves as a higher form of communication as symbols in ritual performance are infused with meaning. Similarly, Bloch (2004: 42) argues that the core tenet of a sacrament is sequential repetition. According to Comaroff and Comaroff (1993: xvi), rites should be historicised and examined in how they “work in the everyday world”; rites, they argue, are “a vital element in the processes that make and remake social facts and collective identities”. McAllister (2006), researching Xhosa beer-drinking ceremonies, demonstrates the complexity that is contained in such ceremonies. McAllister (2006) demonstrates how the act of beer drinking in Xhosa culture is layered with meanings and that it is different from the Western concept of going to a bar for a drink. In Xhosa culture, depending on what kind of beer is brewed, who speaks at the beer drinking gathering, the seniority of the speaker, what they say, how they say it, and whether the Xhosa brew is accompanied by brandy are all systems of communication and they speak to an establishing order.

The descriptions of rites offered by these scholars capture acutely the wedding as ceremony, in that weddings are viewed as a coming together of two people, but also the coming together of two families, facilitated by a ceremony where cultural rites are performed. Comaroff and Comaroff (1993: xxvii) argue that we shouldn't see rites as simply “conservative and

conservationist”; that rites are also “a site and means of experiential practice, of subversive poetics, of creative tension and transformative action”. A wedding is an event where an imagined ideal is projected, an ideal about a life together, where at times couples promise to love each other “till death us do part”. Weddings are highly emotive events and, according to Smith (1997), weddings are ceremonies that produce emotions like excitement, stress, happiness, and nervousness. These emotions are evident in the data as participants spoke about their weddings. The kind of rites that can be performed at a wedding depends on the kind of wedding a couple is having. With the diversity of cultures in South Africa, wedding ceremonies are also diverse. The weddings in black communities are sometimes split between what Mupotsa (2014) calls white weddings and traditional weddings. The white wedding can be described as the European kind of wedding with the ‘bride’ in a white dress. The traditional wedding will have its own kind of traditional dress accompanied by other practices like giving the bride a new name. Some black couples opt to have both weddings, and other couples will have one version of these wedding traditions. The kind of wedding a couple chooses can be contentious between partners, family, and friends, as exemplified by Paula and Andiswa.

Andiswa: And they say this in the last week, and in the next weekend you are getting married. Why are you doing a white wedding? Why don’t you just go and sign [at the Home Affairs office]? We don’t want to go sign, but a white wedding is waste.

Paula: Whose waste is it?

Andiswa: It’s our waste. It’s our wedding; we will have it our way.

Out of the twenty couples sampled in this study, four couples officiated their marriage at Home Affairs. The majority of couples held a wedding, or a wedding-like ceremony. The attraction to Home Affairs, for many couples, is exactly what the friends of Andiswa and Paula point out in the anecdote above: it is free to register your marriage at Home Affairs. Andiswa and Paula wanted a white wedding, which is costlier than signing at Home Affairs. The white wedding, with the accompanying symbols and meanings, is what Andiswa and Paula wanted and ultimately executed for their marriage. Paula and Andiswa are not rich, but they are a middle-class black lesbian couple that can afford a white wedding. The couple received pushback from some of their friends suggesting that they should just sign at Home Affairs. The friends of the couple assert that a ‘white wedding is waste’. Mupotsa’s (2014) intervention is useful here as she argues that black weddings in South Africa are aspirational and

demonstrate a kind-of “arrival” for black couples. So, the white wedding of black South Africans is linked to post-apartheid freedoms where black couples are scripting their lives through consumption. To understand this, we have to consider the context in which Paula and Andiswa operate. Their black lesbian friends probably could not afford a white wedding like Paula and Andiswa. Paula and Andiswa have relatively good jobs, and their friends possibly do not. For them, a white wedding is a waste because they would rather spend the money on something else. There are other couples, like Sarah and Mary, who decided against a wedding. They saw the spectacle of the wedding as a show-off and opted for a signing at Home Affairs. These examples underscore the different meanings attached to weddings, and that how the wedding is constructed is about social position and meaning making.

Snizek (2005) credits Ingraham’s (1999) *White weddings: Romancing heterosexuality in popular culture* as the first study that specifically looks at weddings. According to Snizek (2005: 216), “The importance of weddings has been noted by sociologists, but rarely is it the subject of sociological research”. In the South African context, the intervention provided by Mupotsa (2014) on white weddings is instructive on how weddings speak to the precarious post-apartheid condition. In the South African context, weddings and the kind of wedding one has is important. In black cultures in South Africa, “white weddings” and “traditional weddings” often go hand in hand, as in the one performed after the other (Mupotsa, 2014). Although there is an increase in the demand for the white wedding, traditional weddings have not died (Mupotsa, 2014). There are specific rites and a process followed in many black weddings, a process that roughly follows these steps: a delegation is sent to the prospective bride’s family to negotiate a marriage on behalf of the groom; livestock is slaughtered; the day after the wedding, the woman is expected to help around the home of the husband as the new wife of the home; she is expected to cover her hair as a sign of respect; she is also expected to wear “women’s clothes” – in other words, she is not allowed to wear pants as a new bride; there are also specific clothes she must wear that alert everyone of her “new” bride status. The gendered nature of the cultural practices surrounding black weddings is inescapable, and as demonstrated by Snizek (2005) and Ingraham (1999), the wedding has historically been a gendered ceremony. Ingraham (1999: 16) argues that white weddings operate on what she calls “heterosexual imaginary” – a “belief system that relies on romantic and sacred notions of heterosexuality”. Ingraham (1999) understands white weddings as sites that solidify and

preserve systems of domination based on heterosexuality, race, class, and gender. Sniezek's (2005: 216) argues "weddings are enormously important for participants in maintaining, constructing and understanding the individual, the couple and the family within the context of their daily lives." The gendered questions about who is wearing the dress are symptomatic of the inherent heteronormative structure of the wedding. In the wedding ceremony especially same-sex couples come head to head with the heteronormativity as they construct their idealised weddings.

#### **4. "Plea For Africa": Putting on an "African" show**

Visibility has been at the centre of sexuality politics since the Stonewall Riots in 1969 in New York City. The notion of "coming out" is built on the premise that LGBTI people need to be visible and be proud of their sexual identities (Savin-Williams, 2001). In the South African context, one can argue that the first political act of performing LGBTI visibility was with the Gay Pride march in 1990, headed by Simon Nkoli and Beverley Ditsie (Ditsie and Newman, 2002). The face of the sexuality movement in South Africa has changed since and De Waal and Manion (2006) discussed some of these changes in their book *Pride*. Since the late 1990s, the sexuality movement in South Africa has been associated with white South Africans, and homosexuality has been dubbed "unAfrican". Matebeni (2009) argues that the idea of homosexuality as "unAfrican" is linked to the invisibility of black people in same-sex relationships, while white same-sex couples are common. This is changing. There is more visibility of black LGBTI people on television and radio, on social media, and on different public forums. Perhaps the most visible was what many referred to as the "first African gay wedding", in 2013, of Cameron Modisane and Thoba Sithole that took place in Durban and was reported on national television. Most weddings by nature enable visibility as they are performed in the public sphere. With the added advantage of social media, even the most remote of weddings can enjoy public consumption through social networks. The politics of visibility and meanings contained within same-sex weddings are not without complexity. Paul and Alex are an example of the complexity of South African identity politics jostling for meaning at their wedding.

Paul: We chose songs that describe us, but we also chose 'plea for Africa' I don't know if you know that song. It's Sibongile Khumalo, she is an opera singer, she normally sings that song "plea for Africa" and during marriage ceremony you normally find

couples lighting the candle that symbolises now two people becoming one, for us it's crap. But we lit a candle but it was a candle for Africa. And we spoke about or the minister read something out that what we are doing here today in the ceremony is that we do not take it lightly because there are many other countries where people cannot do that. And so it was a pause in recognition of our own constitution and our own constitutional rights but also we paused to offer our thoughts to people who cannot do it in other countries... We also had an exchange of family gifts, now we wanted to, although both of us, both Alex and myself haven't got traditional African cultures but we wanted to do something that was sort of African you know. And because either of us didn't pay lobola we wanted to incorporate some sort of cultural ceremony. Now the Khoi they exchange gifts as well as families become one and we then adopted that, that sort-of symbolism, so what we gave our parents, this was the gift, we didn't want my family to buy something for Alex's family and vice versa. ... We had this very traditional African song playing, I think it was one of, what's her name now I forget her name now, Brenda Fassie songs, and we had our people sweeping in front of us, then we exited the ceremony. Then our white neighbours got such a fright probably that we are gonna bring out the cow to be slaughtered and they left, and we laughed about it later on.

The metaphor of putting on a show is quite apt to describe the wedding ceremony of Paul and Alex. Paul and Alex are a coloured middle-class gay couple. In the extract above they position themselves as political and put on a political show for their guests. Paul and Alex have a particular way they want to be perceived by their guests at their wedding; therefore, the wedding is a production centred on their political identity. Paul and Alex manipulate wedding rites to fulfil their own specific needs and desires. Comaroff and Comaroff (1993) argue that the imaginative influence of ceremonies lies in the tension that exists between the rite and routine action. The rites that are performed at weddings are not performed every day, although they speak to the everyday lives of those marrying. The symbols in wedding ceremonies are exposed to other influences and linkages; therefore, rites will sometimes operate disparately on shifting platforms. These manipulations of symbols by same-sex couples in weddings enable rites to be broken and then reassembled, thereby producing different meanings and references.

Like in many ceremonies, symbols play an important function in weddings. As demonstrated by Kaiser (1997) and more recently Aguwuele (2016), symbolism plays an important role in the ways people convey messages and construct meaning in their lives. The messages and meanings carried out through symbols are often communicated in the presence of family,

community, and even a nation, as these are people who would be able to read the symbolism displayed. Whether it is using clothing, as documented by Kaiser (1997), or our cultural fascination with wearing uniform as demonstrated by Craik (2003), or the meanings attached to dreadlocks in Yorubaland as shown by Agumuele (2016), people use different symbols to construct certain meanings in particular contexts. The song, 'Plea for Africa', the lighting of a 'candle for Africa', and the use of Khoi 'gift exchange' were symbols in Paul and Alex's wedding that were incorporated to ensure their wedding was read as "African".

It is striking how the customs incorporated into the wedding by Paul and Alex were not intended to be specific to any African culture, but to African culture in general. Other than the Khoi, no specific African tradition is linked to the practices in the ceremony. The lack of specificity warrants the question, which African culture are they borrowing from? Perhaps Xhosa wedding practices, Zulu practices, Sotho practices? Although they are both coloured South Africans, they do not regard themselves as "African", at least not in the construction of the wedding. In their construction of Africa, they are not included. In this case, "African" is reserved for black South Africans and their cultures. Interestingly, Leo, who is coloured and is in an interracial relationship with a white South African, when asked about the incorporation of traditions into their wedding, answered by saying that there are no traditions in the coloured community for weddings.

Leo: the coloured community doesn't have traditions really. There's hardly a tradition, I don't know I mean there are more American traditions in coloured communities than anything else. So for me there was never traditions at all. We just basically took some things from here and some things from there and made it our own. So I don't know whether it [traditions] played any part in any of the ceremony or in any of the event.

When Leo discussed his wedding, he described it as 'a night at the Oscars'. So when he said that there are more American traditions in coloured weddings, this is what he meant because his own wedding was likened to an American cultural event. Soon after Leo says that there are more American traditions in coloured weddings, he says 'so for me there was never traditions at all'. What this tells us is that in Leo's mind, 'tradition' is defined similarly to the way that Alex and Paul think about tradition, that it should incorporate "African" symbols to be considered tradition. The 'American traditions', which can be read as a synonym for the white wedding traditions, are read as not being part of any tradition. The American traditions



become a backdrop, the traditions are naturalised, and it is only other kinds of traditions that are seen as “traditional”.

These two examples contrast with the “African gay wedding” that was shown on national television, of Cameron Modisane and Thoba Sithole, both black South Africans – both wore traditional regalia at their wedding and performed Zulu and Tswana traditional wedding dances at their ceremony (Modisane, 2013; eNCA, 2013). Paul’s narrative can easily be read as posturing. In Paul’s description, the symbols are piled up on top of each other and become no more than decorations. The incorporation of African culture in the wedding is more about appropriating African culture than anything else. When Paul states that he and Alex ‘haven’t got traditional African cultures’ Paul positions Alex and himself outside of the very African cultures they appropriate.

Paul and Alex see themselves as political; they are performing the kind of multiculturalism that has come to dominate post-apartheid South Africa. Their wedding ceremony embodies the new rainbow South Africa. They are enveloping themselves in African culture by using particular symbols as a legitimising strategy in order to stake a claim at African citizenship. Of course, this all takes place in a post-apartheid political climate that has branded same-sex love “unAfrican”. Moodie (1988), Amadiume (1987), Murray and Roscoe (1998), and Morgan and Wieringa (2005) all have documented the history of homosexuality on the African continent. Matebeni (2009), Tamale (2011), Ekine and Abbas (2013), and Reid (2013) have continued to document the lives of gays and lesbians, and yet the narrative of homosexuality being unAfrican persists. It is in this context that the couple incorporates African symbolism.

The ‘candle for Africa’ lighting moment is double-edged in that it is a moment to recognise those ‘who cannot do it in their countries’ but it is also a salutation to South African exceptionalism on LGBTI Rights on the continent. Paul speaks about a ‘plea for Africa’ and this plea can be read as alluding to other LGBTI people on the African continent who do not have legalised same-sex marriage. It is striking that although Paul incorporates African traditions in the wedding ceremony, he sees himself and his partner as people who ‘haven’t got traditional African cultures’ but nonetheless wanted ‘to do something that was sort of African’ for the wedding. The goal to be achieved by the incorporation of African symbols in

this wedding was to demonstrate that the couple is political; to use contemporary language, it was to demonstrate that the couple is “woke”.

### **5. “I Felt Like It Was the Oscars”: The Star of The Show**

The weddings of the same-sex couples in the sample were highly personalised. The kind of weddings, and the content of the weddings used specific iconography that was decidedly about the couple. Evident in their different approaches, the couples were highly influenced by their backgrounds, but also how they wanted to be seen as they plan a future together. Similarly, in the UK, Heaphy (2013: 101) found that same-sex couples were preoccupied with their weddings being an “authentic expression of the couple”. What was also present in the UK same-sex weddings was the idea of “lifestyle”. Heaphy (2013: 100) argues, “Like heterosexual weddings, same-sex weddings were ‘lifestyled’. By this we mean that they said as much about tastes and styles associated with socio-cultural locations and aspirations as they did about sexuality”. The idea of authentic construction, and of couples ‘lifestyling’ their weddings to demonstrate their couple-identity, were also present in the narrative of same-sex couples in Cape Town. Jako and Leo, an intergenerational interracial couple. They wanted an intimate wedding which friends and family would enjoy. It was revealed in the interview that in the planning, the wedding started out as a small event and soon escalated. Here is what Leo had to say about their wedding:

Leo: Well, we wanted an intimate affair ... So we decided on 50 of the closest people we know, knew or liked or liked us lets put it that way. Well obviously my family was the first of the lot and we chose closest people after that. It was an experience, I mean I have never ever in my life gotten out of a car and felt like a celebrity. I promise you I have never seen so many cameras and so many cell phones in my face like almost, I felt like it was the Oscars and I am the star attraction or whatever it was. Obviously we were the star attraction of our own wedding. ... We had it at the yacht club. Which is a nice venue, it overlooked the vlei and so nice pictures and photography... Like I said, it was an intimate affair, it was a bit cold that day, very windy. And everybody was happy...

Leo’s description of his wedding continues the allegory of putting on a show, and in this particular show Leo is the star of the show. The language of ‘star attraction’ used by Leo in the extract above is telling of the showy/performative nature of the wedding. There are two important elements in the excerpt above. Firstly, the extract places emphasis on feelings, ‘I felt

like a celebrity' and 'I felt like it was the Oscars'. Secondly, the extract also speaks to popular culture, specifically referencing the 'Oscars' and 'star attraction'. Leo speaks of feelings, and as Love (2007) argues, we must take seriously the relationship between politics and affect. In the aptly titled book *Politics of Affect*, Massumi (2015: vii) defines affect as a "dimension of life which carries a political valence". Massumi argues that affect is the original politics, or the first politics, stressing that as we move through life, and as we have different experiences, we are constantly being affected and affecting others. Shouse (2015), on the other hand, differentiates between feeling, emotion, and affect. According to Shouse (2015: 2-5), a feeling is a sense that has been measured alongside past experiences, while an emotion is an exhibition of a feeling, and affect is an unconscious "experience of intensity". Shouse argues for distinguishing between these words and modes: we need to be clear about what they mean as there are slippages between them when different scholars use them. Puar (2007: 208) is also very aware of these slippages and she suggests, "Perhaps what these slippages between emotion, feeling, and affect are performing in queer critique are continuing efforts to elaborate different and alternative modalities of belonging, connectivity, and intimacy".

Shouse (2005: 6) argues that, because of its abstract nature, affect cannot be fully translated into language because "the body has a grammar of its own". Leo's feelings about his wedding attached to the Oscars and celebrity are his way of trying to translate his experience. Shouse (2005: 12) argues that "Affect plays an important role in determining the relationship between our bodies, our environment, and others, and the subjective experience that we feel/think as affect dissolves into experience". With Leo, we see that he is connecting his wedding experience with the Oscars. There is transference of the feelings he has while watching the Oscars, and seeing the stars, to the experience he had on his wedding day. Leo's experience embodies Shouse's (2015: 6) assertion that "affect is what makes feelings feel". So, Leo is experiencing intensity in the moment, and the moment is linked to Leo's experience of the Oscars on television (TV); what Brennan (2004) calls "the transmission of affect". Brennan (2004: 6) describes the transmission of affect as "not self-contained in terms of our energies". Furthermore, in the transmission of affect, "there is no secure distinction between the 'individual' and the 'environment'". This does not, however, mean those personal experiences with transmission of affect are nullified; indeed, we may filter them through our own personal experiences. Brennan (2004) argues that "transmission of affect" happens through what we

see on TV, what we hear on the radio, and what we read in magazines. People are affected by what they hear; we are “touched” by something, and often, like in Leo’s case, what “touches” us we re-enact in our lives or we see our lives through the experiences that have affected us.

The second element in the extract relates to the ways we consume celebrity culture, which is not unlinked to affect. The world is celebrity-obsessed and scholars in media and cultural studies have given us much to think about vis-à-vis celebrity culture (Holmes, 2005, Turner, 2004). People use different mediums to consume celebrity culture: watching TV, reading magazines, engaging with social media and going to pop concerts. With Leo, there is a re-enactment of what he sees in celebrity culture. His wedding is presented as a night at the Oscars. Leo’s description of the wedding gives the impression of flashing lights similar to cameras flashing at celebrities at the Oscars. Seeing the wedding as a night at the Oscars, the getting out of the car, feeling like a celebrity, cameras, and having the wedding at the yacht club, are all signs of constructing a glamorous wedding.

In *Understanding Celebrity*, Turner (2004) describes the reality TV phenomenon of “ordinary” people being part of television shows and celebrity culture as the “demonic turn”. Increasingly, ordinary people get to be part of celebrity culture via reality TV and therefore, the clear line between “star” and ordinary watcher is blurred (Holmes, 2005; Turner, 2004, 2006). The blurring of lines between stardom and ordinariness creates avenues for people not only to imagine themselves as stars, since stardom now is linked to “ordinariness” but also to enact the life of stardom in the everyday (Gamson, 2011). Turner (2006: 154) notes, “much of the participation in reality TV is aimed at a certain kind of recognition of the self”. The genre makes celebrity attainable, unlike in the days of old, when stardom was unreachable or at least seemed so. Gamson (2011: 1062) argues “consumers of celebrity culture then do all sorts of things with these stories, often giving them new meanings. Some make use of celebrity stories to fantasize a different life, to construct their identities, or to model themselves on people they admire or envy; others use them as fodder for connecting socially with one another”. The reality TV genre is geared towards enabling people at home to see themselves, and to see the celebrities in reality TV shows as being as ordinary as themselves, therefore worth watching. The affect that is created by reality TV is what TV producers exploit, even though much of reality TV is constructed (Gamson, 2011; Turner, 2006). The way that Leo describes his wedding, and how he felt on his wedding day, supports Barry’s (2008) argument that celebrity

culture is tied to global capitalism, and that celebrities influence what we buy, what we think is 'cool', and ultimately how we feel.

## **6. “The Church and Christianity Is Traditionally Anti-Gay”: Politics of Religion**

The relationship between same-sex sexuality and religion is controversial. The legalisation of same-sex marriage, in the context of religious bodies having claimed marriage, causes friction in an already precarious relationship. The wedding as an event has historically and symbolically been embedded in religion, thus an intervention on the weddings of same-sex couples has to take religion and its impact seriously. The wrestling with religion in the wedding event is unmissable because for both those same-sex couples who demand religious iconography, and inclusion and those who reject religion all together, they are all wrestling with religion. The question then becomes, as same-sex couples wrestle with heteronormativity in constructing and performing the wedding, how do these couples negotiate religion. A study by Henrickson (2007) in the New Zealand context showed that lesbians, gays, and bisexuals struggle with the intersection of their religion and their sexuality. Similarly, in South Africa, homosexuality and religion are often presented as incompatible. Religious scripture is often cited as evidence of this incompatibility, where church leaders openly preach against same-sex relationships. In 2017, the gay celebrity Somizi Mhlongo made headline news when he walked out of the Grace Bible Church because the preacher was preaching homophobia (Singh, 2017; NemaKonde, 2017). We knew about this incident because Mhlongo used social media to expose the church, but his experience tells us that LGBTI people attend churches that preach against same-sex love.

For many South Africans, marriage is a religious institution. Research conducted by Mwaba (2009: 803) on attitudes and beliefs about homosexuality and same-sex marriage amongst students showed that “71% of participants indicated that it was strange for people of the same sex to get married”. The research also showed that 49% of students were opposed to the legal recognition of such marriages. Opposition to same-sex marriage was also evident in the fight for the legal recognition of same-sex marriage in South Africa as demonstrated by Vermeulen (2008) and Hendricks (2008). Mufti Bayat, the spokesperson for the Council of Muslim Theologians, was quoted (in Hendricks, 2008: 224) as saying, “Same-sex marriages are a violation of the limits prescribed by the Almighty, a reversal of the natural order, a moral

disorder and a crime against humanity”. The potential loss of the sacredness of marriage was used to lobby against same-sex marriage. Religious faiths view same-sex marriage as an attack on family values, as if queer people do not have families; but of course, they do (Lubbe-De Beer and Marnell, 2013; Lehr, 1999; Weston, 1990). Religious people like Janine Preesman and Reverend Nokuthula Dhladhla embraced same-sex marriages and helped same-sex couples marry in their respective places of worship (Judge, Manion, and De Waal, 2008). This, however, does not mean that the battle is over: many same-sex couples struggle in their respective religious faiths to be seen and respected as legitimate couples.

Perhaps the most visible collision between religion and same-sex marriage is the case of the lesbian Methodist minister who lost her job as minister when she announced she was engaged to her partner. In 2012, De Lange took the church to court for unfair dismissal, and the constitutional court eventually ruled in favour of the church, see *De Lange v. Presiding bishop of the Methodist Church of Southern Africa* (Constitutional Court, 2015). Ironically, in the same year (2015) after a long debate, the Dutch Reformed Church agreed to acknowledge same-sex marriages in the church (Areff, 2015; Ngubane, 2015). Religious bodies have had a troubled relationship with same-sex marriage, and, in the post-Civil Union era, religious establishments have had to rethink their marriage recognition policies as gay and lesbian congregation members push for wedding ceremonies. The contestations with religion were visible in wedding discussions for all same-sex couples in the sample. While some same-sex couples made a political choice to reject religion in their ceremonies, other couples incorporated religion in their weddings. Glenda and Gerda are an example of the negotiation with religion that same-sex couples have to endure. Glenda and Gerda are a white Afrikaans lesbian couple and are practising Christians and attend the Dutch Reformed Church. They speak of having to deal with the lack of real acknowledgment and prejudice from their church.

Glenda: I still remember when we got married in our church I was on the music team and we used to practise ... the Thursday before the Sunday I wasn't at the practise because I wasn't gonna be there on the Sunday after our wedding but our minister told us that she told them that Glenda was getting married, our Glenda? She said they were actually quite shocked that I was getting married.

Gerda: She is in a relationship! (laughs).

Glenda: Even more it was the idea that it was, usually at the church they will say, they will say we are celebrating with them because they are getting married this week and whatever else, it wasn't like that for us. They didn't mention it, I still remember our minister said it was going to be a big week for some of the people in the, she looked at us so I knew she was acknowledging it, but she didn't acknowledge it the same as the others.

Glenda: There was this difficulty around it. And I still remember the evening of our, when we got married that day. We were sitting there and our minister sat down, she had a drink in her hand, she said she didn't realise how emotionally draining this was going to be.

Gerda: Imagine that coming from the person, during this celebration.

Glenda: And I looked at her going, I am not going to upset myself now but I can't forget it. I can't forget the fact that she said it, and the fact that it was so hard for her.

Yip (2005) found that one of the strategies used by religious LGBTI people is to remain in the religious institution after they come out to affect positive change. Glenda and Gerda fall into this category, in that they shared in the interview that they believed that they would change the church. The minister that married Glenda and Gerda said to the couple that the ceremony was 'emotionally draining'. The homophobia in this statement is unavoidable. It is safe to assume it was the minister's first same-sex wedding. Glenda and Gerda had to absorb homophobic comments directed at them by their pastor, after the pastor officiated their wedding. This was a hurtful experience for Glenda as she states, 'I can't forget the fact that she said it'. It is not a line that is easily forgotten on one's wedding day. Clearly LGBTI people in their religious institutions wrestle with homophobia. By wrestling couples struggle with narrow definitions of relationships. Couples wrestle with negative depictions of same-sex intimacy in the sermons in the church. LGBTI people wrestle with the narrow reading of biblical scripture that renders their love, their lives, and their whole beings as sin. The desire to be part of a religious community, the desire for spiritual fulfilment for same-sex couples is to come up against homophobia, even as they are tolerated in their religious institutions. To wrestle is to fight. To wrestle is to fight for same-sex intimacy to exist within religious institutions. Of course, with fighting, there comes bruising and pain and this is what religious same-sex couples have to content with. Of course in the wrestling within the church, couples like Glenda and Gerda provides alternative ways of seeing things for their church, and the

church is, clearly, slowly being changed by their presence in that the minister agreed to officiate the ceremony.

The church is forced to change, and couples like Glenda and Gerda are engineering that change, albeit at a cost of having to deal with homophobic statements. When Glenda states, 'I knew she was acknowledging it, but she didn't acknowledge it the same as the others', she is speaking to the invisibility she and her partner endure in the church. The couple's invisibility is felt, because even when they are talked about, they are not talked about. Ironically, these are the invisibilities that legalisation of same-sex marriage is trying to address. The presence of Glenda and Gerda is pushing for the Dutch Reformed church to evolve, as the church now acknowledges same-sex marriages. A study conducted in New Zealand, found that lesbians remained active participants in their religious organisations despite not believing the doctrine of the religious organisations of which they were part (Kirkman, 2001). This practice is known as "defecting in place", coined by Winter, Lummis, and Stokes (1994: 194). Many of the same-sex couples in this study, as exemplified by Glenda and Gerda, also spoke along the lines of being active in church while disagreeing with its doctrine pertaining to sexual orientation.

In studying the experiences of black LGBT individuals in regard to spirituality and religion, Hill (2015) found that all the research participants had had negative experiences with religion due to their sexual orientation. Similarly, Coyle and Rafalin (2000) found that Jewish gay men found it difficult to reconcile their Jewish identity with their sexual orientation. In both studies, the participants were made to believe that their sexual identity is incongruent with their respective faiths. Some of the negative feelings that Hill's (2015: 66-67) participants associated with church, because of its "homonegativity", included shutting down, anger, and depression. Some of the participants turned to drugs and alcohol as coping mechanisms. In a different study, Tan (2005: 141) found that gays and lesbians have high levels of "religious well-being" and high levels of "existential well-being", which discounts the idea that gays and lesbians are spiritually lacking. Henrickson (2009: 49) claims that there is an "estrangement" between religious people and sexual minorities because both sides claim to be oppressed by the other, and only the creation of a "taxonomy of understanding" will deliver both groups. Coming from a social work perspective, Henrickson (2009: 56-57) argues that there is no real dialogue between those who are accepting of same-sex desire and those who believe in traditional authority and see sexual minorities as a threat to their traditional order. Hence,



Henrickson's solution is "constructive dialogue". Henrickson believes that the struggle would exist even without same-sex desire because the real struggle is not against gayness itself, but the loss of power by traditional authorities.

While Boisvert (2000: 14) argues that the three components of LGBTI people's spirituality are, critical religious reflection, political engagement, and taking seriously the erotics of LGBTI people; however, these components are not always present or honoured. Glenda and Gerda, can be said to engage politically, but their church does not affirm their erotics. Yip (2005) argues for a nuanced take on the relationships that LGBTI people have with religion, because what happens at the institutional level in religious institutions is different to what happens at grass roots level. While for some LGBTI people religion represents homophobic prejudice, for others it represents deep spiritual connection. Both Yip (2005) and Tan (2005) argue that sexuality and spirituality are not polar opposites, that they are intimately connected. Yip (2005: 276) states, "Sexuality and spirituality are flip sides of each other—to be sexual is to be spiritual; and to be spiritual is to be sexual. They are inseparable". Thus, the same-sex couples encounter negative feelings in their religious organisations because essential parts of who these couples are are undermined. Dedicated LGBTI people who are active members of religious institutions, like Glenda and Gerda, challenge the anti-gay sentiments within the church. The assertion of spirituality and sexuality by LGBTI people within religious institutions acts as a "political tool that transgresses and disrupts heteronormative power structures that give rise to institutional homophobia" (Yip, 2005: 278). So, the presence of Gerda and Glenda in the church ultimately serves a political purpose but not without personal costs. The role played by Glenda and Gerda is geared towards a transformational politics. It is a politics that understands that in order to change the homophobic institutions of South Africa society, LGBTI people need to be in those institutions wrestling with them to mirror the ideals contained in the South African Constitution of equality and dignity. Gerda and Glenda embody Jo's philosophy, "you stretch them, and they grow" (discussed at length in chapter 6) in that they are pushing for the visibility of same-sex desire in a religious environment, and forcing the religious institution to engage with same-sex desiring members.

In her research, Kirkman (2001: 215) demonstrates that Christian women with feminist and lesbian identities construct "new religious realities" that incorporate their seemingly contradictory identities. There was a similar trend in the lesbian spirituality research of Winter,

Lummis, and Stokes (1994). In the process, in both research studies the women redefine themselves and the social relations with others in their church communities, with the ultimate goal of transforming the church. Glenda and Gerda are a same-sex female couple that sit perfectly within this paradigm of wanting to stay in the church and change it because being a Christian is part of their identity. Their sexual identities are inseparable from their Christian identities. Other female same-sex couples did not want anything to do with the church. Take Sarah for example: she and her wife Mary are a white lesbian couple who live in the southern suburbs of Cape Town and define themselves as queer. They did not have a wedding; they signed their marriage papers at Home Affairs and had a coffee date afterwards.

Sarah: Well the church and Christianity is traditionally anti-gay so why would we wanna sort-of feed into that paradigm so. While we are talking what is being offered to us in terms of the civil union we don't want to buy into the whole traditional concept of marriage. So, that's why we keep it simple and we are not doing what like normal, all the ceremony and everything, we are not doing that because we don't want to be a part of that yeah.

While some couples, like Glenda and Gerda, are willing to engage the hostility of religious people and their institutions towards same-sex love, other couples, like Sarah and Mary, are vocal about their rejection of religion. The couples that reject religion, albeit in different ways, are taking a political position: Sarah states, 'Christianity is traditionally anti-gay' and, consequently, having a religious wedding is tantamount to 'feeding the paradigm'. This difference in approach to religion between couples proves that same-sex couples are not monolithic. Sarah and Mary's approach to religion is similar to their approach to the 'traditional concept of marriage' – they reject both concepts. This couple see themselves as queer, reject what is viewed as 'normal', and want to shape their world as they see fit. This position of being queer and rejecting normative ideas of marriage on the one hand, but on the other hand also wanting to take part in civil union complicates the 'assimilation versus radicalisation' debate between Warner (2000) and Sullivan (1996), about whether or not marriage will radicalise, or assimilate, same-sex couples. Sarah and her partner both wanted same-sex marriage but did not want to be part of the normative aspects of the institution. So, for the couple, it was not an either-or polarity as positioned in the queer marriage debates. Mary and Sarah were cognisant of the power of heteronormativity as a system that is hinged on Christian values. It is important to highlight, however, that their approach to the wedding

and subsequently marriage was singularly radical as compared with the other couples in the sample. No other couple spoke as sharply against the adoption of heteronormative performance in weddings and marriage. Bob and Martin were also against some elements of traditional weddings, but, as Bob explains, he understood the need to celebrate milestones. The ideas of rites as a symbol of a change or a new beginning explained to Bob by a friend made Bob rethink his ideas around ceremonies.

Bob: What I was trying to achieve was just a celebration, I'm very ahh I'm not religious and I do remember one of my best friends in my home country she had the child and she had this baptism in the church and she is not that religious but she is not, ahh grew up from a family that was religious. So, and I in the moment I criticized her and I said why she do this baptism, the party, and the church and the little baby that she doesn't even know. And she, she answered me in a way she gave me an answer that actually convinced me that this stuff is quite important for another reason. Even if you don't believe in god ahh you want to celebrate with people that you like. And you want to celebrate those good things and what she was doing at that moment was putting together all the people that she loved in the same room, to think positive things about the baby and to give that baby energy and support but also love in that way, very ahh, not tangible things ahh but love and good life. Then I said, ok then I will be there.

In the excerpt above Bob is ambivalent about religion, but he recognises the symbolic productivity of rites. As argued by Bell (2010) and Comaroff and Comaroff (1993), rites play an important role at marking milestones and creating meaning about important life events. Of course, rites are not without politics, particularly when they are embedded in religious practices; this is especially so for people who struggle with religion. The strategy employed by Bob is to question the religion and its place, but without rejecting religious ceremonies altogether, as some of the symbolic work of the ceremonies, even those embedded in religion, are beneficial to community sustenance. There is a manoeuvring of ritual, a reconstruction of ritual with different meanings. So, although he was critical of his friend about the 'baptism and the church' he was convinced of the importance 'to celebrate good things'. The baptism of the friend's child was not only a religious practice, but also a 'putting together of all the people that she loved in the same room'. So, Bob's friend takes a ceremony that is religious, using aspects of it that are useful to them, and ignoring things with which they do not agree. There is a manipulation of the meaning. The meaning of the ceremony is changed to suit the needs of those participating in it.

The way that Bob understands his wedding as ‘celebrations’ and a ‘party’ is not dissimilar to the way that his friend understood ‘baptism’, in that he saw the celebration as an event to mark their marriage, without the religious weight of a traditional church wedding. The excerpt above shows how Bob was challenged to rethink his stance on religious ceremonies after he was invited to a baptism. His rethinking towards rites is clear when he states ‘even if you don’t believe in God you want to celebrate with people that you like’. ‘What I was trying to achieve was a celebration’ is an ethos most of the weddings in the sample share; what differs is how the celebrations are executed. Elsewhere in the interview, the couple was adamant that their get-together with friends and family after legalising their marriage was a ‘celebration’ and a ‘party’ but not a wedding. The correct terminology was important for the couple. What is revealed here is how couples negotiate tradition, the ways that they negotiate religion, and ultimately how they create something “new” out of old traditions with different meanings. They stretch the traditional ceremonies they have inherited from their parents and families, and in the stretching they make room for queer interpretations of old traditions some of which are built on religion. As Hequembourg (2007) argued in the case of lesbian motherhood, couples adopt some traditions but reject some elements of those traditions; through redesign, they create new meanings. So, the redesigned ceremony might look the same as its traditional inspiration, but it carries different meanings.

### **7. “You Have Fought So Hard To Get Married” – Divorce and the Model Couple**

The last discussion in this chapter focuses on divorce. The irony of ending a chapter on weddings with a discussion on divorce is instructive of how weddings as beginnings already contain in them the seeds for their dissolution. This is perfectly illustrated by Francis-Tan and Mailon (2014) aptly titled paper ‘*A Diamond is Forever’ and Other Fairy Tales* where they demonstrate how wedding spending is directly linked to the duration of the marriage. They argue that the more money a couple spends on the wedding, the more likely they are to divorce. In this section, the idea of divorce is squared with the idea of the “model” couple, where ironically the same-sex couple becomes the exemplary couple of how to correctly “do” coupledness. The discussion of divorce with married same-sex couples unveils the heteronormative platform that same-sex couples negotiate their relationships because the distancing from divorce and the “exemplary couple” discourses is linked to heteronormative

approval. The discussion of divorce also unveils the fragility of intimate relationships even as they profess “undying” love through marriage.

The theme of divorce was not a strong theme for the couples in this study. The few occasions on which divorce came up are worth mentioning because they show striking similarities. There are two main elements in discussions about divorce in this study. One is the fear that same-sex couples will not be able to preserve the sanctity of marriage. The “sanctity of marriage” can be read as the ability to properly “approximate the heterosexual norm.” The angst is that same-sex couples should and must take marriage seriously. The second is the rationale that same-sex marriage was a hard-won battle, and divorce undermines that battle. There is a belief, real or imagined, that heterosexuals are watching and therefore same-sex couples need to be good at marriage. There is self-imposed pressure in same-sex couples to perform marriage perfectly. The pressure can be understood as a self-imposed discipline in the context of heteronormative prejudice that has historically constructed same-sex love as amoral and promiscuous. In other words, under a heteronormative culture, same-sex couples fear divorce as it feeds into an already-existing narrative of same-sex couples as unstable, unnatural, and ruining the “sanctity of marriage.” The understanding of divorce as negative combines with the understanding of same-sex relationships as negative, and therefore some same-sex couples distance themselves from divorce. Some same-sex couples are hyperaware of the heterosexual audience as they perform marriage. Following are two examples from two couples discussing divorce to demonstrate the two elements in discussions of divorce.

Grace: And marriage in that sense ... marriage is very sacred to us in the sense that we really had to think about whether we wanted to do it, we didn't just. Well the proposal happened on the spur of the moment and we had big love and stars in our eyes but we really had to consider who was gonna marry us and where we would get married. We did think about those things and so divorce is not something we just threaten each other with I'm gonna divorce you. A lot of people we know use that as a card I'm just gonna divorce him and move on.

Kelly: We don't dare say (it). We call it the 'D' word? You can like joke about everything but that is not something worth joking about. But I think that might also be because we both come from divorce homes.

Grace describes marriage as ‘very sacred’. Interestingly, this is exactly the same way that religious and traditional conservatives describe marriage, and the very sacredness of marriage

is how conservative groups justified fighting against the legalisation of same-sex marriage. To understand the ethos of marriage as ‘very sacred’ and therefore divorce as bad, we need to understand Rubin’s (1984) sexual hierarchy, depicted in the charmed circle versus the outer limits. According to Rubin (1984), in the sexual hierarchy the inner circle represents what is good, normal, and desired, and marriage would fall into this inner circle. The outer circle of the sexual hierarchy represents what is bad, unnatural, and undesired: this is where divorce is located. When Grace attests to them as a couple never threatening each other with divorce, and Kelly confirms never even joking about it, their understanding of divorce is that it is bad and absolutely undesirable.

While marriage rates are relatively low in South Africa, divorce rates are high (Statistics South Africa, 2015). These are heterosexual divorce rates. Statistics South Africa does not track the divorce rates of couples married under the *Civil Union Act 2006*, so the divorce trend for same-sex couples is not clear. The extract above reveals that although Grace and Kelly do not jokingly threaten each other with divorce, it still hovers above them. Grace and Kelly call divorce the ‘D’ word, signalling the taboo nature of divorce in their relationship. Here, divorce is seen as a bad thing; divorce is characterised as something threatening. The possible reason given by Kelly as to why the couple does not even joke about divorce is that their respective parents divorced when they were children. The trauma of their parents’ divorce is what they highlight as a reason to avoid discussions about divorce.

In their view of divorce, Grace and Kelly are oblivious to the gendered history of divorce. In 1854, Caroline Norton published *English Laws for Women in the Nineteenth Century*, wherein she writes about her experiences as an abused wife in the hopes to change divorce laws (Norton, 1854). Divorce has a long history and Caroline Norton (1808 – 1877) is credited as the instigator in the creation of divorce laws. Caroline married George Chapple Norton at the age of nineteen, when he was twenty-six. It was an unhappy marriage and Mr. Norton was a violent man. She wanted a divorce, but this was impossible as only men could divorce their wives, so Caroline Norton decided to fight to change the law. In South Africa, prior to the adoption of the *Divorce Act 1979*, divorce could only be granted on the grounds of adultery or malicious desertion (*Divorce Act 1979*). In 1979, the grounds for divorce were extended to include “irretrievable breakdown” in marriage and were no longer dependent on showing the guilt of the parties, often the woman (*Divorce Act 1979*). While Grace and Kelly see divorce as

something negative, expansion of the legal grounds for divorce is a historically important victory for women (Kitchin, 2016; Norton, 1854).

Since Norton's publication, divorce laws have become more sophisticated. The process differs from family to family, depending on jurisdiction, and life after divorce, for the large part, is complicated (Moore, 2016; 2017). Contained in Grace and Kelly's view of divorce is the notion that divorce is the antithesis of love and commitment, a fact refuted by Moore (2017). Moore (2017) demonstrates that divorce is a process that shifts continuously, and people who divorce do not necessarily become enemies, but can maintain caring relationships post-divorce. When Moore (2017: 4) notes, "marriages are falling; divorce rates are increasing; the number of babies born out of wedlock is increasing", she alerts us to the changing nature of family life produced by changing social structures. Divorce studies are enabling a nuanced take on divorce, like a study in Israel which found that couples with lower socioeconomic standing are subject to higher divorce risk, and that gender inequality, monetary circumstances, and schooling levels (Kaplan and Herbst, 2015) are all factors which influence divorce rates. In another study examining the effects of divorce culture in the United States, specifically looking at couples who have not divorced, Yodanis (2005: 655) found that "a strong divorce culture on the national level is associated with a more, not less, equal distribution of work in marriages". Yodanis (2005) points to the need for understanding divorce not just on a micro level – as being between individuals – but also on a macro level. Divorce is a complex process, varied in different jurisdictions, and the view that it is 'bad' is simplistic.

The question of divorce is made contentious when one thinks about the battle to achieve marriage. The fight for the legalisation of same-sex marriage was a hard battle. As demonstrated in *To Have and to Hold* (Judge, Manion, and de Waal, 2009), the lead-up to same-sex marriage was a trying time, with parliamentary debates, civil society engagements, and think pieces in the press. Many South Africans were opposed to same-sex marriage. The right for same-sex couples to marry was hard won, and same-sex couples do not take that victory lightly. Although she would later see the flaw in her thinking, it is in this context that Gerda did not understand same-sex couples that divorce. Gerda held a higher standard for same-sex couples than for heterosexual couples in matters relating to divorce, because the right to marry was hard won. However, she later realised that this, of course, is holding same-sex couples to a different standard than heterosexual couples.

Gerda: The other day we were counting some of the couples that got married before and after us that's not together anymore. And then we realised because the first time I heard about a gay couple getting divorced I thought but why, you fought so hard to get married but now you're getting divorced. And then I realised I am making the same mistake as any straight person that; a gay marriage must be something else than a normal straight marriage.

Glenda: I think that's because you want to fight for it that we feel like.

Gerda: Say what?

Glenda: You want to fight for it, jy hou van dit.

Gerda: You want to preserve the...

Much is contained in Gerda's statement 'you fought so hard to get married but now you're getting divorced'. Although, she realised that she was making a 'mistake straight people make' of depicting same-sex marriage as 'something else than a normal marriage', her ideas of same-sex marriage and divorce are telling. Firstly, this statement demonstrates awareness of the battle for LGBTI equality in general, and specifically marriage equality. It is a statement that sees a victory in the battlefield of equality as something that should be protected. So on the one hand it seems as if same-sex couples should lose the right to divorce because they have fought so hard for marriage equality. On the other hand, considering the historical, and in some respects, the continued hardships, of LGBTI people, Gerda's intuition is to protect marriage equality. What is demonstrated here is the added burden for same-sex couples in particular, and LGBTI people in general, of worrying about the erosion of LGBTI Rights that have been already gained. Living in a heteronormative world, where LGBTI freedoms are at times under attack, it makes sense to want to preserve those freedoms. It was in 2012 when CONTRALESA introduced the Traditional Courts Bill that was partly aimed at undermining the security granted by the Bill of Rights that include the sexual orientation clause (Reid, 2012). Although Gerda corrects herself on holding same-sex couples and heterosexual couples to different standards when it comes to divorce, in many respects the reality of same-sex couples is that of discrimination. Gerda's thoughts, at least at first, should be situated in a context wherein same-sex couples have historically been denied the right to marry. Of course, my analysis here shouldn't be seen as supporting non-divorce for same-sex couples, on the contrary, they should have a right to divorce like all couples who are married. What is being



highlighted here is the complex ways that married same-sex couples wrestle with ideas of divorce in a heteronormative context.

That Gerda catches herself is important. It reveals critical engagement with her ideologies, and thus shows that she is able to side-step traps of internalised ideas about the inferiority of same-sex couples. The idea that marriage should be ‘preserved’, and divorce avoided is a conservative idea, an idea one would expect from the anti-homosexuality establishment. Equality means same-sex couples must be free to divorce if they want to without being punished for it, similar to how Norton (1854) meant it. Same-sex couples should not have to be “better” at marriage simply because they fought hard for marriage equality. Divorce is not separate from marriage, divorce is part of marriage; i.e., when the relationship and the institution is no longer tenable, whether homosexual or heterosexual, one should have the choice to opt out. The discourse that marriage is sacred and therefore divorce is profane is pandering to respectability politics and ultimately coerces couples to stay together when it would be better to divorce.

With regards to Kelly and Grace, there is more to the avoidance of divorce than a possible break-up that would be similar to their parents’ divorce. On multiple occasions, Grace and Kelly expressed that as a couple they are role models to young children, children who look up to them as models of a “normal” relationship. The couple spoke about having an exemplary relationship where they are better at marriage than heterosexual couples, because they, as a lesbian couple, receiving feedback that they are role models of monogamy and really perfect domesticity. This way of being seen is highly prized by the couple, and so divorce not only threatens the marriage, but also threatens the exemplary status of the couple. Considering the heteronormative framework of society, the extracts below demonstrate how same-sex couples at times adhere to the heterosexual gaze. They are aware that they are being watched, and so, the pressure to perform a particular version of coupledness perfectly and to diminish any signs of divorce is palpable. So, in this sense, the avoidance of divorce, even talking about it, is really an avoidance of being seen as failing at marriage. An institution that same-sex couples fought very hard to be able to access. Below Kelly and Grace at different moments in their interview spoke about their exemplary status of how to do coupledness.

Kelly: Yeah I was saying that I sometimes Emma said to us on numerous times that we are the only example of love she has, which is like a big responsibility. And for

Mitchell as well, like so, and I wonder if that is because we are all from broken homes. Like it's unusual that we are like, we are the couple that people want to be but we are gay.

Grace: I know. Leave us alone you know.

Lwando: (laughs)

Kelly: Like, like that's now like their normality is like a gay couple, which is very unusual. Like you wouldn't have had that 10 years ago.

...

Kelly: You are a good couple if you love and respect each other. And think that, that is few and far between now. So we just kind-of like, we are ticking boxes for them because they are like respect, love, monogamy and we are one of the couples that they know that does that now. So, and I don't think it's about being gay. And yeah we have become normal.

Grace: Yeah, we have become the cool couple. Kelly's uncle often phone her mom and says I am worried about this couple in the family, skinner (gossip) in the family. Megan and Jeff are not in a really good place and I am worried about them, I don't even know why they are together. And he always goes Grace and Kelly they are sorted, they are like the best couple of the family. So we have got that and it's amazing. So, and I don't know why.

In the above abstracts one wants to pay attention to the ways that Grace and Kelly characterise themselves, and also how they are characterised by other people in their lives as an exemplary couple. What does this characterisation mean and what does it do? In the extracts Grace and Kelly are seen as 'the only example of love', something they see as a 'big responsibility' and they are the example of 'normality' to others. They are even compared to a heterosexual couple in their family, where the heterosexual couple is seen as failing at their relationship, where Grace and Kelly are seen as 'sorted' and 'they are like the best couple of the family.' Firstly, the idea of putting on a show is helpful for understanding the strategies of Grace and Kelly as they characterise themselves as an example of normality as a same-sex couple. There is considerable amount of "performing couple" as Grace and Kelly enact admirable domesticity. The desire to be seen like any other couple, in other words to be seen like a heterosexual couple, demands a particular kind of coupledness performance; the kind of performance that ticks all the right boxes. Secondly, the exemplary couple status that Grace and Kelly are bestowed with is linked to how they think about divorce, which would be something that

would ruin their model couple status. This is partly why the couple sees divorce as negative because it would tarnish their standing in the family as the exemplary couple. Lastly, the exemplary status of the couple is linked to heteronormativity because the model of relationship that Grace and Kelly are seen as exemplars of is the heterosexual relationship. In order for Grace and Kelly to be a model example, there has to be a standing model to compare from, and this model is the heterosexual married couple. Thus, when Grace and Kelly are favourably compared to another heterosexual couple in the family, and they are seen as the example of 'normality' we see the power of heteronormativity assumed by the same-sex couple.

Grace and Kelly go as far as to mention that they are 'ticking boxes' for the family, these 'boxes' are on 'love, respect and monogamy'. These aptly named 'boxes' are the hallmarks of a particular kind of dominant heterosexual relationship. This is the model that Grace and Kelly perform and excel at to the point where others admire them. In a way Grace and Kelly outperform heterosexuals in coupledness, and therefore can be said to fully embody what Warner (2000) calls the "good gay" ethos in that they are able to assume heteronormative relationship structuring perfectly. Of course, the idea of the good gay is linked to queer respectability discussed in the previous chapter, so the performance of exemplary couple by Grace and Kelly is an adoption of respectability politics. Scott and Theron (2017) made similar observations when they argued that same-sex marriage is strategy for respectability in the promise of heteronormativity in the South African context. These strategies used by same-sex couples, as exemplified by Grace and Kelly are successful in legitimising the same-sex couple in the eyes of friends and family. The couples gain the respect of friends and family and this is a victory for same-sex couples, at least in their immediate surroundings. It is inevitable that same-sex couples would draw on familiar notions of coupledness to legitimise their marriages. Same-sex marriage was desirable because of the social power it has to cloak same-sex relationships with familiar notions of 'love, respect and monogamy'.

## 8. Chapter Conclusion

This chapter focuses on the wedding and argues that the wedding is a kind of a show put on by couples. In putting on this show, on the one hand the “show” resembles a heterosexual white wedding that Mupotsa (2014) wrote about while at the same time same-sex couples in putting together their own wedding provide alternative ways of reading the wedding event. The choices couples make about what kind of wedding to have, who to have at the wedding, how to construct the wedding, what to wear at the wedding, and even whether to have a wedding at all are decisions that say much about the couple, but also how the couples are negotiating heteronormative systems of power. Couples use weddings to say something about who they are, they are layered with symbols and other kinds of meaning referencing the society the couple is in. Goffman’s (1956) ideas about how people represent themselves in everyday life are significant in that they are illuminating for lesbian and gay identities that have a history of being shamed and/or hidden (whether partly or fully) in everyday life. This chapter argues that same-sex weddings illuminate how same-sex couples break apart wedding traditions and reassemble them in conversation with their lesbian and gay sexualities.

In many ways, the weddings of same-sex couples continue the fight for sexual freedom of lesbian and gay people. They do so primarily by challenging the ideas about the gendered nature of the wedding event. Same-sex weddings are relatively new, and this means that there is no blueprint for how they should be conducted. This is something some same-sex couples found frustrating about organising their weddings. Simultaneously, this is also what was liberating about same-sex weddings, in that same-sex couples did not have to be bogged down by wedding rites that did not fit them. The weddings of the same-sex couples in this study demonstrate that same-sex couples find some aspects of the heteronormative wedding structure useful, while they deconstruct other ways and created new ones. In doing this couples prove that Hequembourg (2007) was right when she argued that same-sex couples are simultaneously accommodating and resisting normative ideas of coupledness.

The same-sex wedding as an event is a battleground around ideas of gender. Same-sex couples wrestle with dominant ideas of gender performance in the construction of weddings. So, it is not surprising that same-sex couples have had to deal with awkward questions about what they will be wearing at their weddings. The gender of same-sex couples troubles the

heteronormative 'woman in a white gown and man in a tuxedo' structure, and this makes family and friends uneasy. The questions that couples receive around what the couples will wear are about both curiosity as well as wanting to gender the couple; as if, if one of the grooms or one of the brides were to wear a wedding gown, that would enable family and friends to understand the gender dynamics of the couple. The dress question is underpinned by heteronormative and binary understandings of the world wherein one partner is feminine, and the other is masculine. Showcasing the ubiquity of heteronormativity as a dominant structure. Heteronormativity is troubled by same-sex weddings as couples do not seat neatly into the gendered and sex binary.

The wedding as an event is closely associated with the church or religion. Even as many people marry without being affiliated with religion, the structure of many weddings contains in them religious symbols and meanings. The church has been a powerfully influential institution in the regulation of marriage. So, a conversation about marriage naturally will necessitate a conversation about religion. Same-sex marriage demonstrates that lesbians and gays have a difficult relationship with religion. While there are lesbians and gays who are against the church, there are some who actively engage in religion – in this study, those in the latter category are all practising Christians. Research has shown that lesbians and gays can experience spiritual fulfilment at their churches, and that they can choose for themselves which part of the Christian message they will adopt and practise, and which they will reject. Of course, same-sex couples who share their lives and relationships with their churches are not always well received, and this is the price that religious lesbians and gays pay. Of course, many couples absolutely reject the church and what it stands for. Some same-sex couples do not reject all of religion, in that they see some aspects of religion as productive. So, they take what would be a religious ritual and recreate it by manipulating the symbols and rituals to mean what they desire. Meaning is created through customs, and customs are routinely deconstructed and reassembled to accommodate modern understandings of them. Same-sex couples have deconstructed the wedding ritual, they have then reassembled it to, and in this process of reconstruction something new, and queer emerges.

In the next chapter, the thesis narrows in on the kiss in the wedding. The kiss in the same-sex wedding represents many things, including visibility, and a claiming of sexual agency in publicly displaying intimacy. Similarly, to how weddings of same-sex couples challenge gender norms

and wedding traditions, the public kiss staged in the wedding is a political moment for same-sex couples. Same-sex displays of public affection are contested, so the kiss at the same-sex wedding is charged with political meaning. In theorising the wedding kiss, this next chapter argues that same-sex marriage contains the potential for a liberatory politics. Perhaps Heiner (2003:43) was correct in emphasising that, “the power of the homosexual consists in the potential he/she bears to constitute affections and relationships that exceed the framework of possibility drawn by contemporary institutions”.

## Chapter Six

### The Wedding Kiss

#### 1. Chapter Introduction

This chapter theorises the wedding kiss. The kiss at the wedding is a moment that guests often wait for in anticipation. Witty lines and jokes often precede the wedding kiss supplied by those officiating the wedding. This chapter narrows in on the wedding kiss to make a point about the politics of same-sex displays of affection. Society seems to approach same-sex displays of affection with this phrase in mind - “same-sex couple should exist but should never be seen.” There is a denial of the right to public affection of same-sex couples. Research demonstrates that same-sex couples are denied the ability to display public affection, something heterosexual couples take for granted (Steinbugler, 2005; Johnson, 2002). Seeing that a wedding is an event where affection is displayed; seeing that same-sex couples have reported feeling uncomfortable displaying public affection because of the potential of violence in public; seeing that one couple had to disinvite their family from the wedding because of the potential kiss between two men; this chapter takes seriously the politics of public kissing of same-sex couples.

In chapter four, there was a discussion on Gerda and Glenda’s first kiss in public, which took place on their wedding day. The wedding kiss is discussed as a form of “coming out” for Gerda and Glenda. This chapter is anchored in the kiss experience of one couple in the sample, Willem and Ruan, more specifically Willem. The kiss or the potential for a kiss was a source of stress for the couple because the mother of Willem was nervous about the couple kissing at their wedding. The wedding kiss in this instance becomes the battleground for Willem and Ruan’s desire for public affection, it becomes a wrestle for the ability of the couple to assert their love and intimacy in public. This chapter theorises the wrestle for the visibility of sexuality, characterised by the kiss or specifically the struggle for the public kiss – to a point where the couple decided to disinvite the parents of the one groom. Historically, the display of public affection by same-sex couples has been a struggle because firstly public displays of affection are outing and secondly, they sometimes invite homophobic violence. Public displays of affection between same-sex couples are contentious even in 2018 as demonstrated by the video that went viral created by Sean Lionadh (2018) about how same-sex couples negotiate engaging in public affection. In the video Lionadh (2018) talks about the hostile stares that

same-sex couples encounter when they hold hands, or look at each other with affection, and also when they kiss. He narrates how something as seemingly innocuous like a goodbye kiss with a lover must be negotiated by same-sex couples, something heterosexual couples take for granted. A couple of years ago, there was a scandal at Stellenbosch University when a picture of two men kissing appeared in the university newspaper (Jones, 2010). This was a scandal that caused much debate about the “appropriateness” of a picture of two men kissing on the front cover of the university newspaper. In 2017 a study showed that more than half of gay men are afraid to hold hands in public in Britain (Bachmann and Gooch, 2017). All of these examples tell us that public displays of affection between people of the same-sex are political, so theorising about the wedding kiss is particularly salient in deeply thinking about queer lives in post-apartheid South Africa.

In negotiating marriage, it becomes clear that collision with heteronormative structures is unavoidable for same-sex couples, because couples do not function outside of structures of heteronormative power (Lannutti, 2005; Hequembourg, 2007). What is brought to the fore in this chapter are the *choices* same-sex couples make as they negotiate heteronormative structures. In the case of Willem and Ruan, the choice was to disinvite the parents from the wedding and continue to have the wedding kiss. In wrestling with heteronormative culture, in marriage, the politics of sexual orientation visibility become illuminated (McGarry, 2016). In the wrestling with heteronormativity same-sex couples assert their sexuality, and in so doing they make claims on marriage for themselves, and challenge and transform their families and friends. The possibilities created by same-sex marriage for same-sex couples and those around them is contained in Jo’s phrase “you stretch them, and they grow.” In the latter part of the chapter Jo’s philosophy is discussed in relation to the wedding kiss and the possibilities created by the politics of same-sex marriage.

The wrestling with heteronormativity that married same-sex couples have to do enables the process of stretching and growing. What we see with same-sex couples is that although at times through difficulty, and at times inadvertently, married life has transformed their *personal* relationships with their families for the better. Married life obviates the same-sex-ness of same-sex couples, which in turn forces them to engage with the world as same-sex couples, and this has implications for their personal sexual freedoms. In this, it becomes clear that there is more scope to critically engage the links between individual politics of sexuality, same-sex marriage,



and broader transformations of the heteronormative order. As alluded to in the introductory chapter, while same-sex marriage does not radically upend the institution of marriage, it does challenge heteronormativity and transforms same-sex couples and their families. A transformation that has the potential in the long run to alter the institution itself. The process of marrying stretches both the couple and the families of the couple, to a place where the sexuality of the couple become “normalised”. This normality is achieved through struggle, a struggle that is initiated by the decision or desire to marry.

## **2. “You Are Not Invited Anymore”: The Wedding Kiss as a Political Act**

Considering the homophobic context of South Africa, the stronghold of heteronormativity as a system, same-sex weddings are staging of political acts. This is true regardless of whether the couple intended to make a political statement or not. As political acts, same-sex weddings challenge systems of dominance and assert themselves at the risk of loss or violence. Same-sex weddings, at times inadvertently, become sites of resistance. In South Africa, there is still widespread hostility towards same-sex relationships and marriage (Mkhize, Bennett, Reddy and Moletsane, 2010; Nwaba, 2009). Although the recent research report published by The Other Foundation (2016), *Progressive Prudes*, found that South Africans are now more accepting of same-sex relationships, prejudice towards and disapproval of same-sex relationships and marriage remain high – much higher than in countries in the Global North where same-sex marriage has been legalised. The *Progressive Prudes* report states that 51% of South Africans believe that gay people are entitled to Human Rights, but at the same time, about 71% of South Africans believe homosexuality is morally wrong. This is the context in which same-sex couples are making decisions about their weddings.

The choices of same-sex couples about what kind of wedding or non-wedding to construct have political consequences. The question about dresses discussed in chapter five speaks to the politics of gender and heteronormative expectations of same-sex weddings. This tells us that same-sex weddings are politically charged spaces, where what couples wear is a matter of interest because of the meanings it carries. In fielding heteronormative and sometimes-homophobic questions from family and friends, same-sex couples often have to make difficult decisions about their weddings. Take Jako’s experiences, for instance.

Jako: Eventually the penny dropped and then she said oh you are together and she hadn't assumed that. And then she tried to be patronising by asking you know, why you are getting married and I had had that question about 3 times I was already so I said we have to be pregnant. That was my response because I wanted to say to her this is a stupid question to ask, you wouldn't ask a straight couple that question why ask a gay, and don't compensate for your embarrassment. But we had that experience even when we walked into the first two wedding planners that we fired, the one thought that I was the client and he was the chauffeur because he drove the car. The other one thought that he was getting married and I was there as the best man. And he took you know, and we had to be really blunt and to the one woman I said 'ons is moffies frau' [we are moffies, woman] because she just didn't get it. She kept saying what is the bride going to think, what is the bride gonna think.

The anecdote above is demonstrative of the political work that same-sex couples are forced to do when they decide to marry. The negative experiences that Jako and his husband Leo went through were at times frustrating for the couple as they had to explain themselves because society is governed by heteronormativity. Jako does not shy away from confronting the people who do not see him and his partner as a couple. Jako's approach is political; it proclaims their sexual identity without apology. Jako is aggressive towards the desexualised reading of them as a couple. Treating Jako's partner as a 'chauffeur' or 'the best man' is to sanitise their sexual relationship to something akin to friendship or employer-employee. Choosing to engage those whom Jako encounters is indicative of his political consciousness, and how through the legalisation of same-sex marriage, he is able to make legitimising claims about their same-sex relationship.

Evident in the extract is the effects of compulsory heterosexuality (Rich, 1980) that same-sex couples have to deal with because the couple was asked 'what is the bride going to think?' – because in a heteronormative world, there can only be a "bride" and a "groom." The wrestling with heteronormative assumptions within South African society is an ongoing struggle for same-sex couples. The assumptions made here by the people are met with fierce resistance. The couple speaks back to assumptions, challenges ideas that they are not a couple, and insists on being treated like a couple when they ask, 'you wouldn't ask a straight couple that question why ask a gay.' While at face value this demand can be seen as desiring heteronormativity, in this context it is more than that. In this context, this assertion is a demand to be treated equally, it is a demand for fairness and dignity. It is an assertion that demands a recognition of their same-sex relationships.

Jako and Leo's frustrations are made more complicated by their status as an interracial couple. Jako is white and Afrikaans and Leo is coloured. The fact that they are an interracial couple impacts on their experience as a gay couple. The idea of intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1991) is instructive here. Crenshaw (1991) posits that our varied identities like race, class, gender, and sexual orientation criss-cross and impacts our lives in different ways informed by our different social locations. When Weston (2011) argues that gender is linked to race, sexuality, age, nationality and a host of other identities she is stressing the importance of intersectionality as a way of thinking about the social world. With intersectionality in mind, the issues that Jako and Leo face are not just about their sexual orientation, they are also about race. In their lives, race and sexual orientation, and maybe even class (given the history of apartheid in South Africa, race and class run along parallel lines) play a role in how their lives are read and subsequently how they are treated by others. The fact that Leo was mistaken for a chauffeur for Jako by a shopping assistant is not innocent. This "mistake" is grounded in the history of race relations in South Africa where the white person is assumed to be in a position of power and therefore the employer, and the coloured person accompanying the white person is a labourer. These race relations are the legacies of apartheid and in a complicated intersectional manner they continue to shape the lives of South Africans. While white identity in South Africa isn't what it used to be as powerfully demonstrated by Steyn (2001) in a book with a similar title, whiteness – through white discourse, what Steyn and Foster (2008) call *White Talk* – has put up a strong resistance to racial transformation in South Africa. So, in post-apartheid South Africa race relations have not necessarily become easier, on the contrary, they have become more complicated (MacCool, 2017; Nyamnjoh, 2016; Erasmus and De Wet, 2003).

It is in this complicated post-apartheid moment that Jako and Leo find themselves as an interracial same-sex couple that desires to marry. It is in this environment that the couple had to navigate the intersections of their identities both between each other, and with the society around them. Clearly Jako and Leo had to wrestle with heteronormative assumptions and also racist assumptions as they were preparing for their wedding, but this wrestling is not just for the wedding, but part of their daily lives as an interracial same-sex couple. The prejudice that same-sex couples experience is not only from strangers, it is also from family members. Sometimes couples have to decide whether to invite a homophobic uncle, or whether to disinvite a parent that can't seem to handle the idea of two men kissing. Ruan and Willem, a

white gay Afrikaans couple, had to make such a decision and disinvite Willem's mother from the wedding.

Willem: And I think for my parents especially I think it's a bit difficult for them to just gel into his family (Ruan's family) from the start also because of this awkwardness of the gay situation. So, knowing that and judging my family's response and the type of questions they started asking me things like, so how is it gonna happen [changes voice to sound like parents], are you gonna try and make it like a straight wedding or a normal wedding, they might say and the kind-of like cherry on the cake of all these questions was when my mom asked me whether we actually gonna kiss each other like normal people on a wedding. And I just realised that they obviously struggle with things that is going to make this not a pleasant experience for them, knowing that I wanted to be happy and not worry about my family on my wedding day ... I said to them listen here, I know you are not going to get to the point where you tell me that you don't want to come to my wedding because it is just going to be horrible for you. So I will do you the favour in telling you that you are not invited anymore.

In the above extract there are many struggles. The questions posed by Willem's mother, about the wedding being like a 'straight wedding' and if they will be behaving like a 'normal people', are loaded with heteronormative prejudice. The questions posed by Willem's mother are not dissimilar to the questions of "who will wear the dress". Willem's mother is disturbed by the thought of her son kissing his partner in public because they still feel 'awkwardness of the gay situation'. There is almost a discomfort with Willem himself as he speaks of his gayness as 'the situation.' It is as if Willem himself is struggling with self-acceptance, which is not unusual as demonstrated in the coming out literature (Guittar, 2013 and Savin-Williams, 2001). So here Willem himself is wrestling with his own sexual identity. Willem's response to his mom's discomfort is to do her a 'favour' and disinvite her from the wedding, making it easier for her to not actually have to reject the invitation to the wedding.

Why doesn't Willem stand his ground and push for his parents to be there, instead of 'understanding' how they feel? The answer is twofold. By disinviting his mother, Willem simultaneously averts dealing with his mother at the wedding because she won't be there, but also enabling himself to have the public kiss that he wants. He chooses the kiss over his mother; this can be read as a political act, however disinviting his mother can also be a way of avoiding conflict. Willem's response to his mother is contrary to the response of Gerda, whose sister asked for permission not to attend Gerda's wedding. Gerda, who is part of a white

Afrikaans lesbian couple, told her sister, she must not come to the wedding on her own accord, but that she would not be let off the hook by being disinvited.

Gerda: Even my sister asked me permission not to come to my wedding because she didn't want to expose her children to it. So I told her that your children are not invited we arranged for a baby sitter, so and then I told her you don't have my blessing not to come. This is my big day, I flew half way around the country to get to yours so if you want to stay, stay at your own account not with my permission, and she came alone.

Whereas Willem gives into the pressure from his mother to disinvite his parents because they don't have the courage to say they won't come to the wedding, Gerda – in a political act – refuses to absolve her sister. Gerda held her sister accountable and forced her to deal with the fact that she is marrying another woman. Willem did not insist that his parents come to the wedding. Surely, the wedding is one of the few times where the brides or the grooms holds the upper hand, a power that the couple would otherwise not have, and can be more adamant with family members. In comparison, Gerda stood up against her sister; she refused to make it easier for her sister and obliged her to come by reminding her that she (Gerda) 'flew half way around the country' to get to the sister's wedding. This is not to say that Willem's decision was easy, but it is divergent from Gerda's. The family situations of Gerda and Willem are similar, in that they both have conservative Afrikaans Christian backgrounds, but their response to the prejudice in their families differs. The divergent solutions to family invitations can be explained in part by personality traits. Whereas Willem is soft-spoken and seems to shy away from conflict, Gerda is outspoken and has been involved in activist work within her church demanding inclusion for same-sex relationships and families. This only partly answers the divergent reactions. The issue with the kiss becomes clearer when later, Ruan and Willem confess that they had never displayed affection in front of Willem's parents.

Willem: Also we, we didn't have an openly affectionate relationship in front of them. I wouldn't kiss Ruan or hug him or whatever just because it would feel uncomfortable in front of them. So for me from having this friend Ruan for a couple of years now going over to marriage suddenly exposed them to a lot of things they now have to think about, realising ok this is seriously a happy loving relationship.

The extract above reveals that through marriage, Ruan and Willem move from a friendship-like relationship to a romantic/sexual relationship. Ruan and Willem are wrestling with the fact that their romantic/sexual relationship had not found expression in front of Willem's

parents. This places Willem's mother's concerns about the public kiss into context. Their relationship was acknowledged but it was never visible. The rituals associated with coupledness include public displays of affection like holding hands, cuddling, and sometimes stealing a kiss. The performing of these coupledness rituals had been denied to Ruan and Willem. Goffman's (1968) book *Stigma* sheds some light when he talks about the act of "covering". Goffman (1968: 125) argues "persons who are ready to admit possession of a stigma ... may nonetheless make great effort to keep the stigma from looming large". Covering is an act of knowing that there exists a stigma but making sure that the stigma does not take centre stage; that it is controlled. The demand to control the stigma, in this case gayness, comes from the parents of the same-sex couple, and the burden to control the stigma lies with the same-sex couple.

Covering is what Ruan and Willem do in the presence of Willem's parents, which is how the parents have managed not to see them showing affection to each other. The thought of affection on the wedding day causes discomfort for the parents because through the couple's covering, the parents have been able to avoid the gay stigma. In recent years, it is Yoshino (2007) who takes up Goffman's important work on covering, in his book simply called *Covering*, which focuses particularly on gay covering. Yoshino's work is focused on how he covered in the process of coming to terms with his sexual identity, and he also mentions some of the ways his parents were invested in him covering his gayness, in the same way Willem's parents are invested. Ruan and Willem and Willem's parents were all participants in the act of covering the relationship before they were married. At the wedding, what had been covered was to be revealed, which caused much discomfort for Willem's parents.

Ruan and Willem's wedding is the "front" stage in the Goffman (1990) sense where finally, Ruan and Willem get to perform physical affection in public. Their wedding becomes the battleground for public intimacy for the couple. The wedding offers them a platform to be public about their affections and therefore their sexuality. The wedding is a legitimate place to have a public kiss. In their parents' house, they have always been trying to protect the parents from their gayness. At the wedding, they want to be acknowledged as lovers but also as sexual beings, and their sexual identity must be centred. This is a political act.

Willem's mother's preoccupation with the public act of kissing confirms Badgett's (2009: 88) assertion that "marriage is, after all, a public act". The many questions that same-sex couples

receive from family and friends about the particulars of their weddings harbour discomfort and prejudice. Willem's mother's reaction is an apprehension about seeing two men kiss. Society at large is preoccupied with lesbian and gay public affection; people are often voicing their discomfort over gay and lesbian public affection (Snapp et al., 2014). So, Willem's mother's fretfulness has a history behind it, a history of unease with same-sex public displays of affection. Willem's mother is imagining all kinds of fantastical things about her son's same-sex wedding. Her concern about the kiss is really an apprehension about Ruan and Willem's sex lives, particularly if we agree that a conversation about marriage is a conversation about sex (Bernard, 1976; Warner, 1999). The wedding is a sexually charged event, in that there is traditionally an expectation that on the wedding night, a couple will consummate their marriage with sexual intercourse. The kiss question unveils the worry of Willem's mother; she is confronted by the fact that her son has gay sex and will probably have gay sex on the wedding night with his new husband.

Although Ruan and Willem want to perform their sexuality in public, they want to do it within the containment of the wedding and, thereafter, marriage, without the looming danger of gay sex (Berlant and Warner, 1998). Gay sex is viewed as dangerous but can potentially be sanitised by marriage. Gay sex is the source of worry for Willem's mother, hence the kiss question. Ruan and Willem are also conscious of the shame of gay sex, hence display no affection publicly prior to the wedding. There is a stigma to gay sex; gay sexuality has historically been linked to danger and death (Berkman and Zhou, 2015; Low, 2014; Cohen, Feigenbaum, and Adashi 2014). Laws have been enacted to protect children against the dangers of gay sexuality (Edelman, 2004). As demonstrated by Martin, McDaid and Hilton (2014) in reporting on sexuality, gay men are often seen as *a risk* and *at risk* in their sexual behaviour. Also, The Other Foundation's (2016) *Progressive Prudes* report states that the majority of South Africans see gay sex as immoral. This affects how same-sex couples see themselves and sometimes elicits feelings of shame about gayness and gay sex (Halperin and Traub, 2008). The struggle over the kiss at the wedding is Ruan and Willem's struggle for acknowledgement as gay sexual lovers and to be seen as such in the public realm, a realm in which they have been denied visibility. Furthermore, it would seem that Ruan and Willem are conscious of the stigma attached to gay sex and steer clear of it; they do this by performing gay intimacy in a nice and contained

manner at the wedding, a setting considered not dangerous. In other words, the same-sex wedding provides an avenue for a sanitised performance of gay intimacy.

### **3. The Kiss: The politics of same-sex public affection**

The ability of same-sex couples to display public affection is a contentious issue. As demonstrated above, even in places where a kiss is “appropriate” same-sex couples are held to a different standard. It is not unusual to hear people outwardly share that they are fine with gay people, as long as they keep their “lifestyle” private. Others have voiced concerns about children seeing gay men kiss and how that will influence children to become gay. The concern over public affection warrants us to ask why is same-sex public kissing such a contentious issue? What is it about kissing that causes these reactions? Why is the private space available for same-sex affections but the public space is not, while all spaces are open for heterosexual couples? The discomfort displayed by Willem’s mother about her son’s wedding kiss can perhaps help us delve deeper into why the kiss is so contentious.

Using the conceptualisation of “formal rights” and “informal privileges” Doan, Loehr, and Miller (2014) scrutinise whether people separate formal rights like marriage and informal privileges like public displays of affection. These scholars found that heterosexuals are willing to grant formal rights to same-sex couples but are unwilling to extend informal privileges. Interestingly, this research study by Doan, Loehr, and Miller (2014) also found that same-sex couples were more forgiving of heterosexuals with informal privileges compared to same-sex desiring people. This demonstrates that although formal rights like same-sex marriage are on the rise, the ability for same-sex couples to practise same-sex love in public is still contentious. It is as if same-sex love can exist in principle, but it cannot exist in practise. The study by Miller was conducted in the United States but displays similar patterns to a study conducted in South Africa by the Other Foundation (2016) *Progressive Prudes*. The Other Foundation (2016) report demonstrates that attitudes towards same-sex desiring individuals have positively changed. This is however not the full story because although the majority of South Africans are willing to extend Human Rights to same-sex couples, they are unforgiving about same-sex sex, marriage and intimacy as they see it as immoral. This means that we need to pay attention to informal privileges, privileges the dominant groups, in this context heterosexuals, take for



granted. Formal rights are easy to agree on, partly because the law requires it, but informal privileges remain elusive for same-sex couples as they are administered by the public.

It would seem that one can make links to the ways that race struggles have played out in the past decades, in that overt racism is no longer acceptable and people know this, but covert racism is still part of people's racial experiences (Erasmus, 2010; Steyn and Foster, 2008; Erasmus and De Wet, 2003). While many white South Africans recognise that racism is wrong and is against the spirit of the new South Africa, negative stereotypes about non-whites and racial inequality persists. In the post-apartheid South Africa (Erasmus and De Wet, 2003), and in the post-Civil Rights America (Dixon, Durrheim, and Tredoux, 2007) race and racism have become more complicated because of the enactment of anti-discrimination laws, and the social punishment for racial prejudice, but this has meant that prejudice has become unsolidified and most importantly it is contextually adaptive. A similar argument can be made about gender struggles, that in many ways discrimination against women, abuse against women, is all against the law and there is formal agreement through laws and commemoration days like "Women's Day" that gender inequality is wrong. This, however has not ended the different kinds of formal and informal biases and prejudices against women in both at home and the work place (see Ndimande-Hlongwa, 2016; Fisher and Naidoo, 2016; Sigalo, 2015). Also, the recent #MeToo Movement that was sparked after Harvey Weinstein was accused of "aggressive overtures to sexual assault" (Farrow, 2017) by women who had worked with him in the movie industry in the past is an indication of continued gender inequality. The #MeToo Movement proved to be a force that pushed for accountability for men who had sexually abused women and got away with it because of their power and privilege (Farrow, 2017; Perkins, 2017; McGowen, 2018). What this demonstrates is that formal rights are necessary, but they are not enough to change the ways that societies views people who have been historically disenfranchised. This points to a real challenge of how to translate formal rights to informal privileges where they can be enjoyed by those who previously couldn't partake in them.

Similarly, to racial and gender inequality, the contentiousness of same-sex public affection is an issue of a dominant group, heterosexuals, resisting change while simultaneously holding on to power and privilege. Although visible in other instances of discrimination and prejudice, the issue of "morality" and religious belief has been particularly attached to anti-gay rhetoric. Jewell and Morrison (2012) and Morrison and Morrison (2003) argue that one can differentiate

between old-fashioned and modern homonegativity. They found that old-fashioned homonegativity is substantiated by morality and religiosity while modern homonegativity regards social change demands made by gays and lesbians as unfounded and even unfair. The distinction between the “old” and the “new” forms of prejudice made by these authors has been challenged by Lottes and Grollman (2010). Using a sample of 650 university students testing the Morrison and Morrison (2003) hypotheses, they argue that there is no distinction between the “old” and the “new” forms of prejudice. They argue that moral and religious reasons are still being cited as objections to same-sex desire. Indeed, in South Africa morality and religion have been the major tools used to legitimise anti-gay and anti-lesbian rhetoric.

The context described here is the context in which we need to situate the wedding kiss of Ruan and Willem. Both the reservations of Willem’s mother of the kiss, and the resistance of Willem to have the kiss are wrestling with morality and beliefs. It is a wrestle of who can claim public space, and what they are allowed to do in that public space. The kissing of same-sex couples causes ire because it is the visual manifestation of same-sex intimacy. It is a confirmation that same-sex couples are sexually intimate with one another and this causes discomfort for many people. This discomfort is located in the ways that society has constructed the heterosexual norm where male bodies are supposed to kiss and have sex with female bodies. The public display of affection of same-sex couples is really an issue about sex, and which bodies are allowed to have sex with which bodies. Kissing is an intimate act, an act that is allowed between two people who are affectionate towards each other. The hostile reactions towards same-sex couples kissing in public is a resistance to the new world order that sees same-sex relationships as legitimate.

#### **4. “The More You Stretch Them, The More They Grow”: Consequences of Same-Sex Marriage**

At various points in this thesis, it has been demonstrated that same-sex marriage is a political act. Not all marriages, and not all the actions of those married, are political all the time. However, as couples navigate their gendered identities in a heteronormative environment, as they challenge and resist dominant ideas about intimate relationships, they carve out new queer ground. As predicted by Duggan (2002), Warner (2000), same-sex marriage does not radically alter the institution of marriage, but the lives of same-sex couples in Cape Town prove that

same-sex marriage alters the personal relationships of couples with family and friends. This section specifically addresses what same-sex marriage does to the families and friends of same-sex couples. As demonstrated in chapter five, people have certain preconceived ideas about same-sex couples, and therefore of their weddings. The questions posed to couples when they announce their impending nuptials demonstrate stereotypes that friends and family harbour about lesbians and gays. The wedding and the married life that follows provide alternative ways for family and friends to see same-sex couples. In other words, in their personal capacity these couples are resisting stereotypes about gays and lesbians. Indeed, the personal is political, as same-sex couples educate those around them about same-sex relationships through their marriage. In the context of prejudice towards same-sex couples, same-sex marriage works as a transformational tool in some cases. In the process of transforming from non-married to married, same-sex couples, often unintentionally, challenge friends and family and therefore help to transform the friends and family members who begin to soften or even eliminate their previously held prejudice. Jo captures this transformation as he speaks of family and friends who have journeyed with him in marriage:

Jo: A lot of people that you know in your life are conservative and they are not gonna have, like what you are doing, but for the relationship they will stick around. In the process you stretch them and some people you stretch them and they break and you lose them out of your life and you lose the relationship and it's actually quite sad. But it is amazing to see that sometimes you stretch people, and as you are stretching them you are creating space to grow, and they grow, the more you stretch them the more they grow, the more you stretch them the more they grow. We could really see that in a lot of our friends and family and this whole process of getting married. Some of them were really not ok with it, they didn't feel uncomfortable in being stretched that kind-of way and now in the past week Rupert's mum said, yes, someone asked me at church what does my son do? I said well, he is married to his partner and they live in Stellenbosch and they just bought a house and Jo is working there. She said, and I realised if I am not uncomfortable about it people actually don't react and they are not uncomfortable about it. They pick up on me being uncomfortable and they become uncomfortable, but if I treat it as if it's normal, they are fine with it, and I've got nothing to be ashamed of. So it's a typical example of where you've stretched someone, and they grew, now all of a sudden I think they are stronger for it and more secure in themselves. One of the things being gay does to one is the fact that, you have to get to a point where you don't care what people think and what people say. And it's actually nice to see how that transfers to other straight people in your life where they have to get to a point where they don't care what people think.

Jo and Rupert are a white Afrikaans gay couple residing in the winelands. Jo and Rupert are acutely aware that they are part of a conservative community, and that their family and friends have conservative values. There is a contentious relationship, a wrestle really, between those with conservative values and same-sex marriage. The Christian right in America and the Christian and African traditionalist fundamentalists in South Africa oppose same-sex marriage because of “morality” and “traditional values”. The arguments made by Theodore Olson (2012), the lawyer who fought to invalidate the anti-same-sex marriage proposition, ‘Proposition 8’ in California in the United States, are compelling. Olsen (2012) is a self-proclaimed lifelong Republican and argues that,

“Same-sex unions promote the values conservatives prize ... At its best, it is a stable bond between two individuals who work to create a loving household and a social and economic partnership. ... The fact that individuals who happen to be gay want to share in this vital social institution is evidence that conservative ideals enjoy widespread acceptance. Conservatives should celebrate this, rather than lament it”.

However, both in the United States and in South Africa, many conservatives do lament the legislation of same-sex marriage. As a conservative advocating for same-sex marriage, Olsen captures the fraught relationship conservatives have with same-sex marriage; an institution which conservatives champion for its sanctity, while denying access to the sanctity for same-sex couples who desire sanctity.

Jo’s extract reveals the transformative journey their conservative family have gone through with their same-sex marriage. The discomfort Rupert’s mother felt about her son’s same-sex relationship is altered after marriage. Jo and Rupert were already living together before marrying; for all intents and purposes, they already lived a married life. They had a good relationship with Rupert’s parents, but the parents were still ‘uncomfortable’ with the fact that their son was in a gay relationship. Rupert’s mother has changed; she is no longer uncomfortable, and she talks to other people about her son being married to another man. Rupert’s mother is a product of Jo’s and Rupert’s journey of demanding more from their personal relationships. Marriage played a role in the transformation of Rupert’s mother. Her discomfort changed partly because of her understanding the meaning of marriage, appreciating the symbolic power of marriage, attending her son’s gay wedding, seeing Jo and Rupert

publicly performing love and commitment to each other. To capture this transformation process, Jo uses the metaphor of stretching – ‘the more you stretch them, the more they grow’. Jo is referring to family and friends who have been stretched by Jo and Rupert. The question then becomes, what happens with the stretching, what does this stretching do?

Stretching is an apt metaphor for what happens to same-sex couples and the family and friends through marriage. It is a stretching that is created through wrestling with family and friends. Here stretching is used to mean expansion, growth, the creation of space. It is a stretching of the mind and ways of being in the post-apartheid world. This means that in the life of same-sex couples, their friends and family, through marriage they create new possibilities in ways of seeing and thinking about same-sex intimacy. The stretching enables a more fluid reading of gender performance and gender identities, it enables an expansion on ideas of which genders and bodies can build intimate relationships. The stretching created by same-sex couples means that in the expanded space created lies the seeds for further expansion for relationship possibilities not yet visible. This suggests that on an interpersonal level same-sex marriage is politically productive. Jo’s theory and Rupert’s mother’s transformation are in line with the hypothesis of contact theory, that contact with gay and lesbians positively affects the attitudes of heterosexuals towards gays and lesbians (Pelts, 2015; Costa, Pereira, and Leal, 2015; Collier, Bos, and Sandfort, 2012; Licciardello, Castiglione, and Rampullo, 2011). This stretching resembles the articulations of Sullivan (2001) when they wrote about the ambiguities and struggles of legitimate recognition of the “other mother” in lesbian co-parenting situations. Sullivan suggests that lesbian co-parenting disrupts normative ideas of motherhood, both for the lesbian mothers and the those they interact with. In the strategies that co-parenting lesbian mothers adopt, Sullivan (2001: 250) suggests that “lesbian comothers are in the process of constructing a new sociofamilial identity that has hitherto not existed, they are in a unique position to educate members of society about their families.” While this process is by means easy for the co-parenting lesbian mothers, it is a process that stretches, that enables more room for different constructions of motherhood disrupting heteronormative ideals.

The transformational ethics were not necessarily the drive behind Jo and Rupert wanting to marry, but they are the consequences of marriage. Rupert’s mother is said to have nonchalantly shared with a church member that she has a married gay son. This demonstrates not only the mother’s level of comfort, but also the power of marriage. Jo and Rupert know that

conservatives understand marriage, even same-sex marriage. Jo's stretching theory is a theory about transformation; it is a theory about pushing family and friends of same-sex couples to come on board with same-sex relationships. The ability to push family and friends requires self-awareness and a willingness to challenge those around them. In Jo's case, it requires not caring too much 'what people think and what people say'. This requires a politics of being out, being aware, and a willingness to assert one's gay sexuality. Jo and Rupert do this through marriage. It is in this context of surety about one's gay sexuality through marriage that same-sex couples push family and friends to greater acceptance of same-sex intimacies.

## 5. Chapter Conclusion

"They kissed for the first time then in the cold spring rain, though neither one of them now knew that it was raining. Tristan's heart pounded in his chest as if it was not big enough to contain all the joy that it held. He opened his eyes as he kissed the star. Her sky-blue eyes stared back into his, and in her eyes he could see no parting from her." – Neil Gaiman, *Stardust*

The above quote is taken from the novel *Stardust*. It demonstrates how kissing is such an important part of our lives that it appears in many different art forms. The quote above also demonstrates how in the popular imagination kissing is often depicted as heterosexual, and in this case, even white, as the narrator talks about the 'sky-blue eyes' of the characters. Considering the meanings we as humans attach to kissing, the denial of same-sex couples public affection is not inconsequential, on the contrary, it speaks volumes about the denial of equality and dignity for same-sex couples. This chapter is an attempt at thinking critically about public displays of affection of same-sex couples, and the political work of public kissing. This chapter is also an attempt to get at the discomfort of heterosexuals with the public kissing of same-sex couples, and try to theorise the apprehension about public kissing. Lastly this chapter demonstrate how through wrestling with heteronormativity in its different forms, through public performance of same-sex love, intimacy, passion, same-sex couples are involved in a process of transformation for both themselves and the people who are around them.

Two men kissing in public is disruptive of the dominant gender order and the sexuality order hence the apprehension around same-sex kissing, including Willem's mother's apprehension. Living in a world where same-sex love remains in the periphery, same-sex public affection

continues to cause discomfort. The resistance to same-sex public affection is a resistance to the claiming of public space by same-sex couples, it is a resistance to the assertion of same-sex sexuality in public. Same-sex public affection challenges the “out of sight out of mind” approach towards same-sex intimacy as demonstrated by Willem’s mother. Often, when progressive people speak, they argue that “it’s 2018” meaning that we have progressed and same-sex couples kissing in public shouldn’t be an issue, but as demonstrated in this chapter, kissing in public remains controversial for same-sex couples. Thus, while we have achieved same-sex marriage, a *formal right*, we are yet to truly achieve *informal privileges* like kissing in public. This of course has much to do with the heteronormative order of South Africa, indeed the world. It is tied to the assumptions made about same-sex couples not being equal and somehow are measured differently from heterosexual couples even as they are equal in front of the law.

The open and visible lives of married same-sex couples are in themselves political acts that are changing South African society. Married same-sex couples are a challenge to the “morality” and “beliefs” of some South Africans who see marriage as a sacred institution. In this sense as same-sex couples wrestle with heteronormativity, their loved ones have to wrestle with their own beliefs. Same-sex marriage challenges and demands more from the family and friends of same-sex couples. It is same-sex marriage that creates the possibility of the couple to be able to transform those who are close to them. The proximity to a married same-sex couple enables friends and family to see the “ordinariness” of same-sex love. The discomfort once felt about same-sex relationships is transformed. Such transformation is not necessarily an outward goal of same-sex couples in their desire for marriage, but a consequence of marriage, nonetheless. Of course, this process of seeing same-sex couples as “ordinary” is fraught, because same-sex couples are at times gaining acceptance as they perform love, commitment, and intimacy in ways that the heteronormative structure approves of. Although same-sex couples do challenge some aspects of heteronormative culture, particularly on an interpersonal level.

## Chapter Seven

### The Conclusion

#### Same-Sex Marriage: Wrestling with Possibilities

This thesis was driven by the need to understand the impact of same-sex marriage on the lives of lesbian and gay people who have chosen to marry. The impact that same-sex marriage has on same-sex couples, and those around them is characterised by Jo's philosophy "the more you stretch them, the more they grow." This thesis argues that same-sex couples are engaged in a wrestle with heteronormativity and the product of that wrestle is that same-sex marriage enables a transformation of interpersonal relationships. Where once those around the couples were ambivalent, and even oppositional to their same-sex love, they are transformed by the experience of marriage of the couple. This thesis demonstrates that in the decision to marry, in the construction of the wedding, and the married life after the wedding, same-sex couples are in a constant wrestle with heteronormativity.

There are numerous queer debates about marriage. The queer debate that is engaged in this thesis on the one hand argues that same-sex marriage is assimilationist and creates an apolitical gay and lesbian citizenry through neoliberal co-option (Warner, 2000; Duggan, 2002). On the other side of the debate are those who advocate for same-sex marriage arguing that it is about equality and how marriage would create stable lives for same-sex couples (Snyder, 2006; Rauch, 2004; Sullivan, 1996). The assimilationist critiques of marriage make convincing arguments, but do not fully capture the intricacies of same-sex marriage in the Cape Town context. South Africa is a highly stratified society, where the intersections of race, class, and gender impact on the ways that sexual orientation is experienced (Scott, 2017, Salo et.al., 2010; Mkhize et.al., 2010; Tucker, 2009). Thus, the neat binary of assimilation and innovation does not consider these intersectional complexities. Furthermore, while one can agree that same-sex marriage does not radically alter marriage as an institution, there is much transformation in same-sex couple's interpersonal lives. Same-sex marriage in Cape Town, South Africa, demonstrates a complicated picture where same-sex couples are wrestling with systems of dominance where they can't easily be placed in a dualism of adopt and reject. What becomes evident is that



characterising same-sex couples that marry as merely assimilating to heteronormativity is simplistic and overlooks the negotiations that same-sex couples are engaged in their decision to marry, in the construction of the weddings, and in married life after the wedding.

In the assimilation vs. innovation debates about same-sex marriage, same-sex couples are often depicted as lacking agency, but this is not the full story because while some same-sex couples wholly embrace marriage in its traditional forms (as traditional as tradition can be with two men and two women marrying), other couples are ambivalent about the institution even as they participate in it. This is perhaps what Harding (2006) meant when she argued that in the United Kingdom married same-sex couples hold seemingly contradictory positions because as they marry, they are also ambivalent about the institution. What this thesis demonstrates is that the “contradictions” are part of the wrestling with heteronormativity that same-sex couples are engaged with in marriage. In the debates about same-sex marriage, there is a push for same-sex marriage to be assimilationist or innovative, but in the Cape Town context, this is influx. The need to neatify and characterise same-sex marriage as assimilationist or innovative is demonstrated by Hopkins, Sorensen, and Taylor (2013: 106), who argue, “LGBT families more closely resemble conventional heterosexual families than in the past. At the same time, the literature shows that same-sex couples and families have not fully embraced the heteronormative ideal”. In conversation with Hopkins, Sorensen, and Taylor (2013) this thesis argues for engaging the tension created by the wrestling that same-sex couples are engulfed in because the wrestle leaves things unsettled but through this unsettled state transformation occurs. Similarly, to Hequembourg (2007) this thesis demonstrates that same-sex couples do not exist outside dominant systems of power, like heteronormativity, and these are the systems that same-sex couple come up against in the marriage experience.

Post-apartheid South Africa is an environment that has heralded LGBTI freedoms, and it is in this political climate that same-sex marriage becomes a reality. When couples decide to marry, marriage is supposed to do something for the couple. While some benefits of marriage, like protection through the law, solidifying commitment, and sharing a life together are expected, there are also experiences in marriage that same-sex couples did not expect. There are two elements related to coming out that same-sex couples experienced in their marriage journey. Marriage for some same-sex couples was linked to their experiences of coming out of the closet again, a kind of “coming out again”. Marriage for some same-sex couples also

represented what Guittar (2013) calls “fully” coming out. The coming out again metaphor references the struggle that same-sex couples experience after they announce their intentions to marry as akin to the struggle that individuals experienced when they came out as gay or lesbian. The reference here is that announcing the intention to marry was hard for couples in that they experienced resistance from family members about their impending nuptials, a similar resistance they experienced when they came out as gay or lesbian. What we find here is that marriage, for same-sex couples triggers emotions associated with coming out, particularly the emotions of rejection, intolerance, and resistance as many couples experienced hostile reactions from family members when they announced their intentions to marry. What was surprising for some same-sex couples was that these negative reactions towards their impending nuptials were not just from homophobic family members, but from people who had been supportive of the same-sex relationship prior to marriage. These experiences demonstrate that in both in wrestling to come out of the closet, or wrestling to be acknowledged by the state as married, the struggle for emancipation for same-sex couples does not end with marriage.

Same-sex marriage enables same-sex couples to live more open and honest lives because same-sex marriage enables them to be more out. The idea of “fully” coming out described by Guittar (2013) captures this sentiment because some people with same-sex desire might be in a relationship and live a gay life but still be in the closet at work or amongst certain friends. Same-sex marriage forces these individuals to be “fully” out. So, while some people might not be in the closet at their work-place, they might also never discuss their private lives. This somehow changes with marriage. Marriage, it seems, opens up those discussions about personal life, where same-sex couples are more empowered to be open and expressive about their sexuality. The phrase “my husband and I” comes to mind and one can imagine a gay man speaking these words at the coffee station at work and in that moment provide a powerful way to assert his sexuality and engage with others. The phrase is provocative and evocative at the same time, while it uses wording that is familiar it unsettles gender, particularly masculine, ideals. What becomes evident is that marriage enables some same-sex couples to have vocabulary to talk about their relationships with their families and work colleagues. However, the ability to use this lexicon relies on the power the institution of marriage has in society, where there is an almost automatic respect of someone who is a husband or a wife. In this

environment where marriage enables access to a particular social status, same-sex couples feel more empowered to claim their sexuality through acknowledging their husband or wife.

Overall, same-sex couples in this research study conceive of intimate relationships similarly to the way Giddens (1992) theorised about modern relationships, where the connection between two people is highly prized. Same-sex marriage reveals to us much about how same-sex couples are engaged in “modern” ways of demonstrating commitment; however, it also demonstrates how lesbians and gays are entangled in respectability politics. This entanglement is demonstrated by same-sex couples rejecting some of the more “queer” elements in their lives, like drag culture, for a more acceptable and palatable self-presentations in their weddings. There is a distancing of things that might allude to same-sex couples “mocking” the institution of marriage. There is also a seriousness that is adopted by same-sex couples through marriage. The act of marrying someone of the same-sex is not ironic in any way, but it is taken up with utmost earnestness. There is no room for camp in same-sex marriage. Scott and Theron (2017) argue that looking at the world through a heteronormative lens that makes same-sex couples yearn to be respectable. The ways that same-sex couples speak about marriage as a demonstration of commitment echoes the findings of Hull (2006) who states that same-sex marriage is seen as an institution that solidifies the validity, significance, esteem, and acknowledgment of same-sex relationships. Although these married couples speak about commitment in different ways, their ideas of commitment buy into the heteronormative system that prizes the dominant monogamous, domesticated, two adults framework. This inevitably reinforces a hierarchy of relationship arrangement where monogamous marriage is the only “normal” relationship structure. Of course, the fact that people are restricted by the law, in that marriage is already framed in a monogamous package by the state, those who are married are restricted by this structure.

The weddings of same-sex couples reveal the insidiousness of gender norms, the heteronormative structure of the wedding, but also the different ways in which couples manipulate traditions surrounding the weddings. The wedding is a highly gendered performance in the Goffmanian (1956) sense, in that all those involved know the social script. The social script is gendered and heteronormative. In this thesis, Goffman’s (1956) ideas about front stage behaviour, the setting where behaviours take place, and idea of idealisation are engaged in order to make sense of same-sex weddings. The wedding is a performance of love

and commitment between two people in the presence of others. A wedding is a performance that necessitates spectators; it is not legal if there are no witnesses that it took place. It is all about performance, people knowing their places and acting on cue. Everyone at the wedding is a performer, from the officiator, the grooms, the brides, and even the guests. The rules of the performance are not written down, but people know the rules. For example, one of the known rules, that almost everyone performs without being asked to, is to abstain from wearing white at someone's wedding.

With regards to wearing a white dress, much is revealed about the couples and their guests in the question "who is wearing the dress?" because both the couples and the wedding guests have to wrestle with heteronormative expectations. This is a question that both effeminate gay men and lesbians received from prospective guests. The curiosity about who's wearing the dress is not innocent. It is encumbered with all kinds of gendered assumptions and meaning that guests want to ascribe to those in question. The dress question reveals the nervousness around gender performance in same-sex weddings; this is precisely because same-sex weddings challenge the gendered order of the heterosexual wedding (Ingraham, 1999). In asking the question, guests are trying to reassemble their disrupted gendered world by assuming that if they know who wears the dress, they will know the gender fundamentals of the couple. In heterosexual weddings, everyone knows who the bride is and people proceed to treat the bride in the gendered way that brides are treated at weddings. The question, who's wearing the dress, is a veiled sexual question asking who is the top and who is the bottom, a reference to the sexual act of same-sex couples. This is a question that is built on heteronormative binary assumptions about tops/bottoms, masculine/feminine, bride/groom, man/women, tuxedo/dress, etc. People are unnerved by not understanding the lay of the land gender-wise because society has been conditioned to treat people according to their gender, and when gender is disrupted, people are not sure how to proceed. So, the dress question is a way that those who are coming to the wedding orientate themselves to the idea of a same-sex wedding where the gender order is in flux.

Same-sex weddings can be read as political acts regardless of the intentions of the couples. Same-sex couples are forced to make hard decisions about whether to invite or disinvite a family member that is homophobic or uncomfortable with same-sex relationships. These decisions weigh heavily on couples, as sometimes the person couples debate upon is one

partner's parent or sibling. While same-sex marriages can be seen as political acts that assert same-sex love in the face of a disapproving society, they are also acts that desire to be seen existing on par with heterosexual relationships. The seemingly contentious space occupied by same-sex couples present throughout this thesis, is where they are constantly negotiating with the heteronormative social structures in relation to their non-normative sexual identities.

Same-sex weddings, like most modern weddings, are stylised in their performance to speak to the identity of the couple. This couple's identity is evident in the stylisation of the wedding, in what they wear, the food that is served, the wedding venue, the sequence of events, and all kinds of personal iconography that speaks to their taste. The vision that a couple constructs is not without politics; indeed, everything about the wedding is informed by a kind of politics of the couple. Same-sex couples often manipulate the symbols in the wedding as they perform them to communicate the couple's visions. Couples deconstruct the wedding and then reassemble them with new meanings. How those in attendance see the couple is important because the wedding is about projecting an idealised image of the couple through putting on a show.

In the production of a same-sex wedding, the couple seems to be in search of the most authentic representation of who they are as a couple. This authentic representation is linked to the culture of 'lifestyle' in contemporary society. Same-sex weddings are influenced in turn by the socio-cultural ethos of contemporary South Africa and the world. The personal iconography of same-sex weddings reveals much about their emotions. What the couples create in performing the wedding ceremony is highly emotive and references parts of themselves. The example of Leo who compares his wedding to a night at the Oscars is a case in point. His comparison demonstrates the intensity of affect that can be transferred to the wedding from another source, in this case the popular culture phenomenon of the Oscars. As argued by Brennan (2004), the transmission of affect posits that we are one with our environments. Our environments shape us; they shape how we feel and how we see the world. The things that touch us, things that move us, are things we often transmit through our own experiences because we are affected by them.

In many places around the world, including South Africa, weddings are synonymous with religion. This has been gradually changing, but the Christian church still sees itself as the

guardian of the institution of marriage. The opposition to same-sex marriage in different jurisdictions around the world is a position often supported by religious institutions. In different research studies, LGBTI people have been shown to experience rejection from places of worship because their sexuality. Many have decided to stay in their religious organisation even though they do not believe in all of the doctrine that is taught, a practice known as “defecting in place” (Winter, Lummis, and Stokes, 1994). While some same-sex couples rejected religion in their lives, and by extension, in their weddings, other same-sex couples were religious and had to navigate and negotiate their beliefs with their weddings. This difference in approach to religion between couples demonstrates the heterogeneity of same-sex couples.

This study shows that same-sex couples who remain in their religion, asserting themselves as same-sex lovers and disrupt the homophobia in their respective religious affiliations. The presence of same-sex couples, particularly those who demand that their religion recognise their marriages, are political tools that challenge the religion. Such visibility however comes at a price, because those who remain part of the religion after they are out of the closet have to deal with the prejudice. Some couples approached religion with ambivalence, where they rejected religious dogma, but still desired to take part in religious rites. As Bob’s perspective in this study demonstrates, he recognises that the symbolic work of ceremonies, even those embedded in religion, is important for community nourishment. Thus, the ceremonies are manipulated, they are reconstructed, and different meanings are attached to them. This partial embrace of religion also speaks to the complex ways people deal with contradiction, where parts of religion are rejected, and other parts are reformulated and are productive. What becomes clear in this study is that same-sex couples do not function outside of systems of power; indeed, they affect everyday decisions about couple life that must be continuously negotiated. These negotiations demonstrate the overly simplistic frame of the assimilation versus radicalisation does not account for the different ways same-sex couples move between embracing and resisting heteronormativity (Hopkins, Sorensen, and Taylor, 2013).

In studying the lives of married same-sex couples, it is evident that the intricate relationship between gender and heteronormativity is an important site for couples to negotiate power. This means theoretically there’s a need to focus on the relationship between heteronormativity and gender and what this relationship produces. Theoretically, this thesis builds on the

understanding of gender as socially constructed (de Beauvoir, 2011; Butler, 1990) in conjunction with queer theory's understanding of heteronormativity (Kitzinger, 2005; Ingraham, 2005). As argued by Cameron and Kulick (2003), the ways in which we perform gender in our everyday lives is policed by society, and this policing is an integral part of reproducing heteronormativity.

The question of whether to change one's surname once married, and what to call a spouse once married, are loaded with the troubled history of gender. Likewise, what couples call each other and/or how they introduce each other to other people, using words such as "husband" and "wife" are linked to quandaries of gender. These monikers are encumbered with social meaning and are used as markers of ordinariness. To be read as ordinary requires that one is read as a member of the dominant group. In other words, being able to pass as ordinary is to possess social privilege. Only those in possession of dominant norms are considered ordinary. For example, those who are white, male, cisgender, middle-class are characterised as ordinary and others who do not inhabit these identities are seen as other. The terms "husband" evoke a kind of ordinariness, they avail access to a kind of privilege. The use of labels such as "husband" and "wife" evidence the ways that language is gendered, and the use or non-use of these monikers has political consequences.

The political consequences can be seen in *who* used the terms. Who decides to use these terms matters, because social location, meaning whether you are gay or a lesbian, influences the uses of these monikers. Firstly, using the term "husband" to refer to one's partner when one is a man reveals one's same-sex marriage status to whomever one is talking to. The term "partner" does not invite scrutiny because it is gender-neutral, but the term husband does. The choice to use these terms is a conscious decision on the part of the same-sex married couples as these terms might be outing and invite homophobic responses. Secondly, it was striking that the gay male couples were more comfortable with "husband" than the lesbian couples were comfortable with "wife." This shows the insidiousness of gender hierarchy because "wife" carries a very different connotation to "husband": whereas wife is associated with women's inferiority, husband is associated with a superior position – head of the household – at the expense of the wife (Zipp, Prohaska, and Bemiller, 2004; Tichenor, 1999). For lesbian women, "wife" is not as appealing as "husband" is to gay men. The intersection of gender and sexuality

influences how couples approach these monikers. It is therefore not inconsequential that gay men who clamour for the term “husband”, and women who reject “wife”.

Furthermore, it was white gay men who spoke about the desire to assert their husband status – because despite them being men, and being white, and therefore part of a privileged class in a racist and patriarchal society – they are deprived access to privilege through homophobia, a weapon of sexism (Pharr, 1997). The moniker “husband” acts as a bridge towards claiming a respectable white masculinity, an antidote to the promiscuous characterisation of gay men. The term “husband” can be read as trying to access the full extent of male privilege to which many gay men have been denied access. This, then, confirms some of the fears outlined by Green (2013), Duggan (2002), and Warner (2000), about the feelings of shame contained in the desire for same-sex marriage.

This study has demonstrated that, like most of South Africa, same-sex couples engage in heterogeneous family practices. In South Africa, what constitutes a family has been in flux for more than a century. The heteronormative ideal of a nuclear family is no longer legislated as the norm in marriage law in South Africa. Indeed, there exist many different forms of family as demonstrated in *Queer Kinship* edited by Morrison, Lynch, and Reddy (2018) and *Home Affairs* by Lubbe-De Beer and Marnell (2013). Same-sex couples challenge dominant ideas about who can be a family. Homosexual men who become parents challenge normative ideas about masculinity. The different family formations with same-sex couples consist of couples with children, couples who do not want children, couples with adopted children, couples with children from a previous heterosexual marriage, etc. These family formations have to negotiate the heteronormative structures of South African society, and in order to succeed, they have to be flexible. While heterosexual families are also diverse, and have their fair share of challenges, their challenge does not include homophobia in its various forms. The idea of the rhizome (Deleuze and Guattari, 2005) becomes important in understanding the ongoing construction of family life as same-sex couples chart new territories of being same-sex parents or creating alternative families by negotiating the given heterosexual blueprint. Rhizomes can be described as non-linear, instead as multiple, like a root, with no clear beginning and no clear end. Rhizomatic thinking enables us to reconceptualise what we think as “normal” family structures. Using Deleuze and Guattari’s (2005) rhizomatic logic, the demand is that we embrace the unlimited ways families can possibly be constructed.



The heteronormative environment in which same-sex couples find themselves influences some of the ways they see their lives. The influence of the heterosexual gaze is visible when same-sex couples talk about divorce. In this study divorce, was discussed with reference to two elements. One was the fear that same-sex couples would fail to uphold the sanctity of marriage, while the other held that same-sex marriage was hard-won and divorce undermines the battle for marriage equality. The view that divorce is negative is constructed from the societal panic over high divorce rates and is then linked to stereotypical ideas of same-sex couples' inability to maintain long-term, monogamous relationships (a stereotype constructed out of a limited heteronormative lens of relationships).

Same-sex marriage has implications for lesbian and gay sexuality. Perhaps one of the most important is that same-sex marriages are political acts that challenge family and friends. Weddings and life after the wedding of same-sex couples seem to have the most influence on those closest to the couples. The family and the friends of the couple are heavily influenced – indeed, sometimes changed – by the experience of being part of the wedding and then the married couple's life. The prejudiced preconceived ideas about same-sex couples and their lives wither away as friends and family experience same-sex couples creating life and families through marriage. In this sense, same-sex marriage can act as a transformational tool for the family and friends of those marrying. The journey that same-sex couples go on with their families and friends seems to transform those around them. This is partly because of the familiarity of the institution of marriage, particularly to those who hold the institution in high regard. It is also the participation in ceremonies that enable community building and sustainability. The transformation that loved ones go through is also because of the same-sex couple's public performance of intimacy and commitment, which sends a strong message about their intimacy and commitment. Weddings enable the assertion of same-sex intimacy in the open, where many can witness the love and commitment through a wedding. They represent going beyond coming out of the closet, asserting one's sexuality in a language many understand and respect. Through marriage, same-sex couples push for greater acceptance of same-sex intimacy by their family and friends. In turn, they also change the character of their familial and community relationship in the process.

Same-sex marriage is a wrestle with heteronormativity where same-sex couples negotiate dominant power systems of normative gender and sexuality. The wrestling of couples enables

us to conclude that among married same-sex couples in Cape Town, there is no clear resistance to heteronormativity or simple assimilation of queerness (Hopkins, Sorensen, and Taylor, 2013; Oswin, 2005). Oswin (2005: 578) argues, “there might be something other than either appropriation or resistance going on in ‘gay Cape Town’”. This thesis contends that that “something other” that Oswin (2005) is alluding to is the interpersonal transformation that same-sex couples experience as they go through marriage. The transformation is both for the same-sex couples themselves, but it is also family and friends who are in the couple’s lives. The transformation of the couples themselves is visible throughout the thesis, like in chapter 6, where one couple insists on their wedding kiss to the point where they disinvite the mother. This transformation of interpersonal relationships is captured in the metaphor of “the more you stretch them, the more they grow” that is also discussed in chapter 6. This metaphor is apt in capturing the political work that same-sex marriage does. In an interesting way, and contrary to queer critiques of marriage as assimilationist, same-sex marriage may provide a transformational ethos that is often prized in queer theory. Contrary to Warner (2000) and Duggan (2002) same-sex marriage, at least in the Cape Town context, is not apolitical, indeed it is a tool for same-sex couples to transform their interpersonal relationships.

The stretching that takes place through same-sex marriage is complicated in that it is the perceived wholesomeness of marriage as an institution that makes married same-sex couples palatable. Simultaneously, it is the entry of same-sex couples into marriage as an institution that disrupts the order of things, particularly on the interpersonal level. Ironically, the conservative values espoused in marriage are the kind of values that have been used against same-sex love to characterise it as deviant, yet in marriage, it is those same values that same-sex couples lean on to make claims about their relationships. It is in this contradiction, in this unsettled state of affairs that an alternative, transformative way of seeing same-sex relationships lies. The characterisation of same-sex marriage as assimilationist was premature, at least for the Cape Town, South Africa context, as what takes place with marriage is much more dynamic. Same-sex couples are using marriage to make radical claims to their families like how Gerda (chapter 6) forced her sister to come to her wedding because she had gone to hers. It is a tactic that understands that family events like weddings, siblings are obliged to attend. Making claims on family in the process of legitimising same-sex intimacy is no small matter, as argued by Weeks (1995: 323) “making that claim for inclusion may seem

assimilationist, but actually making demands on a culture which denies you is extremely radical.”

Same-sex marriage is a beacon of what is possible with a determined citizenship and a strong and progressive judiciary system. Same-sex marriage provides South Africa with alternative ways of reading what constitutes intimacy, belonging, and ultimately family. Same-sex marriage makes visible the sexuality of same-sex couples. It enables same-sex intimacy to be seen and performed in the open. Same-sex couples who marry are making claims about their belonging to South Africa, and about the legitimacy of their ways of loving. They call upon their family and friends to be witness to same-sex intimacy. This act is profound in a conservative environment like South Africa. Same-sex marriage provides alternative ways of reading familiar categories like “husband” and “wife” and “bride” and “groom” because although these are familiar, they are not the same when inhabited by same-sex couples. With the marriage of same-sex couples, the category of “husband” or “wife” doesn’t remain the same, it is stretched and expanded to include different meanings. Same-sex marriage in South Africa is a testament to the many possibilities for structuring our intimate relationships and demonstrates that we are only limited by our imaginations.

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## APPENDICES

### 1. The Couple Interview

#### **Same-Sex Marriage Research**

#### **Couple Interview Questions**

I am trying to find out more about couple's experiences of same-sex marriage. So can you tell me about your marriage – I want you to tell me about your experiences as a married couple – start wherever you want and please take your time. I will listen first and I won't interrupt – I will take notes in case I have further questions for you when you're finished telling your story..... Please tell me the story of your marriage, everything that matters to you about your marriage.

Follow –Up

Tell me more about your marriage.

What in your life lead you to marriage?

Did you always think about getting married?

What were some of the biggest challenges in deciding to get married?

When you got married you had a choice of calling your union a Civil Union or Marriage. Which one did you choose and why?

How did you negotiate the changing of last names?

## 2. The Individual Interview

### Same-Sex Marriage Research

#### Individual Interview Questions

As you know, I am trying to find out more about couple's experiences of same-sex marriage. I have a number of questions that I would like to ask you.

##### 1. The wedding to me.

- a. What were your family reactions when you said you were getting married?
- b. Did your whole family attend the wedding?
- c. Was it important to have family at the wedding?
- d. Can you tell me about organising the guest list and the invitations?
- e. Could you please describe the wedding to me?
- f. What role did traditional customs/practises play in the wedding?
- g. How did you finance the wedding?
  - i. The hall, the food, the clothes, the honeymoon,
- h. Where there any challenges in planning and preparing for the wedding?
- i. How did you negotiate the honeymoon?

##### 2. Decision making around marriage.

- a. Why did you get married?
  - i. How were the negotiations with your partner?
- b. How has your experience of marriage been?
- c. How do your expectations compare with those of your partner?
- d. What is the best thing about being married?
- e. What is the worst thing about being married?

##### 3. How is the private experience of marriage?

- a. What does a typical week-day look like?
- b. What does a typical weekend look like? For example, what did you do this past weekend?
- c. How do you manage house work or duties?
  - i. If there is domestic worker, who pays the domestic? Who communicates with the domestic worker?
  - ii. What are the challenges in negotiating household work?
- d. How do you make decisions about family matters?
  - i. Who pays the rent or mortgage? Who pays for the car?
  - ii. If you were to buy an armchair tomorrow, would you consult your partner?
  - iii. Do you have disagreements about how money should be spent? How do you negotiate the disagreements?

- e. Some marriages are two individuals and some work as units, how would you describe yours?
- f. What are some of the adjustments that you had to make when you married?

**4. How is the public experience of marriage?**

- a. Does everyone in your life know that you are married?
- b. How do you experience family functions now that you are married?
- c. What was the response from the neighbours when you married?
- d. How do people treat you now that you are married?
- e. How has marriage changed your life?
- f. If you had to do it all over again, would you get married?

**5. Other questions**

- a. Some activists say that gays getting married is mimicking of straight people, what do you say to that?
- b. How is your relationship different from straight relationships, bar the sex difference?
- c. Is there anything else you would like to share about marriage?

### 3. The Consent Form

#### **CONSENT FORM**

##### **1. What is the research all about**

This research focuses on the lives of married same-sex couples. I am interested in the reasons same-sex couples get married? I am interested in the ways same-sex couples navigate life as a married couple. I am interested in doing interviews with legally married same-sex couples to talk about their wedding, the lived private experience of marriage and the the lived public experience of marriage. The interviews will be broken into three sections. The first interview will be conducted with both partners at the same time. The second interview will be with each partner separately. In addition to helping me obtain a degree at UCT, The research has the potential to contribute to a better understanding of same-sex marriage in South Africa. It also has the potential to contribute to the world wide debate about same-sex marriage.

##### **2. The right to participate, say no or withdraw**

Participation in this research is voluntary. Participants have the right to say withdraw from the study if they wish to do so. There will be no negative consequences for the participants who do not want to continue.

##### **3. No cost or compensation**

There are no monetary gains from participating in the research. There will also be no monetary expenditure on the part of the respondents. Your time will be the only thing that will be required for the research.

##### **4. Anonymity and confidentiality**

In the writing up of the thesis, the anonymity of the participants will be preserved. Under no circumstances will the identity of the respondents be made available to anyone who is not the principal researcher or the supervisor. Pseudonyms will be used in the final written document unless a participant wants to be named.

##### **5. Contact information**

If you have any questions about the research you can contact the researcher.

Researcher - Lwando Scott. 4<sup>th</sup> Floor Leslie Social Science Building. Sociology – University of Cape Town. Phone: 071 894 2872 - E-mail: [sctlwa001@myuct.ac.za](mailto:sctlwa001@myuct.ac.za)



**Your signature below means that you have read the consent form and voluntarily agree to participate in this research study.**

Signature: .....

Date: .....

#### 4. The Recruitment Flyer

##### **Same-sex marriage in South Africa**

My name is Lwando Scott and I am a PhD student at the University of Cape Town. I live in Cape Town and I am currently studying same-sex marriage in South Africa. As you may know South Africa is the only country that legally recognizes same-sex relationships on the African continent. South Africa is one of only eleven nations in the world that recognize same-sex marriage; these include Argentina, Belgium, Canada, Denmark, Iceland, The Netherlands, Portugal, Norway, Spain and Sweden.

My research focuses on the lives of married same-sex couples. I am interested in the reasons same-sex couples get married? I am interested in the ways same-sex couples navigate life as a married couple. I am interested in doing interviews with legally married same-sex couples to talk about their wedding, the lived private experience of marriage and the lived public experience of marriage.

The interviews will be broken into three sections. The first interview will be conducted with both partners at the same time. The second interview will be with each partner separately. In addition to helping me obtain a degree at UCT, The research has the potential to contribute to a better understanding of same-sex marriage in South Africa. It also has the potential to contribute to the world wide debate about same-sex marriage.

Participants are asked to participate in the research voluntarily. There are no monetary gains from participating in the research. In the writing up of the thesis, the anonymity of the participants will be preserved. Under no circumstances will the identity of the respondents be made available to anyone who is not the principal researcher or the supervisor; confidentiality will be maintained throughout the research process.

If you have any questions about the research, or you want to participate in the research, please contact me.

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