

**“BEING LABELED AS A BRIDE... IT MAKES YOU WANT TO PUNCH THEM IN  
THE FACE”: AN EXPLORATORY STUDY OF QUEER WEDDINGS IN  
VANCOUVER, CANADA**

by

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## **Abstract**

Although the theoretical literature debating the significance, implications, and consequences of queer participation marriage is vast, only a few empirical studies that focus specifically on queer weddings have been carried out. This research examines queer weddings in the distinct political, legal, and cultural context of Vancouver, Canada. Using in-depth qualitative interviews and participant observation, I investigate the decision-making and labor practices involved in planning and hosting a queer wedding. As well, I examine how couples negotiate feelings and relationships before, during, and after the wedding. I explore these practices to illuminate how queer weddings both support and challenge the institution of marriage. My findings suggest some significant distinctions between heterosexual and queer weddings, highlighting that producing a queer wedding presents unique challenges and rewards. Without exception, participants in this study felt they had tremendous freedom to shape their weddings according to their own beliefs, values, and desires. However, I argue that their personal freedom was mediated by the legal requirements of the state, as well as by a desire to attend to the needs and feelings of their families of origin. Further, I found that the wedding industry remains unshakably heteronormative and at times homophobic, often making queer couples feel less than welcome. I discovered that weddings did present my narrators with the chance to resist heteronormativity, traditional gender roles, and the wedding-industrial complex, yet their ability to resist was constrained by the need for intelligibility. I conclude that a queer wedding is a ritual performance of legitimacy and an opportunity to experience a profound sense of validation and belonging. However, the wedding holds a unique temporal and spatial position that does not necessarily reflect everyday realities. My findings suggest that queer couples' access to legitimacy is inconsistent, causing them to experience dissonance as they move through time and space.

## **Preface**

This research has been approved by the Office of Research Services at the University of British Columbia as well as by the UBC Behavioral Research Ethics Board (certificate number H10-01966).

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## **Chapter 1: Introduction**

### **1.1: Cultural, Political, and Historical Context**

Weddings are everywhere we look: every major newspaper in North America lists wedding announcements and regularly prints articles about weddings, bridal magazines easily take up an entire section in any major bookstore, several ‘reality’ TV shows are devoted to wedding themes, and Hollywood has produced more than twenty feature-length wedding films (Howard, 2006; Ingraham, 2008; Mead, 2007). Furthermore, weddings make up a multi-billion dollar global industry. They give business to florists, caterers, wedding consultants, photographers, and limousine firms, as well as the jewelry, clothing, and tourism industries. They also give business to ceremony and reception venues and the retailers that support the wedding gift tradition (Boden, 2003; Howard, 2006; Ingraham, 2008; Mead, 2007). Several noteworthy studies on weddings have emerged in recent years (for examples, see Boden, 2003; Blakely, 2007; Currie, 1993; Freeman, 2002; Howard, 2006; Ingraham, 2008; Mead, 2007; Otnes & Pleck, 2003), but considering the incredible popularity of the wedding ritual and the immense power of the wedding industry, it is surprising that there has not been greater research interest in weddings.

The newest addition to the wedding craze, the queer wedding<sup>1</sup>, follows much the same pattern. As the ritual has grown in popularity, it has also begun to receive a great deal of media attention. Newspapers in most major cities in North America now include queer wedding announcements and feature articles on queer ceremonies, and even

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<sup>1</sup> Although I use the terms *queer* marriage and *queer* weddings throughout the thesis, it is important to note that the terms that are used primarily in the literature are ‘*same-sex*’ marriage and ‘*same-sex*’ weddings. I use *queer* to be inclusive of all sexualities and genders as well as to indicate that I reject the undue emphasis on biological sex that is implicit in the term ‘*same-sex*’. I only use the term ‘*same-sex*’ when quoting directly from the literature or when discussing legislative matters.

mainstream bridal magazines have begun featuring queer-themed stories. More than ten TV series have aired queer wedding episodes, and queer weddings have been included in numerous recent films. Also, a flurry of queer wedding guides, such as *The Essential Guide to Gay and Lesbian Weddings* and *Gay and Lesbian Weddings: Planning the Perfect Same-Sex Ceremony*, have been published, along with magazines such as *Equally Wed* and websites such as *gayweddings.com* and *rainbowweddingnetwork.com*. Not surprisingly, queer weddings have created a burgeoning industry, as evidenced by the rise in services catering to queer couples from “gay-friendly” wedding-planning services to “same-sex honeymoon alternatives” (Mead, 2007).

It is clear that the queer wedding industry has grown rapidly over the past decade and that the ritual is becoming more visible in the media. However, this does not mean that queer marriage is a new phenomenon. Although the wedding industry has only begun accommodating queer couples in earnest over the past decade, queer marriage ceremonies have been known to exist throughout history (Ayers, 2009; Boswell, 1994; Lewin, 1998; Otnes & Pleck, 2003; Smart, 2008). Furthermore, the increasing visibility of queer marriage and weddings does not necessarily imply that queer relationships are widely accepted. We cannot ignore the fact that ‘same-sex’ marriage is still being intensely debated in some parts of the world, indeed unthinkable in other parts. Worldwide, ‘same-sex’ marriages have been legalized in only ten countries.<sup>2</sup> In the United States, only six states<sup>3</sup> and the District of Columbia have approved ‘same-sex’ marriage, while 37 U.S. states have laws explicitly prohibiting such marriages. As I write

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<sup>2</sup> In chronological order, the ten countries are The Netherlands, Belgium, Spain, Canada, South Africa, Norway, Sweden, Portugal, Iceland, and Argentina. ‘Same-sex’ marriage is also legal in Mexico City, but not in other jurisdictions.

<sup>3</sup> The six U.S. states, in chronological order are Massachusetts, Connecticut, Iowa, Vermont, New Hampshire, and New York.

this thesis, Proposition 8, the controversial law that eliminates the right of ‘same-sex’ couples to marry in California, is still hotly debated, and political scientists predict that the case will proceed all the way to the U.S. Supreme Court. Here in Canada, although ‘same-sex’ marriage has been legal federally since 2005, we cannot forget that there was (and still is) strife fomented by conservatives across the country in opposition to ‘same-sex’ marriage.

That queer marriage is so controversial has much to do with the history of marriage as a patriarchal, heterosexual, and heterosexist institution. Historically in the West, the marriage relation was predicated on the inequality of men and women (Boden, 2003; Coontz, 2005; Delphy, 1992). It was an agreement to the formal transfer of the bride from one man to another, and the process by which the legal existence of the woman was incorporated into that of her husband. Traditionally, marriage also organized the division of labor and power; it was assumed that the man would be the head of household and the woman the dependent. Because there is so much at stake if the institution of marriage is transformed, it is no surprise that conservatives are up in arms about the legalization of queer marriage. However, conservative opponents of queer marriage rarely admit that marriage is a political and economic arrangement; rather they argue simply that heterosexual marriage is the only ‘normal’ and ‘natural’ form of relationship, and allowing queers to marry would tarnish this revered institution. On the other hand, many supporters of queer marriage argue that such unions will help to break down the perceived naturalness of heterosexual marriage, and of heterosexuality itself. At the same time, some queers oppose queer marriage because they maintain that it reinforces heteronormative family structures and delegitimizes other forms of

relationships (Auchmuty, 2004; Butler, 2002; Calhoun, 2000; Polikoff, 1993; Warner, 1999; Young & Boyd, 2006).

As the ritual embodiment of the marriage institution, traditional heterosexual weddings are rife with customs and symbols reminding us that marriage is patriarchal and heterosexist. The father-of-the-bride “giving away” his daughter to the groom, the reciting of traditional vows, and the bouquet toss are just a few examples of wedding rituals that are steeped in assumptions about the ‘natural’ and ‘normal’ order of sex, gender, and family (Oswald, 2003). Queer weddings, by their very nature, make these assumptions visible. Previous research on queer weddings suggests that participants in a queer wedding, both the couple and their guests, are forced to think about the meaning of the undertaking in a way that is not demanded of their heterosexual peers (Mead, 2007). Furthermore, this research suggests that regardless of whether queer weddings are perceived as expressions of assimilation, subversion, or anything in-between, these ceremonies challenge boundaries that have rarely been questioned (Lewin, 1998; Mead, 2007; Smart, 2008). For all of these reasons, queer weddings constitute an extremely complex and rich area for sociological investigation.

## **1.2: Objectives and Research Questions**

The purpose of this study is threefold: 1) to understand what the wedding signifies for queer couples, 2) to explore the feelings and negotiations that queer couples navigate when they plan and have a wedding, and 3) to examine the attributes and dynamics of the queer wedding industry in Vancouver. To achieve these aims, I utilized a mixed-methods approach including in-depth interviews and participant observation. I conducted

interviews with twelve queer couples, 23-65 years of age, who reside in Metro Vancouver. Ten couples had their weddings less than a year prior to being interviewed, and two were planning their weddings at the time of the interview. I also interviewed one professional wedding planner who specializes in queer weddings, and I carried out participant observation of an “alternative wedding show.”<sup>4</sup>

Throughout this research, I was guided by three central questions:

- 1) *What motivates queer couples to wed and what factors shape their decisions about what type of wedding to have?*
- 2) *In what ways do queer weddings constitute the normalization of queer couples?*
- 3) *In what ways do queer weddings subvert heteronormativity, traditional gender roles, and the wedding industrial complex (Ingraham, 2008)?*

### **1.3: Limitations of Previous Literature**

While the theoretical literature on queer marriage is remarkably vast, only a few empirical studies that specifically focus on queer weddings have been carried out (see, for example, Hull, 2006; Lewin, 1998; Smart, 2007, 2008; Stiers, 1999). These accounts have made a significant contribution to our understanding of these rituals. They demonstrate the myriad ways that queer couples navigate the personal-political landscape when planning and executing a wedding. They also complicate the notion that queer weddings represent either accommodation or resistance, suggesting that the theoretical debates about queer marriage have often relied upon overly polarized distinctions. Still, these studies are limited in several important ways. First, all of the previous studies on

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<sup>4</sup> The second annual “Indie I Do,” the “alternative wedding show” that I observed was held in January 2011 at the Heritage Hall in Vancouver. I elaborate on my methodological approach in Chapter 3, and a more detailed account of my observations from the wedding show appears in Appendix C.

queer weddings/commitment ceremonies that I am aware of were carried out in the U.S. (for examples, see Hull, 2006; Lewin, 1998; Stiers, 1999) and the U.K. (Smart, 2007, 2008) and their findings cannot be generalized to other geographical contexts. Several scholars have recently pointed out that research on queer marriage and queer weddings must be more attentive to geographical specificity (Browne, 2011; Lewin, 2008), highlighting the significance of this limitation and the need for further research. Second, previous studies give only minimal attention to the wedding couple as producers and consumers. They do not, for example, explore specifically how queer couples conduct their wedding planning or how they interact with the wedding-industrial complex (Ingraham, 2008). Finally, while these studies explore couples' feelings and interpretations of the wedding itself, they overlook the events before and after the wedding, such as the proposal, engagement, and the honeymoon. Careful attention to all of these components is necessary to paint a complete picture of the wedding experience and its impact on the lives of queer couples.

#### **1.4: Unique Contributions of the Current Study**

My research makes a contribution by addressing these gaps in the literature. To my knowledge, this is the first study of queer weddings in the Canadian context. Taking up the call for greater attention to geographic specificity in studies on queer marriage and queer weddings (Browne, 2011; Lewin, 2008), I give careful consideration to the uniqueness of Canada and of Vancouver in particular throughout my research.

Canada is a distinct context in which to examine queer weddings for a number of reasons. Canada stands out because queer marriages have been legal nationwide since

2005, and in British Columbia since 2003. In the United States, where most of the research on queer marriage and queer weddings/commitment ceremonies has been carried out, queer marriage remains illegal in the majority of states. In the United Kingdom, where Smart (2007, 2008) conducted her research, queer couples have access to civil partnerships, not marriage. My study therefore provides insight into the meaning and implications of queer weddings that are fully authorized by the state.

Vancouver is a particularly unique geographical context for this study for additional reasons. Vancouver is home to Western Canada's largest queer population and is aggressively marketed as one of the world's most "gay-friendly" cities (Tourism Vancouver, 2010). Vancouver is also an increasingly popular destination for immigrants from all over the world (Hansen, 2010) and previous research suggests that it is a particularly attractive destination for queer migrants.<sup>5</sup> As marriage is one way for immigrants to enter and remain in Canada legally, immigration is an important factor to consider in this research. Vancouver is also rapidly becoming one of Canada's most diverse cities. The visible minority population of Metro Vancouver is currently about 40 percent; researchers predict that this figure will reach 59 percent by 2031 (Hansen, 2010). Also noteworthy, Vancouver is an extremely expensive city: recent reports indicate that it is the most expensive city in Canada (Mercer, 2010), and has the least affordable housing in the world (CTV, 2010). Attention to these economic factors is important when analyzing the material classed relations produced and reproduced vis-à-vis marriage and weddings.

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<sup>5</sup> For more information, see D. Kojima, *Migrant intimacies: Queer migrations and technologies of imagination in the Asia Pacific world*. See also E. Luibhéid, *Sexuality, migration, and the shifting line between legal and illegal status*.



My study also makes an original contribution by considering how queer couples act as wedding producers and consumers. I explore specifically how queer couples in Vancouver plan and create their weddings, for example by considering what they do or do not purchase, how much they spend, and whom they solicit for help. In doing so, I highlight the ways that these couples both support and resist the wedding-industrial complex (Ingraham, 2008). I also offer accounts from business people in Vancouver's wedding industry through interviews and participant observation (see Chapter 3).

Finally, I offer a holistic picture of queer couples' entire wedding experience from the decision to wed to life after the wedding. I explore important events leading up to the wedding such as the engagement proposal, announcing the engagement to family and friends, and shopping for wedding outfits. I also consider respondents' feelings and experiences after the wedding through discussion of their honeymoons, as well as their ordinary daily lives as married couples. Exploring all of these aspects of the wedding experience allows for a deeper and more textured analysis of my research questions. Investigation of all of these components also builds a stronger foundation for drawing comparisons with the literature on heterosexual weddings.

### **1.5: Layout of the Thesis**

In order to contextualize this research, I conduct a review of literature relating to queer weddings in chapter 2 - *Review of Literature*. First, I survey the literature on queer marriage, the (hetero)wedding industry, and queer weddings. I then outline the theoretical perspectives that have been most influential in my research, including the ideas of Michel Foucault, Judith Butler, and Pierre Bourdieu.

In chapter 3 - *Methods* - I first discuss the influences of feminist and anti-racist knowledge producers on this research, highlighting the ideas and methods embodied in Dorothy Smith's institutional ethnography (1987). I segue from here into a detailed description of my methodological approach. I explain all phases and aspects of the research process including recruitment of participants, ensuring diversity, ethical considerations, interviews, participant observation, geographical considerations, and data analysis.

In chapter 4 - *Planning the Wedding* - I begin by discussing the wide range of factors that motivated my interview narrators to have a wedding. I then explore the events surrounding the decision to wed, such as the engagement proposal and participants' experiences of announcing the engagement to family and friends. From here I move into a discussion of the sources that couples consulted for wedding planning inspiration and ideas, and their main priorities and considerations for the wedding. I consider the ways that these couples resisted dominant wedding ideology and the wedding-industrial complex (Ingraham, 2008).

In chapter 5 - *Wedding Labor* - I explore how my respondents carried out the work involved in producing their weddings. In contrast to the typical heterosexual model in which brides carry out the bulk of wedding work (Blakely, 2007; Currie, 1993; Sniezek, 2005) and are often assisted by female family members such as mothers, aunts, and grandmothers (Mead, 2007), I show that the couples in this study carried out their wedding work together and often with the assistance of friends. I also illustrate the ways that shopping for the wedding presents unique challenges for queer individuals.

In chapter 6 - *The Big Day* - I discuss my interview narrators' accounts of their wedding day. Using particular wedding rituals, such as walking down the aisle, the first dance, and the father-daughter dance as examples, I show that couples adapted and reconfigured these customs to reflect their own beliefs and values. I also demonstrate several ways that couples had to balance their desires with the needs of their guests, as well as the official requirements of the state.

In chapter 7 - *After the Wedding* - I consider how my interview narrators' lives are both the same and different after the wedding. First, I discuss their honeymoon experiences, and illustrate the ways that the honeymoon is a striking reminder that the wedding's promise of legitimacy has not been realized. I then outline their perspectives about how being married has affected the couple's relationship and their relationships with others. I argue that marriage is in many ways a contradictory institution: the concrete differences between married and unmarried couples are few, but the social significance of marriage is immense.

Finally, in chapter 8 - *Conclusion* - I summarize my research findings and explain how they shed light on my original research questions. I expand the discussion by showing where my research is positioned within wedding scholarship and by making theoretical links with Foucault, Butler, Bourdieu and others. I discuss several limitations of my research as well as suggest areas for future inquiry. I make these recommendations in the hope that others will endeavor to understand weddings, both heterosexual and queer, as a vital area for academic scholarship. Weddings are, after all, one of the most ubiquitous and socially important cultural rituals in the West (Boden, 2003; Currie, 1993; Smart, 2008) and are upheld by a powerful, transnational capitalist industrial-complex

(Ingraham, 2008). Is it not the sociologist's job to question actions and ideas that most people take for granted?

## Chapter 2: Review of Literature

### **2.1: Introduction**

This thesis both draws from and builds upon literature on marriage and weddings. In particular, my work is situated at the intersection of three distinct but interrelated bodies of literature within the broad fields of sociology of families, gender, and sexuality. First is the abundant and ever-expanding literature on queer marriage. This body of work primarily focuses on theoretical debates about the social and political significance of queer marriage, but also includes some empirical studies on experiences of queer married couples themselves. Second is the relatively small body of literature on the (hetero)wedding industry, which is characterized by a focus on the commercialized nature of weddings and wedding planning. Third is the emergent research on queer weddings. This research suggests that queer weddings cannot be generalized, as queer couples' motivations for having a wedding and their beliefs about what the wedding signifies are many and varied.

In this chapter, I provide a cursory review of these bodies of work and then discuss the theoretical perspectives that are most pertinent. Although the contributions of numerous social theorists have informed this project, the three that have been most influential are Michel Foucault, Judith Butler, and Pierre Bourdieu. These theorists maintain that mechanisms of power are manifest in various forms: surveillance, discipline, regulation, normalization, and recognition. Their work explores how these mechanisms are deployed to produce and reproduce discourses on sexualities and 'the family.'

## **2.2: Queer Marriage: History, Context, and Contemporary Debates**

Many recent studies focus on the political and legal history of queer marriage (see, for example, Andersen, 2008; Bala, 2006; Lahey, 1999; Lahey & Alderson, 2004; Nicol & Smith, 2008). Bala (2006) compares the controversies over the definition of marriage and the evolution of recognition of queer relationships in Canada and the United States over the past few decades. He suggests that the process of recognition of queer couples began earlier and has progressed further in Canada as compared to the U.S. due to Canada's comparatively broad approach to the recognition of familial relationships that are based on neither marriage nor biological links. Also, he explains that in the U.S., family law is largely a state issue, which makes the process of recognizing queer marriage slower and more complicated. His study reminds us that all research on queer marriage must be situated within the historical, political, legal, and cultural context in which it is embedded.

Attention to geographies is particularly important when exploring the meanings that queer marriage holds for queer couples, and the impact it has on broader society (Browne, 2011; Eskridge & Spedale, 2006; Lahey & Alderson, 2004; Hull, 2006; Lee Badgett, 2009; Taylor, et. al., 2009). As an example, Taylor, Kimport, Van Dyke, and Andersen (2009) investigated the dynamics and impact of the 2004 queer wedding protest in San Francisco. In this protest, marriages were used as strategic means to dramatize claims about rights to marriage, and most participants in the study considered their marriages acts of contestation. To be sure, the geographical specificity of San Francisco plays a significant role in shaping couples' understanding of their weddings, just as the

specificity of Vancouver must not be overlooked when considering queer marriages and weddings here.

Another important contribution of the previous literature is that it sheds light on the complex interrelationship between the law of the state and the everyday lived experiences of queer couples. This literature reminds us that marriage is both a state-conferred legal relationship status as well as a social designation that affords couples access to various forms of capital. Previous studies suggest that both the legal and the social dimensions of marriage are important to queer couples. For instance, Hull (2006) conducted interviews with queer couples in the U.S. While some of her research participants expressed an interest in accessing the practical rights and benefits of marriage, many also spoke of the social legitimacy that marriage would bring to queer relationships. Her findings suggest that among queer couples in the U.S., the latter is a more powerful motivating factor for marriage than the former, as many of her participants were attracted to the cultural practice of marriage even in the absence of legal rights and benefits.

Queer marriage is an issue that has incited heated debate among queer scholars, particularly in the U.S. and the U.K. Proponents generally take a liberal stance: they argue on the basis of equal rights and emphasize the similarities between heterosexual marriage and queer relationships (for examples, see Eskridge, 1993, 1999, and 2002; Harper, 1996; Mohr, 1994 and 1997; Stoddard, 1992; Sullivan, 1995 and 1997; Strasser, 1997; Whittle, 1996; Wintermute and Andenaes, 2001). In short, supporters argue that participation in marriage normalizes and legitimizes queer relationships, and that legalization of queer marriage marks a pivotal step towards achieving widespread social

acceptance of queer identities. Calhoun (2000), for example, states that marriage is central to the liberation of queers, as the greatest way of overcoming our exclusion from both the public sphere and the protected private sphere. Some cite practical reasons for pursuing queer marriage, such as the right to obtain the same legal and financial benefits that heterosexual married couples have. Other proponents support queer marriage because they believe it is subversive. They contend that it offers the opportunity to transform the meaning of family; indeed, to actually define what counts as family. Some feminist supporters, for example, have argued that queer participation in marriage could transform it into a condition dissociated from its sexist base (see, for example, Calhoun, 2000; Cox, 1997; Hunter, 1995; Stoddard, 1992).

Queer critics of marriage focus on three central arguments. First is the argument that queer couples who marry reinforce heteronormative family ideologies. This argument states that queers should not assimilate into a heterosexual model, but rather focus attention on the potential for queer relationships to act as better models for all relationships, inside or outside marriage (see, for example, Auchmuty, 2004). The second critique is that extending spousal status to queers reinforces the neoliberal privatization of economic responsibility by placing it on family members, rather than the state (see, for example, Young & Boyd, 2006). The third argument is that queer participation in marriage creates a new hierarchy of “acceptable” queers. Butler (2002), for example, espouses that new relationship hierarchies will emerge in public discourse, resulting in a foreclosure of options outside of marriage as “unthinkable” (p. 18). Warner (1999) makes a similar appeal, and adds that while marriage recognizes and validates some relationships, it delegitimizes and stigmatizes other (non-normative) relationships



and desires. He also suggests that queer marriage is primarily of interest to and beneficial for middle- and upper-middle class white men, who do not represent the majority of queers.

### **2.3: The (Hetero)Wedding Industry**

Despite the frequent use of the adjective ‘traditional’ to describe the lavish, formal white wedding, it is important to recognize that such weddings are actually a recent invention (Boden, 2003; Howard, 2006; Ingraham, 2008; Mead, 2007). For most couples from the colonial period through the 19<sup>th</sup> century, a wedding was not a consumer rite but rather a communal celebration of marriage integrated in a system of reciprocity. It was not until the 20<sup>th</sup> century that the formal white wedding gained popularity, and only very recently have such weddings come to be considered a ‘right’ of all couples. Howard (2006) claims that the rise of the white wedding was a result of the newly established wedding industry’s need for new and dependable markets.

Mead (2007) explains that the term ‘wedding industry’ is used as a “catch-all expression to describe the infrastructure of service providers and businesses, ranging from individual entrepreneurs to massive corporations, that seek to provide the bride and groom with the accoutrements of the wedding day, and in many cases, to do business with them long after the wedding day is over” (p. 5). The wedding industry therefore includes a wide range of businesses from invitations, flowers, and photos to home furnishings and household equipment. If one thing is clear, it is that the wedding industry in Canada and the U.S. is bigger and more powerful than ever before. A recent article in *The Globe and Mail* indicates that the average Canadian wedding costs \$30,000

CAD (Gazze, 2010). In the U.S., the average couple spends \$27,852 USD per wedding, and according to recent studies, the cost of the average American wedding has increased by 38 percent in the past 15 years (Ingraham, 2008). For most American families, weddings represent the largest payout they will ever make after purchasing a home and paying for higher education (Howard, 2006).

In addition to being profitable--in 2006, it was estimated that the wedding industry was worth \$161 billion to the U.S. economy (Mead, 2007)--the wedding industry is also a highly complex, transnational capitalist economic system that is made up of primary, secondary, and tertiary retail markets. For this reason, Ingraham (2008) uses the term “wedding-industrial complex” to illustrate that an array of institutions spanning the entire globe are involved or invested in the production of weddings, either directly or indirectly. The wedding-industrial complex has been heavily impacted by globalization: while white weddings in popular culture are increasingly opulent, most wedding products are actually produced in ‘Third World’ countries where companies can secure the cheapest labor and the least expensive natural resources (Ingraham, 2008).

This multibillion-dollar wedding industry includes the sale of a diverse range of products, not only for consumption on the day of the wedding itself, but also for the couple’s continued use as they enter into the domestic realm. Newlyweds and potential newlyweds are among the largest consumers of major appliances, furniture, and consumer electronics, as well as tableware, linens, small appliances, and cookware, often obtaining these items as wedding presents selected through a registry (Ingraham, 2008). Howard (2006) suggests that this close relationship between weddings and mass consumption of household goods indicates that the wedding ‘tradition’ serves a wider

social function related to the ‘homeward bound’ movement and the affirmation of consumer capitalism.

Although the wedding industry is indeed powerful, wedding consumers are not dupes of the industry nor are they coerced to participate in it. Rather, the wedding industry guarantees our compliance and consent by relying on a complex meaning-making apparatus that Ingraham (2008) refers to as the “wedding-ideological complex,” which creates the meanings that we attribute to weddings and marriage and obfuscates the powerful arrangements these meanings serve. The power of the wedding industry therefore lies in its ability to capitalize on these meanings. As Mead (2007) argues, the wedding industry taps into the deepest hopes and fears of their consumers in order to generate profits.

Previous research on weddings clearly shows that the meanings we attribute to weddings and marriage have a powerful influence over consumer decisions. Perhaps most powerful of all is the belief that a wedding must be ‘perfect’ down to the very last detail. In fact, it is this drive to have things ‘picture perfect’ that determines the amount of work and money that couples invest in the wedding (Currie, 1993; Howard, 2006; Mead, 2007). But where does this drive, this “unnecessary pressure” (Currie, 1993, p. 409) come from? According to Mead (2007), what underscores this drive to have the ‘perfect’ wedding is the belief that a wedding done ‘just right,’ e.g. done according to the prescriptions of the wedding industry, promises an equally flawless marriage. Similarly, the idea that the wedding day is the most important event in a person’s life contributes to the feeling that it must be done ‘right.’

The drive to have a perfect wedding is exacerbated by the fact that consumers face an almost limitless range of choices (Boden, 2003; Currie, 1993). Boden (2003) draws from Beck's (1992) argument that in this era of high modernity, individuals have been liberated from the bonds of social structural relations, including religious and family ties; thus traditional values and assumptions of the 'standard' way things should be done have been eroded. At the same time, this freedom from structural relations brings with it an ever-expanding array of choices and decisions: consumer decisions. She argues that wedding consumers must choose "not simply whether or not to marry, but where to do it, what theme to choose, what budget to set, who to turn to for advice, what insurance policy to take out, which exhibition to visit and so on" (p. 16). Currie (1993) makes a similar argument, stating "the emphasis on being 'up-to-date' overrides what tradition and etiquette have dictated in the past" (p. 417).

Not surprisingly, this expansion of wedding consumer choices has increased the amount of time and work involved in planning a wedding. Previous research has shown that the work of planning a wedding, or wedding labor, falls primarily on women's shoulders (Blakely, 2008; Currie, 1993; Sniezek, 2005). In particular, brides tend to take on most or all of the tasks that are "invisible," or stereotypical women's work, while grooms are involved in the more visible aspects of the process such as making final decisions (Currie, 1993; Sniezek, 2005). As many brides are faced with time constraints stemming from work-family conflict, an increasing number are choosing to employ professional wedding planners. This commodification of wedding planning is just one example of the phenomenon that sociologist Arlie Hochschild (2003) describes as the commercialization of intimate life.

Across Canada and the U.S., but particularly in the U.S., an industry devoted specifically to queer weddings has proliferated over the past decade. One can find an abundance of queer wedding planning guides including websites, books, and magazines. Queer wedding conventions are held in a number of U.S. cities, where businesses sell everything from wedding invitations, gowns, and jewelry to honeymoon packages and insurance plans. While some of these businesses may genuinely believe in the equality of queer relationships and value diversity of family forms, previous research suggests that many are motivated by the potential to expand their market share and increase profits (Howard, 2006; Hennessy, 2000; Peñaloza, 1996; Puar, 2007).

Marketing and media attention directed to queers as a distinct consumer group has increased dramatically in the post-Stonewall era, particularly in the 1990s through the present. Numerous researchers have investigated this phenomenon, which has been described using such phrases as “queer market accommodation,” “queer market incorporation,” and “the commodification of gay identity” (see, for example, Hennessy, 2000; Peñaloza, 1996; Puar, 2007). The incorporation of queers into the marketplace has some significant advantages. In particular, it can serve to validate and legitimate queer identity. It is valuable affirmation, for instance, for queers to be able to go to almost any major city in the world and locate queer clubs, media, and bookstores, and to see themselves in film, music, and advertisements. At the same time, the marketplace has a tendency to distort representations of queer people. Peñaloza (1996) points out that images of white, upper-middle class, ‘straight-looking’ people are pervasive while those more distanced from or threatening to the mainstream are marginalized. She explains, “There are extreme subject positions within the communities that make mainstream

advertisers nervous, and the ultimate test of gay and lesbian rights occurs at the extremes, not for those who can pass as heterosexual” (p. 325). She also reminds us that distorted representations of queer people have been used by radical right religious organizations in their efforts to repeal queer civil rights legislation.

#### **2.4: Queer Weddings**

If there is one incontrovertible finding from the previous research on queer weddings, it is that there is no such thing as a ‘typical’ queer wedding. Some couples elect to have a formal, lavish white wedding with hundreds of guests, while others opt for a small, simple gathering of close friends and family. Some have civil ceremonies and others have religious ones; some include the ‘traditional’ rituals of heterosexual weddings while others comprise more alternative components (Hull, 2006; Lewin, 1998; Otnes & Pleck, 2003; Sherman, 1992; Smart, 2007, 2008; Stiers, 1999). It is therefore misguided to understand queer weddings simply as an attempt to conform to heterosexual norms. According to Otnes & Pleck (2003), “Classifying gays as the excluded who want to be included is too simple, because gay ceremonies range from events held in churches and synagogues to Wiccan or Pagan events lasting several days and held outdoors” (p. 236). Not only do queer weddings run the gamut from traditional to alternative, but also it is rare to find a single ceremony that can be classified as one or the other. Most ceremonies in fact combine traditional and alternative elements, sometimes adopting symbols from heterosexual ceremonies and redefining them, and other times inventing new rituals altogether (Lewin, 1998; Otnes & Pleck, 2003; Sherman, 1992).

Perhaps the most salient theme in the theoretical literature on queer marriages is the debate over whether such marriages are assimilative or subversive. Thus, it makes sense that researchers of queer weddings have explored the assimilation vs. subversion debate in the microcosm of the wedding itself. Collectively, these researchers have found that queer weddings, ultimately, are neither assimilative nor subversive; rather these ceremonies comprise elements with complex, multi-layered, and highly subjective meanings (Lewin, 1998; Smart, 2008; Stiers, 1999). Lewin (1998) argues that these meanings not only confront one another but can also be mutually reinforcing, which suggests that the interpretations of resistance and accommodation that characterize much recent queer theory depend on overly polarized distinctions. In her analysis of different types of queer wedding ceremonies, Smart (2008) makes a similar argument, stating that “it would be an oversimplification to suggest simply that some kinds of ceremonies signify a neo-liberal politics while another signifies a queer stance” (p. 765). The question of whether queer weddings signify assimilation or subversion is further complicated by the ability of rituals to evoke multiple meanings sequentially or simultaneously, what anthropologists call the multivocality or polysemy of symbols (Turner, 1969). Ritual symbolism does not necessarily communicate a single meaning. Rather, symbols deployed can be understood differently by different people who participate in or witness rituals. Some argue that this complexity and uncertainty of ritual symbols is what makes them powerful (Kertzer, 1988; Lewin, 1998). Kertzer (1988) has emphasized the dual potential of ritual to have both a conservative bias and innovatory potential. Because rituals link the present to the past, they can also represent a relationship between the present and the future: old symbols are taken up for new

purposes, and historical meanings are refashioned to meet present-day realities. This point is particularly relevant for the study of queer weddings. As an example, at a queer Jewish wedding, a couple may define smashing the glass not only as a symbol of the destruction of the second Jewish Temple, but also of the destruction of homophobia (Otnes & Pleck, 2003).

One distinguishing factor of queer weddings as compared to heterosexual weddings is the emphasis placed on negotiating relationships with family and friends. Many queer couples face resistance from family and friends when they announce their decision to wed, although the particular forms or degree of this resistance vary. In her study of commitment ceremonies in the UK, Smart (2007) found this to be the case with all of the couples she interviewed. In fact, even those who had very supportive families and friends had at least one person who presented some kind of personal problem for them. She states, “No one in the study was untouched by these issues even if the problem was about acceptance of same-sex relationships or about rejection of perceived heteronormative and patriarchal practices like marriage” (p. 683).

Resistance from family and friends is a salient theme in all of the literature on queer weddings, including queer wedding planning books. As Otnes & Pleck (2003) observed, “One unique aspect of wedding planning books directed at same-sex couples is the amount of space devoted to helping the couple cope with resistance from friends and family, some of whom, it is anticipated, will regard the ceremony (and the union) as unnatural, immoral, or suspect” (p. 235). This issue has very real consequences, both tangible and intangible, for queer brides and grooms. One tangible consequence is that parents of queer children rarely spend as much money on their queer child’s wedding as



they would for that of a heterosexual sibling. In fact, queer couples typically receive no support from biological family members to help cover the costs of the wedding and must foot the bill entirely on their own. Accordingly, these weddings are usually smaller and fewer relatives are invited, so the gifts the couple can expect to receive are fewer (Otnes & Pleck, 2003; Wythe & Merling, 2000).

Another challenge that queer couples face when planning and having a wedding is the emotional labor (Hoschild, 1983) involved in mixing queer friends with (heterosexual) parents and other relatives. Many queer couples experience distress when deciding whom and whom not to invite, and worry about how queer friends and older relatives will interact with one another at the wedding. Some elect to have two separate ceremonies, one for family and another for friends. Others opt to bring all of the different relationship networks together for one ceremony. In these cases, couples spend a great deal of time and energy to ensure that they are being attentive to the different needs and comfort levels of their guests (Smart, 2007).

## **2.5: Foucault's Conceptualization of Power Relations**

Foucault revolutionized the way we think about power. While many theorists conceive of a power that operates in a top-down fashion, Foucault maintains that power is not unidirectional, but rather is “exercised from innumerable points” (1978, p. 94) and always in circulation:

The omnipresence of power: not because it has the privilege of consolidating everything under its invincible unity, but because it is produced from one moment to the next, at every point, or rather in every relation from one point to another. Power is everywhere; not because it embraces everything, but because it comes from everywhere (ibid, p. 93).

Because power is omnipresent, there is no outside to it. It moves throughout the social body in all directions, even from below, as there is no binary opposition between rulers and ruled (1978, p. 94). Furthermore, because there is no exteriority to power, even resistance is inside power; it is indeed a constituent part of strategic power relations.

In addition to stating that power is immanent, Foucault points out that power is not necessarily exercised in the form of rule or law. Power is not only juridical and negative, but also technical and positive (2003, p. 308). He argues it is critical that we examine these positive mechanisms:

We need to take these mechanisms seriously, therefore, and reverse the direction of our analysis: rather than assuming a generally acknowledged repression, and an ignorance measured against what we are supposed to know, we must begin with these positive mechanisms, insofar as they produce knowledge, multiply discourse, induce pleasure, and generate power; we must investigate the conditions of their emergence and operation, and try to discover how the related facts of interdiction or concealment are distributed with respect to them (1978, p. 73).

This is a useful theoretical schema for understanding queer weddings for several reasons. First of all, queer weddings can be understood as acts of resistance to power while at the same time, they presuppose and reinscribe the sovereign power of the state to legitimate particular forms of relationships. Marriage, lest we forget, is a state-conferred lawful relationship status, one that comes with a number of rights, responsibilities, and privileges. Therefore, by the very act of getting married, queer couples uphold the legal authority of the state to condone certain relationships and condemn others. Moreover, queer marriage and weddings may contribute to the proliferation and circulation of discourses that construct marriage as the gold standard of romantic relationships, therefore stigmatizing other purportedly inferior forms of relationships. To use

Foucault's terminology, this is an example of disciplinary power. In short, although queer marriage can be understood as an act of resistance, it also sustains both sovereign and disciplinary power.

Foucault also provides a useful model for understanding the complex interrelationship between power, desire, and freedom. He states that wherever there is desire, the power relation is immanent. Therefore any attempt to quest after a desire beyond the reach of power is futile (ibid). This conceptualization of power can be productively applied to the example of queer weddings. As discussed above, the sovereign power of the state grants numerous rights and privileges to married couples, and the disciplinary power of discourse normalizes marriage and stigmatizes other forms of relationships. The very desire to marry and have a wedding therefore can be understood as both a producer and an outcome of strategic power relations. Foucault maintains that because desire and resistance are constitutive of power itself, we are "always already trapped" (ibid, p. 83).

Further, he contends that freedom and power are mutually constitutive; that each is a precondition for the other. This interplay between freedom and power is not "an essential antagonism" but rather "a permanent provocation" (2003, p. 139). Foucault might argue that the freedom to marry is in fact a condition for the exercise of power over queer couples.

According to Foucault, discourses are produced both within and outside of institutions. Although institutions play an important role in establishing power relationships, the "fundamental point of anchorage" of these relationships is found outside of institutions (ibid, p. 140). Therefore, one must analyze institutions from the

standpoint of power relations. This perspective is embodied in Dorothy Smith's ingenious methodology called "institutional ethnography" which focuses on examining "relations of ruling" by exploring the everyday.<sup>6</sup>

To analyze the institution of marriage from the standpoint of power relations, where should we cast our gaze? Where can these power relations be found? Foucault suggests that we start by looking at "local centers" of power-knowledge (1978, p. 98). These "local centers" include seemingly banal everyday social interactions. For instance, we might examine the different responses evoked when someone introduces their romantic partner as a "boyfriend" or "girlfriend" as opposed to "husband" or "wife." Or we might consider the responses from family, friends, and even strangers when a couple announces that they are getting married. These interactions reveal the meanings we attach and value we place on marriage and weddings. In turn, they help us to understand how the marriage vow grants couples access to various forms of capital, power, and privilege.

## **2.6: "The Ambivalent Gift": Butler's Views on State Recognition**

In her essay, "Is Kinship Already Heterosexual?," (2002) Judith Butler grapples with a number of critical, analytical questions about queer marriage--questions that have been overlooked in popular discourse on the topic. She troubles many of the binaries upon which the debates on queer marriage have been founded, encouraging us to understand the quest for state recognition as a quandary, a dilemma, or as Foucault might say, a trap. She considers that when we seek recognition from the state we ask for an

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<sup>6</sup> I discuss this approach in more detail in Chapter 3.

intervention in the one domain (marriage) only to undergo extreme regulation in another (kinship). Simply put, she reflects on “the ambivalent gift that legitimation can become” (p. 17).

One of her principal concerns regarding legitimation is that it inevitably produces and intensifies regions of illegitimacy. This concern has been articulated by a number of other feminist and queer scholars (see, for example, Duggan, 1994; Puar, 2007; Warner, 1999; Young & Boyd, 2006). If marriage is agreed upon as the mark of legitimacy, then what happens to queer individuals and couples who fall outside of this sanctified form of relationship? Butler contends that these sexual agents are pushed further to the margins, and that it becomes increasingly more difficult for them to stake claims to legitimacy. Queer marriage therefore produces a new hierarchy of legitimate and illegitimate sexual arrangement. So we can see that power relationships are never stable; they are infinitely mobile and continually generate redistributions, realignments, and homogenizations.

Butler problematizes the binary relation between legitimacy and illegitimacy. She suggests that outside of this struggle between the legitimate and the illegitimate, there are middle zones that are less thinkable, and particularly difficult to name. She calls these middle zones “hybrid regions of legitimacy and illegitimacy” (p. 19). She explains:

Indeed, there are middle regions--hybrid regions of legitimacy and illegitimacy that have no clear names and where nomination itself falls into a crisis produced by the variable, sometimes violent boundaries of legitimating practices that come into uneasy and sometimes conflictual contact with one another. These are not precisely places where one can choose to hang out, subject positions one might opt to occupy. These are nonplaces where recognition, including self-recognition, proves precarious if not elusive, in spite of one's best efforts to be a subject in some recognizable sense (ibid, p. 19-20).

This concept is particularly useful for my research because it captures the complex, competing, and at times contradictory experiences of legitimacy/illegitimacy and recognition/erasure that my respondents navigate as they move through time and space.

Butler also asks us to consider the ways that queer marriage reinscribes and extends the power of the state. The insistence on state recognition in particular implies that other forms of recognition are somehow marginal, irrelevant, or inconsequential. By pursuing the state for recognition, we narrow the field of what will become recognizable as legitimate relationships, therefore “fortifying the state as the source for norms of recognition”:

The failure to secure state recognition for one’s intimate arrangements can only be experienced as a form of derealization if the terms of state legitimation are those that maintain hegemonic control over the norms of recognition--in other words, if the state monopolizes the resources of recognition. Are there not other ways of feeling possible, intelligible, even real, apart from the sphere of state recognition? And should there not be other ways? (p. 26).

## **2.7: A Bourdieuan Analysis of the ‘Normal Family’**

As Pierre Bourdieu points out, “the normal family” is a social construction. He writes, “The definition of the normal family (which may be explicit, as it is in law, or implicit, in for example the family questionnaires used by state statistical agencies) is based on a constellation of words--house, home, household, *maison*, *maisonnée*--which, while seeming to describe social reality, in fact construct it” (1998, p. 64). In this statement, Bourdieu sheds light on two equally important facets of the institution of family: first, that the state is inextricably involved in the creation and maintenance of “the normal family” and second, that “family” is constructed by the vocabulary that the social world provides us with in order to describe it.

Bourdieu suggests that “family” is a privilege, because it requires certain social conditions that are neither uniformly distributed nor accessible to all. Furthermore, the state does not treat different forms of family objectively; rather it favors the nuclear family organization and condemns those who do not conform to this idealized norm. Those who conform to the nuclear model enjoy enhanced power and privilege. This in turn encourages others to aspire to the norm, and perpetuates the cycle of conformism. Those who are able to meet the conditions of the nuclear family enjoy various forms of privilege: economic, social, and political privileges instituted by the state, as well as symbolic privileges of being “normal.” Bourdieu explains: “In short, the family in its legitimate definition is a privilege instituted into a universal norm: a de facto privilege that implies a symbolic privilege--the privilege of being *comme il faut*, conforming to the norm, and therefore enjoying a symbolic profit of normality” (ibid, p. 69).

In considering the point that language plays a vital role in constructing social reality, Bourdieu reminds us that the words (categories, visions, divisions) we use to communicate about “family” (and in fact the word “family” itself) do not just describe it, but in fact make it real. These words create consensus, which then allows the discourse of “the normal family” to take on the guise of “common sense” (ibid, p. 67). The state of course plays a very active role in producing and supporting language we use to describe “family.” As Bourdieu explains, the state is in fact “the main agent of the construction of the official categories through which both populations and minds are constructed” (ibid, p. 71).

Bourdieu’s theorization of the social institution of symbolic power has also informed this research. His concept of symbolic capital, first of all, is a useful tool for

understanding and describing the principal form of capital that couples achieve through marriage. He defines symbolic capital as “any property (any form of capital whether physical, economic, cultural, or social) when it is perceived by social agents endowed with categories of perception which cause them to know it and to recognize it, to give it value” (ibid, p. 47). He argues that symbolic capital is always perceived vis-à-vis divisions or oppositions in its distribution. It follows that the state, which possesses the means to inculcate such divisions, is the site par excellence of the concentration and exercise of symbolic power (ibid, p. 47).

Bourdieu states that in order to understand the social institution of symbolic power, we must examine the social operations of *naming* and the rites of institution through which they are accomplished (1991). Acts of naming are not powerful because of language per se, but rather because of the recognized authority of the speaker. When acts of naming are performed by recognized authorities, e.g. marriage commissioners, priests, presidents, kings, they have an almost magical quality. By mobilizing the symbolic capital accumulated through the whole network of bureaucracy, recognized authorities can institute socially guaranteed identities as well as legitimate unions and groupings (1998, p. 52).

These acts of naming are often carried out through ritual, or what Bourdieu calls “rites of institution” (1991). He uses the term rites of institution to emphasize the social function of ritual and the social significance of the boundaries that one can lawfully cross through rituals. The most important effect of rites of institution is that they consecrate difference: they separate those who undergo the rite from those who do not. In Bourdieu’s terms, “they constitute a simple difference of fact as a legitimate distinction,



as an institution” (ibid, p. 118). This is accomplished by “sanctioning and sanctifying” the difference, by making it “known and recognized,” thereby causing it to operate as a significant social difference (ibid, p. 119).

## **2.8: Conclusion**

In summary, the literature I have examined falls within three main subject areas. First, the queer theory literature debates the significance, implications, and consequences of queer participation in the institution of marriage. Second, the literature on heterosexual weddings has a central focus on the proliferation of the wedding industry and the increasingly commercialized nature of wedding planning. The third body of literature is that which focuses specifically on queer *weddings*. Only a few empirical studies with this particular focus have been carried out. In order to offer additional insights into the questions theoreticians have posed, as well as to understand how queer weddings are distinct from their heterosexual counterparts, further empirical research on queer weddings is critical.

Previous studies on queer weddings have explored the ways that couples navigate the personal-political landscape, showing that queer weddings cannot be categorized neatly as either assimilative or subversive. These studies, however, give minimal attention to the production and consumption of queer weddings. In my research, I explore the queer wedding from both of these angles: the wedding as a personal-political project *and* as something that is produced and consumed. Therefore, my study builds upon previous research on marriage and weddings, both heterosexual and queer, but also takes this research in new directions. Furthermore, the majority of studies on queer

weddings have been carried out in the U.S. and the U.K.; to my knowledge, no scholarly research has yet explored queer weddings in the distinct political, legal, and cultural context of Canada. This thesis research makes a contribution by addressing aforementioned gaps in the literature and by entering into conversation with theoretical perspectives on resistance/normalization, legitimacy/illegitimacy, and recognition/regulation.

## Chapter 3: Methods

### **3.1: Feminist, Anti-Racist Methods**

This research is feminist and anti-racist in both its objectives and its design. First and foremost, the central objective of this project is to understand queer marriage and weddings from the perspective of queer couples themselves. As previously discussed, the literature on queer marriage and weddings is predominantly theoretical in nature. This literature is invaluable in that it raises a number of critical analytical questions that are often absent from popular discourse. However, theoretical literature is only a starting point: it must be further developed and interrogated by entering into conversation with *empirical* research. Another central objective of this research is that it emphasizes the importance of the *local*. A common limitation of much sociological research, and of queer theory in particular, is that it does not adequately consider the vital role that geographies play in shaping individual and collective subjectivities (Browne, 2011; Lewin, 2008).

I have explored the work of numerous feminist and anti-racist scholars in designing the methodology for my research. The work of Dorothy Smith has been the most influential in shaping my approach. Smith advocates a practice of sociology that positions research participants as subjects rather than as objects of research; a practice of sociology that regards participants as ‘knowers’ and as experts in their own experiences (1987). She also emphasizes the importance of particular geographies, stating that feminist sociology must situate the subject “just as she is:” a particular subject who acts and is acted upon “at a particular time amid the particularities of her everyday world” (ibid, p. 106). In accordance with Smith’s recommendations, I have implemented a

methodological approach that begins from and continually foregrounds the standpoint of my participants. I used semi-structured interviews as my primary data-generating technique, asking couples a wide range of open-ended questions. According to feminist sociologist Hilary Graham, “The use of semi-structured interviews has become the principal means by which feminists have sought to achieve the active involvement of their respondents in the construction of data about their lives” (1984, p. 112). Although I came to interviews with a structured interview guide, I did not adhere strictly to the questions in the guide or the order in which they were arranged; rather I always remained flexible and allowed the conversation to unfold organically. In this manner, couples were encouraged to speak by and for themselves, using their own words and sharing their own stories. It has been my focus to ensure that this project foregrounds themes that participants themselves highlight as particularly relevant to their lives, rather than imposing my preconceived notions onto the data. I therefore opted to speak as little as possible during the interviews. Instead, I listened carefully to the viewpoints and stories that my participants shared, periodically probing or asking follow-up questions to clarify and enrich my understanding of their experiences.

I have applied the same feminist, anti-racist principles in the analysis of the interview transcripts. As Canadian political scientist Naomi Black wrote, feminist research “insists on the value of subjectivity and personal experience” (1989, p. 75). I have endeavored to uphold this principle by focusing on texture and nuance in my interview narrators’ accounts rather than appealing to claims of universal truth. Conscious of the fact that ‘race’, class, gender, dis/ability, and sexual identity interact in multiple ways to construct participants’ subjectivities and their everyday experiences, I

sought to include as much diversity in my group of participants as possible. In this manner, I have sought to produce research that does not reconstitute the White, male subject as norm. Furthermore, I have remained cautious not to impose theory onto the data by adopting the language that couples used during their interviews to develop my codes and themes. I have also preserved the interview narrators' presence in this project by including extensive quotations.

Feminist, anti-racist thought has also inspired me to remain self-reflexive and deeply cognizant of my biases. The questions I posed in interviews and the ways that I interpret the data certainly have been influenced by various components of my identity position. The fact that I am 28-years-old, female, single, White, and American, for example, have all played a significant role in this research project, as these factors inevitably shape my views on relationships, sexualities, and 'family' in both tangible and intangible ways. Equally important, my epistemological and ontological perspectives affect the study in myriad ways. There is no escaping the fact that I, the researcher, am fully present in this research. Feminist, anti-racist theorists maintain that this is not a weakness of interpretivist research, but rather the immanent reality of *all* sociological research. As Dorothy Smith explains:

We begin from where we are... beginning from some position does not destroy the 'scientific' character or the enterprise. Detachment is not a condition of science... in sociology there is no possibility of detachment. We must begin from some position in the world... the specification of that somewhere and the explication of the relations to which it is articulated, including ideological discourse, are the aim of inquiry (1987, p. 177).

Smith's conception of "institution" is not limited to a determinate form of social organization, but rather the intersection of more than one relational mode of the ruling

apparatus (ibid, p. 160). Understood in this way, marriage would most certainly be classified as an institution, as it coordinates the law, the state, religion, and ‘family’ into a functional complex. Although this project is most certainly not an institutional ethnography, it does incorporate several of the core components of this approach. According to Smith, “Institutional ethnography explores the social relations individuals bring into being in and through their actual practices” (ibid, p. 160). She argues that these practices, which she refers to as “work,” are what bring the institutional process into being (ibid, p. 161). In my research, the “work” under consideration includes all of the practices involved in planning and hosting a wedding. But it is more than just that: it also includes the practices that couples engage in to negotiate relationships with family and friends, the various ways that they seek to attain legitimacy or a sense of belonging, as well as the strategies they use to assert their difference. I explore these practices to illuminate how queer weddings both support and challenge the institution of marriage.

### **3.2: Recruitment Strategies and Access to Participants**

My goal was to recruit 12 queer couples who met the following criteria at the time of the interview: 1) reside in Metro Vancouver, 2) planning their wedding<sup>7</sup> or had their wedding within the past year. I used several different approaches to recruit participants. Assuming that queer couples planning their weddings utilize websites and online discussion forums to help generate ideas for their weddings, I thought it would be fruitful

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<sup>7</sup> According to the Merriam Webster dictionary, “wedding” is defined as “a marriage ceremony usually with its accompanying festivities.” This definition, of course, could encompass a very wide array of different types of weddings. For the purposes of this study, I define “wedding” as a legally sanctioned marriage ceremony with an accompanying celebration of some shape or form, attended by at least three guests (in addition to the couple). The number of guests at my participants’ weddings ranged from four to 250, with an average of 69 guests. Their weddings encompassed a wide variety of types, for example, a potluck picnic wedding, a destination wedding, a backyard wedding, and a religious ceremony followed by a formal reception at an upscale restaurant.

to post my call for participants on several wedding-related sites.<sup>8</sup> I also used two forms of print advertising. First, I placed recruitment posters at a number of queer community centers and gathering places throughout Vancouver. I was deliberate in my decision to place approximately half of these posters in Vancouver's West End and the other half in the Commercial Drive area of East Vancouver.<sup>9</sup> Second, I placed an ad in Xtra! West, Vancouver's most widely distributed gay and lesbian newspaper.

As another approach, I sent emails describing my study to approximately 15 marriage commissioners, 11 religious leaders, and 10 professional wedding planners. I also sent emails to the administrators of several queer groups at UBC, who then sent an announcement of the study to their members on my behalf. Finally, I talked about my study among friends, colleagues, and personal and professional contacts, who then spread the word to their networks via email, Facebook, and word-of-mouth.

I quickly discovered that these last three strategies were by far the most productive. For example, one of the marriage commissioners that I emailed put me into contact with five couples, and I ultimately interviewed three of them. Six of the couples I interviewed were referred to me by personal and professional contacts, two couples learned of the study via the Pride UBC list-serv, and one couple responded to the ad in Xtra! West. In total, I received more than 30 inquiries about my project from October 15 to December 1, 2010. However, because of time and budgetary constraints, I decided to keep my original plan to interview 12 couples.

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<sup>8</sup> These websites include RainbowWeddingNetwork.com, Craigslist.ca, and IndieBride.com.

<sup>9</sup> Vancouver's West End is home to a large gay male community and the Commercial Drive area is home to many lesbians. For more information, see Anne-Marie Bouthillette's 1997 book chapter "Queer and Gendered Housing: A Tale of Two Neighbourhoods in Vancouver."

I did not receive such an overwhelming response from professional wedding planners. While I sent emails to 10 different wedding planners, I heard back from just two. Only one of those, Darryl Persello of *Two Dears and a Queer*, is a wedding planner with a particular focus on queer weddings. I interviewed Darryl in November 2010, and it was through this interview and subsequent conversations with Darryl that I discovered the “queer wedding industry” in Vancouver as I had imagined does not actually exist. *Two Dears and a Queer* is in fact the only specifically queer wedding planning business in Vancouver. What is more, most clients of *Two Dears and a Queer* are queer couples who come from abroad to have their “destination weddings” in Vancouver. Darryl supposes that the majority of queer couples in Vancouver do not hire professional wedding planners, but rather plan their weddings independently. My interview narrators supported this supposition, so I decided not to pursue my original plan to interview three wedding planners. A brief discussion of my interview with Darryl is included in Appendix B.

### **3.3: Ensuring Diversity**

Previous research suggests that queer weddings are predominantly a White, middle-class, and upper-middle class phenomenon (Auchmuty, 2004; Ettelbrick, 1989; Warner, 1999). Furthermore, I am White, middle-class, highly educated, and my social network consists of people of a similar demographic background. For these reasons, I presumed that without making deliberate, targeted efforts to ensure diversity in my sample, I would end up with a homogeneous group of participants. Since one of my explicit goals is to avoid reproducing White, middle-class privilege in the production of



knowledge, I brainstormed ways that I might target particular groups, e.g. queer people of color and working class queers. I gathered the names and contact information of several organizations that serve these groups, and sent emails to several of them. Unfortunately, I was not able to recruit any participants using this approach. Nonetheless, I was still able to recruit a highly diverse group of respondents using the other recruitment methods outlined above. My participants are men and women of a variety of ‘races’, ethnicities, nationalities, religions, and ages. Seven of them are ‘non-White’<sup>10</sup> and six are recent immigrants to Canada. Seven of them are over 40-years-old, which is noteworthy considering the topic of weddings. Also, there is an equal number of men and women in the sample. More details about the demographics of my participants are included in Table 3.1 below.

In this table, I have elected to list my respondents’ gender, age, nationality, ‘race’/ethnicity, and profession for the reader’s reference. I am conscious of the fact that the ‘race’/ethnicity identifier is socially and historically constructed. I assert, however, that it is imperative to call attention to ‘race’/ethnicity because of the material significance these identities hold in Canadian society. In the case of ‘non-White’ participants, I chose to use racial categories that are commonly used in Canadian English and that have been identified as the preferred terms by non-White groups. My decision to capitalize White was also deliberate. I maintain that White should be capitalized to disrupt the normativity of Whiteness and the racial dimensions of power embedded in

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<sup>10</sup> For the sake of clarity and consistency, I use the term ‘non-White’ throughout the thesis to refer to all participants who do not identify as White, Caucasian or European. I am alert to the problems associated with classifying people as racial or ethnic minorities, as we know the very concept of ‘race’ to be historically and geographically contingent as well as socially constructed. Nonetheless, there are very real material consequences to being born ‘non-White,’ and particularly relevant to this thesis are conditions of double oppression, such as by ‘race’ and sex or ‘race’ and sexuality (Hill Collins, 2005).

language. I am aware that I have excluded other important characteristics such as class, religious faith, and dis/ability. While I believe these all merit our attention, I point to gender, age, nationality, ‘race’/ethnicity, and profession as most salient to the themes under discussion in this thesis.

**Table 3.1 - Characteristics of Interview Narrators**

Name	Gender	Age	Nationality	‘Race’/Ethnicity	Profession
Barry	male	54	Australian	White	professor
Sam	male	52	Canadian	White	retired
Akal	male	27	Canadian	South Asian	employment counselor
Cevdet	male	25	Turkish	Middle Eastern	stockroom manager
Daniel	male	46	Canadian	White	project coordinator
Dinho	male	36	Brazilian	Latino	graphic designer
Wayne	male	30	Malaysian	East Asian	looking for work
Marek	male	33	Polish-Italian	White	hairstylist
Simon	male	40	Canadian	East Asian	project manager
Darren	male	44	Canadian	White	bio-energy healer and life coach
Brad	male	26	Canadian	White	CT technologist
Marc	male	26	Canadian	White	epidemiologist
Twiggs	female	31	Canadian	White	graduate student
Stix	female	32	Canadian	White	graduate student
Sandra	female	27	Canadian	White	graduate student
Vivianne	female	28	Canadian	White	graduate student
Patsy	female	37	Canadian	White	advertising and media promotions
Magda	female	28	German	White	hotel manager and IT professional
Karen	female	25	Canadian	White	nanny
Jamie	female	23	Canadian	White	nurse
Sophia	female	57	Canadian	White	freelance planner and facilitator
Claudia	female	65	Canadian	White	editor and writer
Jackie	female	27	Canadian	South Asian	truck driver
Renée	female	24	Canadian	First Nations	hairdresser and business owner

### 3.4: Ethical Considerations

Any study of queer individuals necessitates that research ethics are carefully considered and thoughtfully applied. Historically, social research on queers has defined

and labeled queers in ways that reinforce their marginal status, and queer people are well justified in being wary or even suspicious of academic research. Furthermore, 'queer' remains a stigmatized and in many ways precarious identity, even in the relatively progressive and queer-friendly environment of Vancouver. Ongoing cases of gay-bashing, homophobic bullying, and queer youth suicides suggest that queers in Vancouver have little reason to feel safe disclosing their sexual identity. Considering all of these points, I made every attempt to minimize any risks associated with this research, as well as to maximize the benefits.

The only anticipated potential risks for participants in this study were emotional feelings of unease when asked questions related to the stigma of queer identity, and disagreements between partners during or after the interview. I attempted to minimize these risks in three ways. First, I had a telephone conversation with at least one member of each couple prior to our interview in order to provide them with more information about the research objectives, the types of questions I planned to ask, as well as my personal motivations for pursuing the topic. I encouraged potential participants to ask as many questions as they wished, and waited for them to express a clear and enthusiastic interest in participating before scheduling an appointment. Second, prior to the interview, I provided participants with a list of community resources, including free support groups and the contact information of several clinical counselors. My objective in doing so was to ensure that if couples had the desire or the need to continue their dialogue after the interview was finished, they would have several options of safe, professional settings to do so. Third, I assured participants that they are not obligated to

answer any question that makes them uncomfortable, and that they are free to withdraw their consent at any time.

As with any social research, confidentiality was of utmost importance in this project. I initially planned to give each participant the choice either to be identified by a pseudonym or by his or her real name. My rationale for this was based on the long history of marginalization and erasure of queer identities: I anticipated that many of my participants might have been silenced, demeaned or delegitimized in the past and I felt it was important that I did not reproduce that experience for them by mandating that they use pseudonyms. However, during the research process, it became apparent that identifying my participants by their real names in this thesis and any publications that result from it would pose some significant risks. I have therefore elected to change all of my participants' names to pseudonyms. The only exception is that I have identified the professional wedding planner I interviewed, as well as his business, by their real names.

It was also important to me that my participants be compensated for their time and effort. I believe that compensation is an important element of ethical research, and particularly so in studies that involve a significant time investment. Thus, I provided an honorarium of \$50 to each couple.<sup>11</sup> I also provided an honorarium of \$25 to the professional wedding planner I interviewed.

Most participants expressed great enthusiasm about being part of this study, and a number of them told me that they enjoyed the process of being interviewed. In particular, they enjoyed the opportunity to “re-live” the wedding by talking about it. Many also shared that they found the interview questions to be quite interesting and thought provoking. This supports claims made by previous researchers of queer weddings and

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<sup>11</sup> One couple refused to accept the honorarium.

commitment ceremonies. These researchers state that many queer people find talking about their own wedding to be a positive experience and one in which they learn more about themselves (Lewin, 1998; Sherman, 1992; Smart, 2008; Stiers, 1999).

### **3.5: Interviews**

I conducted in-depth, semi-structured interviews with 12 couples over the time period of November 15, 2010 - January 5, 2011. Prior to each interview I spoke to at least one member of the couple over the telephone in order to provide them with more information about the interview procedures, research objectives, and to answer any questions they had. This phone conversation proved to be an excellent opportunity to establish some level of comfort and trust before meeting face-to-face, and also to provide potential participants with some additional information so that they could make an informed decision about whether or not they would like to participate.

The interviews were typically conducted in the couple's home, with the exception of three interviews that were held at UBC. On average, the interviews were about 2.5 hours in length. All interviews were audio recorded using a digital recorder and later transcribed word-for-word.<sup>12</sup> I also recorded fieldnotes by hand immediately following each interview.

Couples were interviewed together as opposed to separately. This approach had both advantages and disadvantages. Previous research has shown that it is advantageous to interview couples together in order to witness interactions between the two respondents. For instance, couples are able to 'bounce' off each other in various ways

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<sup>12</sup> I transcribed six of the interviews myself. I hired a professional to transcribe the other six interviews.

and produce recollections that might not emerge without such an interaction (Boden, 2003; Smart, 2007). I certainly found this to be the case in my interviews, as some of the most vivid and thoughtful reflections resulted from the interaction between the couple. On the other hand, interviewing couples together presented some distinct challenges. Interviews were relatively long and also difficult to transcribe due to the prevalence of couples interrupting one another. Moreover, it is difficult to know to what extent responses would have differed if I had interviewed each participant individually, or, in other words, to what extent the presence of a partner influenced each participant's responses.

The questions that I included in the interview guides were specifically designed to shed light on the three central analytical questions guiding this research. As discussed in chapter 1, these research questions are:

- 1) What motivates queer couples to wed and what factors shape their decisions about what type of wedding to have?*
- 2) In what ways do queer weddings constitute the normalization of queer couples?*
- 3) In what ways do queer weddings subvert heteronormativity, traditional gender roles, and the wedding-industrial complex (Ingraham, 2008)?*

During interviews, I asked couples a wide range of questions about marriage and weddings. I posed concrete, specific questions about various aspects of their weddings as well as theoretical, ideological questions about what the marriage and the wedding signify for them (see Appendix A for complete interview guide). I did not strictly adhere to the interview guide during the interviews, but rather asked certain key questions that encouraged respondents to elaborate extensively. I found that if I simply listened, couples often answered many of the questions in my interview guide, even without my

asking them directly. Of course I did ask questions directly from the guide when necessary, and probed or asked follow-up questions to gain additional depth and clarity. Many of the couples I interviewed brought their stories to life by sharing wedding memorabilia with me. For instance, several couples showed me photographs from the wedding and sometimes from the honeymoon. Some couples also shared with me their wedding invitations or other memorabilia and ritual symbols such as cake toppers, gifts, and rings.

### **3.6: Participant Observation**

I conducted participant observation at the third annual “Indie I Do” wedding show, which was held on January 22, 2011 at the Heritage Hall in Vancouver. I first learned about “Indie I Do” by searching on the internet for queer wedding shows in Vancouver. I was not able to find any specifically queer wedding shows. However, “Indie I Do” did appear to be an event that would attract a number of queer couples, as the show’s website explicitly states that the event is geared towards non-traditional weddings, including the “same-sex do.”<sup>13</sup> I spent three hours immersing myself at this ‘alternative’ wedding show: walking around and taking note of the different goods and services on offer, conversing with the vendors, observing the attendees and listening to their interactions with each other and with vendors. Periodically I took notes on what I observed, and at the conclusion of the event I recorded extensive fieldnotes. For a description and analysis of what I observed at “Indie I Do,” see Appendix C.

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<sup>13</sup> For more information, see <http://www.indieido.com>.

### **3.7: Geographical Considerations**

As previously discussed, research has shown that the social and political meanings attached to queer marriage are highly dependent on geographical and historical context (Browne, 2011; Eskridge & Spedale, 2006; Hull, 2006; Lahey & Alderson, 2004; Lee Badgett, 2009; Lewin, 2008; Taylor, et. al., 2009). My participants' wedding experiences, and the emotions and meanings they attach to those experiences, cannot be separated from the particular geographies in which they are embedded. Therefore, I have been careful to contextualize this research within the geographical specificity of Vancouver and the history of legalization of queer marriage in British Columbia.

British Columbia began granting marriage licenses to queer couples in July 2003. That legally recognized queer marriages have been taking place in BC for more than eight years is significant because such marriages are no longer a 'novelty' in this city. My respondents' accounts reflect this: many of them indicate that a number of their queer friends have recently married or are planning to, and that they encounter other married queer couples on a regular basis. To be certain, queer weddings do not have the same meaning in Vancouver today as they had in 2003 when they were first legalized. Similarly, there is no doubt that the significance attached to queer weddings in Vancouver differs from that in California, for instance, where queer marriage still remains illegal after more than a decade of fervent debate. For this reason, I am cautious not to make inferences about queer weddings in Vancouver based on findings from other contexts.



Attention to context is also critical in my analysis of the queer wedding industry in Vancouver. As previously discussed, Vancouver's queer wedding industry is unique because a very large proportion of the weddings that take place here are "destination weddings" involving couples from countries such as Australia, Hong Kong, Taiwan, the U.K., and particularly the U.S. A number of magazine articles and news stories have made reference to this fact (see, for e.g., Daggett, 2009; Huus, 2004; Naumetz, 2005). According to Daggett's (2009) article "Oh Canada! Getting Married Up North," Vancouver "just might be the hottest place for American LGBTs to get married these days." Findings from my interview with queer wedding planner Darryl Persello of *Two Dears and a Queer* as well as informal conversations with wedding vendors at the "Indie I Do" wedding show confirm these claims. I have elected to exclude from my sample couples that are not residents of Vancouver because the "destination wedding" phenomenon is a separate topic of its own. My research focus is on 'ordinary' queer weddings in Vancouver, and it is therefore crucial that my sample is of 'ordinary' Vancouver residents, and not people who have come to Vancouver specifically to get married.

This is a study of queer weddings and the queer wedding industry in Vancouver in 2010-2011, and I make no claims that my results can be generalized to other geographical or historical contexts. This however does not diminish the significance of this research; my findings speak to overarching experiences of queer couples. Results from my study both support and trouble previous findings on queer weddings. In sum, this research provides important groundwork and illuminates new directions for further research on queer weddings in Vancouver and in other contexts.

### **3.8: Data Analysis**

The twelve couple interviews were audio recorded and transcribed verbatim into a Microsoft Word document. Upon completion of the transcripts, I conducted a two-phase coding procedure to identify emerging themes. In the first phase, open coding, I listened to the audio recordings and read the transcripts line-by-line, minutely and in an unrestricted manner. I was guided by the tenet suggested by Strauss (1987, p. 28) to “believe everything and believe nothing” while undertaking open coding. I generated a list of themes as they emerged from the transcripts, and elaborated on these themes by writing frequent theoretical memos. I reviewed these materials to develop theoretical connections and link analytic themes, and then generated a consolidated list of themes. Using this consolidated list, I created a thematic chart, which served to reduce the amount of material and facilitate the descriptive and associative analyses.

In phase two, focused coding, I subjected the transcripts to a fine-grained analysis based on the themes that I had identified as of particular interest (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 1995). I created an initial coding schema using Microsoft Excel, which allowed me to organize all of the interview data according to the focused list of themes. While I was looking out for themes common among all of the interviews, I was also highly attuned to inconsistencies and contradictions both within and between them. I also created a separate Excel spreadsheet to keep track of the characteristics of my participants and their weddings.

### **3.9: Conclusion**

In summary, my research methods were carefully designed to help me achieve my three central research objectives: to understand what the wedding signifies for queer couples, to explore the feelings and negotiations that queer couples navigate when they plan and have a wedding, and to examine the attributes and dynamics of the queer wedding industry in Vancouver. In accordance with Dorothy Smith's practice of regarding participants as 'knowers' and as experts in their own experiences (1987), my methodological approach begins from and continually foregrounds the standpoint of my interview narrators. Using in-depth qualitative interviews and participant observation, I investigate the decision-making and labor practices involved in planning and hosting a queer wedding. As well, I examine how couples negotiate feelings and relationships before, during, and after the wedding. I explore these practices to illuminate how queer weddings both support and challenge the institution of marriage.

I must reiterate that this is a small-scale study with a number of limitations. Nonetheless, this research provides important groundwork and suggests new avenues for future research on queer weddings. Furthermore, every study is part of a larger story. My results speak to overarching experiences of queer people, and help to expand our understanding of queer lives, relationships, and 'family' in the early 21<sup>st</sup> century.

## **Chapter 4: Planning the Wedding**

### **4.1: Introduction**

This study on queer weddings would be incomplete without considering the decision-making processes that my respondents went through during the early stages of wedding planning. Wedding planning was a highly reflective time for these couples and the choices they ultimately made provide some important insights into their values and beliefs. The challenges that couples faced during the early stages of wedding planning, such as resistance from family, also shed light on some of the ways that queer weddings may be unique from their heterosexual counterparts. Ultimately, the wedding planning experience was different for each couple, and a range of personal, political, legal, and social factors motivated every decision along the way.

### **4.2: “Why Thee Wed?”: Motivating Factors**

When I asked couples what motivated them to get married and to have a wedding, an extremely diverse range of responses were presented. A few couples said what one might expect from any couple getting married, heterosexual or queer: they decided to get married because they wanted to enter into a deeper level of commitment with one another, and to declare that commitment in front of friends and family. As an example, Brad and Marc said that love and commitment were their principal motivators:

**Sharon:** What would you say were your primary motivating factors for getting married?

**Marc:** Love.

**Brad:** Mm hmm.

**Marc:** Yeah. I really don't think there's any other--I mean it was love and commitment, basically. Financially, we already shared everything together, legally pretty much everything together. I mean we bought a condo together, we bought a car together [laughs]. It was really nothing more than just full-on commitments and to show our love in front of our friends and family. And an excuse to go to Mexico [laughs.]

**Brad:** Yeah, it's just showing commitment to each other. And to your family and friends. I think that was for us the main thing.

It is important to note that in this example, I asked the question, "What were your primary motivating factors for getting *married*?" as opposed to "What were your primary motivating factors for *having a wedding*?" In all interviews, I was deliberate about asking both of these questions, but asking them separately to emphasize the fact that marriage and weddings cannot be reduced to one another (Freeman, 2002). Still, all of the couples conflated marriage and weddings throughout their interviews, reminding us of how inextricably tied the cultural ritual is to the state institution (Bourdieu, 1991). When I asked Brad and Marc if they could comment on how they view the relationship between marriage and weddings, they explained that for them, the two go hand-in-hand. They said that they would not have considered getting married without having a wedding, as Brad shared:

And I don't think there was ever a question that we would do it in private. I think in our minds it was always going to be a public thing because that seemed to be a big factor, showing our love and commitment to one another in front of everybody. That's--I think all along that was a major reason. As soon as he proposed I started imagining some sort of public thing, yeah. Not just eloping or anything like that.

The majority of couples I interviewed shared this sentiment. In fact, 9 of the 12 couples I interviewed said that they never considered getting married without having a wedding. The other 3 said that they had considered getting married privately, but after

thinking things over they realized they really wanted to go through the wedding ritual and to share it with the people they love. Simon and Darren expressed that having a wedding and celebrating with family and friends is integral to their understanding of what getting married means:

**Sharon:** And would either of you, or had either of you ever considered getting married--legally married--but without having a wedding?

**Darren:** No [laughs.]

**Simon:** I don't think so. You know, I don't think so. It's interesting that you bring that up because one of our friends said to us when we first announced that we were engaged, "Why don't you just go and elope?" And I was actually somewhat offended by that because I thought that's actually demeaning this whole process that we have decided to do. We have decided to, you know, announce our intentions to get married but also to have a celebration of this. You know, and so I thought, "Elope?" You know it just seemed like it--it cheapened what we were trying to do.

**Darren:** I'm just thinking how some people--couples--don't get married cause they say it's just a piece of paper. But it's not just a piece of paper for us; it's the *act* of declaring our love and our commitment to each other. So, we want to do that publicly. And we want to create a celebration for all of our friends and family and ourselves, as well.

For some participants, the wedding served as an opportunity to build or renew a sense of connection with their family of origin<sup>14</sup>. Stix and Twiggs explained how the wedding fulfilled this purpose for them:

**Stix:** Our straight family members, it might be hard for them to be able to relate to our relationship, but in having that rite of passage then, like they are able to relate to our relationship, because they have also had that same thing, so it's like a point of connection between family members.

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<sup>14</sup> I use the term "family of origin" to signify the family that one grew up in. This may or may not be one's biological family. In queer studies, a significant distinction is drawn between "family of origin" and "family of choice." See Weston, K. (1991). *Families we choose: Lesbians, gays, kinship*. New York: Columbia University Press.

**Twiggs:** Oh, I like the way you put that. And it's, so we can relate to them but then we're also validated by them being able to relate to us, or validated in them seeing us--acknowledging our relationship.

Later in the interview, when I asked Stix and Twiggs the very straightforward question, "What is a wedding for?" they again discussed that it's about building connections with families of origin. This calls to mind the theory that rituals, or rites of passage, can function as a means to build or renew unity in social groups (Lewin, 1998).

**Stix:** Yeah. But if you think about it, like a wedding is a ritual, and you do rituals in order to feel a certain way, right? And so I feel like--yeah, you do rituals to feel a certain way, that if like you're grieving it's just a grieving ritual, you do it to feel better, and you feel like it's a--

**Twiggs:** A process for--

**Stix:** Weddings are to feel connected and close to your family and to kind of build a family--a way to build a family.

Like Stix and Twiggs, Jackie and Renée emphasized that their wedding was a means to build connections with families of origin. They said they decided to incorporate both Indian and Western traditions into their wedding ceremony in order to bring the two cultures together and to make the wedding "as colorful and vibrant as possible." Jackie shared that the wedding attracted a lot of attention from Vancouver's East Indian queer community:

Okay. For the Indian style, even though our parents are from--like my family, my mom and her sister and their families are from Fiji. If I looked at their--like the kids my age and the second--I guess you call it second generation, right? I looked at it through there and they all had--you know my side of the family all had [Western] style weddings, right? My cousin in the States had a total Indian wedding. I was like, why not take the two and put it together and create a new style of wedding, right? Take two cultures into one. A) that opens up my culture to their side of the family and B) my mom would *love* to wear a wedding, you know, sari on a wedding day. For her *own* kids. So that's why I chose it like that. I

didn't just look at it just from my and Rosie's purpose. As well I looked at it as--you know to honor my mom and her ethnic ways, as well. *And* a same-sex marriage. I'll tell you this, though. When we told--when people found out about our marriage like that, we had a brown community wanting to interview us. Cause that's never happened before--never been done...once they found out we were doing it, we inspired them to break out of their shell. And to show their families that it's okay to have same-sex marriages. So we were supposed to do an interview, but I guess timing we had so much on our plate we couldn't even get to that. It's breaking barriers.

**Renée:** ... You know just bringing that Indian culture in made a lot of people realize and actually confront us about, "Wow, not only are you guys gay and you got married, but also you embraced your backgrounds. Plus, your *parents* were there?"

While love, commitment, and connection with family were of course important motivators for all of the couples I interviewed, they were by no means the only factors that came into play. Couples mentioned a host of additional legal, political, and social reasons why they decided to get married and have a wedding. One of these reasons, and a very important one indeed, was immigration. For 3 of the 12 couples, getting married and having a wedding was not only something that they wanted to do, but something that they also *needed* to do in order to be together for the long term. One couple, Akal and Cevdet shared their story:

**Akal:** I'd say about six months we were together. Six to seven months we were together before we started having conversations about marriage. Yeah.

**Sharon:** And how did you decide to get married?

**Akal:** How?

**Sharon:** Yeah. How? So what, you know, was there a discussion about it? Or were there certain factors that contributed to your decision?

**Akal:** Well, yeah. I mean, there were a lot of things that were kind of going on. Things that we had kind of put to the side because we didn't



really know what was going to happen in the future. We mainly decided to get married now because we don't want to be separated because we love each other and his visa was coming up so [trails off].

**Sharon:** Because you were on a--

**Cevdet:** I was like--

**Sharon:** Temporary?

**Cevdet:** Exactly, study and work permit, yeah.

**Akal:** So we talked about it and we decided that, you know what, let's do it.

Another participant, Wayne, explained that getting married is the only way to enable his partner, Marek, to stay and work in Canada for an extended period of time. Wayne has ambivalent feelings about marriage, however, and regrets the fact that marriage is the only option available to them if they want to build a life together:

**Wayne:** It's a bit different for our case because he's not Canadian and he's not here on a work permit or anything like that. And if we want to really stay together we kind of have to get married. Because otherwise you know I can go to Europe but I can only stay for three months without any work permit. And he can stay for six months here, but then he cannot work and that's not really feasible for this relationship either. So, yeah. Marriage, to me, is something more than just, you know, for immigration purposes because if anything happens to me, I want to know that he's the next person in, you know, in line I guess, to handle my affairs. Or to be able to visit me in the hospital or stuff like that. We can travel together or you know, be a couple. And also marriage is one of those things that, I wouldn't say denied to me but you know not really allowed in Malaysia, like gay marriage. And so for me, it's something... I'm here, I have this opportunity, I'm with someone I really love, so I don't see what the problem is. But that being said I still don't agree how the state is trying to sanction giving privileges over people who are married versus people who are not married. But you know, nothing is perfect I think, so. I guess--I wish I had more choices sometimes. In regards to marriage.

Another couple, Daniel and Dinho, explained that immigration played a critical role not only in their decision to get married, but also to have a wedding:

**Daniel:** Well, we needed to--I mean we could have just gone to the Justice of the Peace, which would have been really easy, but we wanted to have friends and family be part of it, so that's why we decided to plan to have a wedding--and also because we needed to have, for immigration purposes we needed it as well because it was more--it solidified our marriage plans to the government that okay, this is legitimate, they're not just doing this so this, you know, so that he can become a Canadian kind-of-thing. We really do love each other and we wanted our family and friends, the ones who could make it, to be a part of it so it was small, but it was just a backyard wedding, but it was enough to, so that the people who are important and close to us in our lives were there or were there by, you know, Skype from Brazil to observe and be part of it, you know, and so.

The fact that immigration was the principal motivating factor for marriage for one fourth of the couples that I interviewed serves as an important reminder that marriage is about much more than love and commitment. Marriage is a legal relationship status conferred by the state; a status that comes with a range of rights and responsibilities, including rights to immigration and (eventual) citizenship. That immigration was such a salient theme in this study also highlights the geographical specificity of Vancouver as an increasingly popular destination for immigrants from all over the world (Hansen, 2010) and particularly as a destination for queer migrants.<sup>15</sup>

My respondents' accounts indicate that they are acutely aware of the fact that queer marriage is illegal in the vast majority of countries in the world. Nearly all of my participants remarked that they feel very lucky to have the right to marry here in Canada. Many believe that it is important to use that right and to normalize queer marriage. For instance, Jamie and Karen explained:

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<sup>15</sup> For more information, see D. Kojima, *Migrant intimacies: Queer migrations and technologies of imagination in the Asia Pacific world*. See also E. Luibhéid, *Sexuality, migration, and the shifting line between legal and illegal status*.

**Karen:** And I just feel like because we live in Canada and we're allowed to get married; we should take advantage of that right, and like--

**Jamie:** Show that it's normal.

**Karen:** Yeah, and show like our normal relationship and our lasting relationship and I just feel like we're so lucky to have that right. And there's so many people who would love to get married and they're not allowed, which is such bullshit! I just felt like we're so lucky, like let's take advantage of it.

Similarly, Simon explained that he values having the right to marry in Canada.

He explained that the experience of living in the U.S. for 8 years heightened his awareness of the issue and made him realize how important it is:

**Simon:** I guess, especially with what was going on--has been going on--in the United States, you know the whole constitutional amendments that are taking place across the States, it kind of makes you--

**Darren:** The Defense of Marriage Act and all of that.

**Simon:** Yeah, it's very defensive down there, I guess, you know? And it just felt like an attack. So when I came up to Canada, when I came back to Canada to a place where I wasn't under attack for it, and the fact that it's available here--it just made me, maybe made me value it more, I guess. The fact that we had it here but in--our nearest neighbor to the South they were still fighting in a civil rights battle for it.

Later in the interview, Simon added that one of his motivations behind getting married and having a wedding is to legitimize and normalize queer marriage:

**Sharon:** And how about you, Simon? Anything to add about your motivations for wedding?

**Simon:** Yeah, I mean at first it was all about--not at first but it *is* about sort of making that commitment to Darren and saying that we want to spend the rest of our lives together. And be in a committed relationship. But I've found that as we have gone through this that there's even more--there's other motivating factors, as well, that have kind of cropped up. And part of it is societal, as well, in that same-sex marriage just recently came about. And I feel that as people who are participating in that it's

important for us to legitimize same-sex marriage as well in society. Because it is fairly new and even from talking to my parents, they're--they don't--the strange thing is that it's legal in Canada but a lot of my straight friends that I invited said, "Oh, we didn't even know that you could get married. We didn't know that marriage was legal in Canada for gays." And we've had it for so long!

As my interview narrators' accounts demonstrate, their motivations for getting married and having a wedding are myriad. Some marry for personal reasons such as a desire to make a lifelong commitment or to build connections with family. Some are motivated by political goals such as a desire to legitimize queer relationships and queer marriage. For others, marriage affords the opportunity to live in the same country. Most couples are motivated by several of these factors. If one conclusion can be drawn, it is that the assimilation/subversion debate does not adequately describe the complex range of factors that compel queer couples to wed.

#### **4.3: "Popping the Question": The Engagement Proposal**

According to Schweingruber, Anahita, and Berns (2004), the engagement proposal is one of the world's best-known rituals. They argue that the engagement proposal should be understood as a series of performances that heterosexual couples use to communicate to one another and to their friends and family that they plan to marry. When I began this research, I was curious to find out whether or not my participants had taken up this pre-wedding ritual, and if so, how? As it turns out, 11 of the 12 couples I interviewed did have a proposal of some shape or form. Some proposals were planned and others impromptu; some were elaborate and some simple. While several couples

included a ring, the majority did not.<sup>16</sup>

Considering that the “traditional” engagement proposal script is shaped by gendered and (hetero)sexualized power dynamics, such as the man as proposer, (Schweingruber et al., 2004), it is useful to examine how queer couples have adopted and adapted these scripts for their own purposes. Jackie and Renée shared their proposal story:

**Renée:** I ended up proposing to her and then she lied to her family and told them that she had proposed to me. [Laughing.]

**Jackie:** I wear the pants [laughs.] That’s all I’m gonna say.

**Renée:** I went out--she had been talking about it--and I went out and I was like, you know what? Okay, this is it, I’m gonna do it. And this was before we actually decided we were gonna get married in December, or in January. We hadn’t even talked about it yet. And I went out and I bought her a ring. And I had the ring for probably about a month. And I couldn’t work up the courage to do it. And she was at work one night and I was like okay, you know what? I gotta do this...

Renée shared the details of how the proposal unfolded, and then Jackie explained why the proposal took her by surprise:

**Jackie:** Well, I thought that I was gonna do it, you know? I thought it was my job. So it was kinda awkward when she did it. I felt--cause like in a relationship, my thinking is more towards masculine side of thinking and Rosie, even though she probably is secretly more masculine than me, because I’m a big princess--but I thought I would be the one asking and so when she just presented it to me without saying anything I was like, “Hmm. Okay. Alright.” At work I was like, “Look guys, I got a ring.”

**Renée:** [Laughing.]

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<sup>16</sup> This finding supports previous research on queer commitment ceremonies in the U.S., where it was found that couples typically do not have engagement rings. This fact may be one reason that overall spending on these ceremonies is less than their heterosexual counterparts (see, for example, Otnes and Pleck, 2003).

Another participant, Akal, explained that his proposal was completely spontaneous:

**Akal:** Okay. So we had already decided that we were going to do it, and it just happened very, very, impromptu. We were over at our friend's place, and we were sitting there talking about the marriage, and getting all excited, and then I took her to the side and I said, "Do you think it would be a good idea if I proposed to him on the patio right now?" So she's like, "Okay, okay, do it! Do it!" So then, you know, her and her partner, they're like scrambling, they're getting the patio all ready, they're cleaning it up, putting some candles and everything on there. And then all of a sudden, they're like, "Okay, we're just going to take the dog out for a walk" and then Cevdet is like, "Oh, let's go with them!" and I'm like, "No." [laughs]. So, they left and then I was waiting outside the patio, and then he came outside, and then I proposed to him.

**Sharon:** Impromptu? You hadn't planned it.

**Akal:** I had not planned it. I just decided to do it right at that evening. And I didn't have a ring or anything. But I just decided that--

**Cevdet:** He made me cry.

**Akal:** Yeah, I made him cry. [Laughs].

**Cevdet:** [Laughs].

Schweingruber et al. (2004) asserted that among heterosexual couples, the engagement "proposal" "is actually a misnomer, because no new proposal is put forward" (p. 143). My findings suggest this holds true for queer couples, as well. Although some of my participants "proposed" spontaneously, nearly all couples reported that they had already discussed their intentions to get married before the "proposal" was made.

#### **4.4: Announcing the Engagement**

After hearing their proposal stories, I asked couples to tell me about the process of announcing the engagement to their family and friends, and how they reacted to the news.

Although there was a great deal of variety in these accounts, some general trends are worth noting. Most participants said that their heterosexual friends (particularly heterosexual *female* friends) reacted with elation. Queer friends were typically supportive, but their responses varied, and were rarely dramatic.

Participants also had a wide variety of experiences with announcing the engagement to their families of origin. All 24 participants shared that there is at least one person in their extended family whom they did not tell about the marriage or the wedding. Many expressed that telling their parents was the most difficult, and 5 participants said that they have not yet told at least one of their parents. Renée, for example, said that she hadn't yet told her father about the wedding, but was planning to do so in the near future:

**Renée:** My father doesn't even know we're married [laughs.] He met her for the first time in the summer and we mentioned about getting married or something and he was like, "There's no point in doing that. Why would you go and do something like that?" But I mean my father is also 57 and has never been married a day in his life [laughs.] So, I don't know, we were thinking about breaking the news to him over a Christmas card this year [laughs.]

**Sharon:** So, if I understand correctly, you told him that you were thinking about it [getting married], but then didn't tell him when you did it?

**Jackie:** Well, we told him we were thinking about it and he didn't really agree upon it. He doesn't even know who I am, like, he's never made the initiative of--I had a beer with him, talked about like fishing and stuff that he would like, to break that barrier. But, he wasn't really "go-get-er" about it, so we haven't told him.

Other participants, such as Darren, shared that they told their parents shortly after the engagement proposal, although it wasn't easy to do:

**Darren:** And I told my parents about a week later. I think it was a week later. And it was a little bit difficult. But I had dinner with them and I

waited until the very end, [laughs] and then I just said, “I have something to tell you.” And my mother said, “You’re not getting married, are you?” [Laughs.] And I said, “Well actually, I am.” “Oh!” So she was a little bit surprised. My dad said nothing. But I could see that he was getting a little bit teary-eyed. But I *think* it was out of [pause] happiness? For me. My mother emailed me the next day saying that she was sorry that she wasn’t more forthcoming in her, you know, support, at that moment. But she was surprised and she comes from the 50’s and she’s still learning how to deal with all this. I was a little bit upset that she wasn’t more forthcoming immediately. But, I was also willing to just--let it, let it ride and let her get used to it. And I knew that she would come around...

Darren’s husband Simon also had a challenging experience telling his parents:

**Sharon:** So, how about you, Simon? After the proposal, did you tell your family right away?

**Simon:** I did. Luckily, I had to fly back to Toronto on business which was quite fortunate--just after the proposal. So, I went out to dinner with my parents, as well, and then I said, “Well, I have a big announcement to make.” And then I told them I was getting married and--and then my mother got this look on her face of *horror* and shock [laughs.] And happiness. It was kind of a mixture of happiness, horror, shock, all mixed into one if you can picture what that would look like [laughs.] And then they kind of just said, “Well, we’re happy for you.” Um. You know. “And as long as you’re happy, blah blah blah.” But then meanwhile my mother called me about a couple weeks later and said, “You know, I’m really having difficulty with this. I’m actually not happy for you.” You know? And, “I don’t know what to do”--and it just brought up all these old feelings of--she said, “You can’t tell anyone that this is happening and blah blah blah.” So then I, ummm, flew out there for business again and I had a long, long discussion with them about it and my father--I talked to my father and I said, “What am I gonna do about mom? She’s clearly not on board.” And he said, “Well, that’s your mother” type thing. But he said, “I’m happy for you. And I’m coming to the wedding.” [Laughs.] So, he said, “I’ll just have to deal with mom.”

As these stories reveal, getting engaged and announcing the engagement to family and friends are experiences of emotional highs and lows for these couples. While they experience feelings of joy and excitement upon first getting engaged, sharing the news with parents evokes a more complex mix of emotions. Darren’s description of his



father's teary-eyes and Simon's description of his mother's horrified/shocked/happy facial expression illustrate quite poignantly that the boundary between pleasure and pain is not always clear.

For some couples, the engagement period was a time of mixed emotions for other reasons, as well. Stix and Twiggs explained that it was challenging because their friends and family, despite good intentions, imposed heteronormative interpretations of the engagement onto them. Because of the constraints of language, it was virtually impossible to articulate alternative/queer understandings of what it means to be "engaged":

**Stix:** Yeah. It was a very strange thing to say "Oh, I'm engaged," like it was like very strange. Like I can totally say "Oh yeah, I'm married and we had a wedding and blah, blah, blah," but it's more like the engagement thing that was much stranger, much stranger to kind of like assimilate into my perception of life, the being engaged and the whole engagement thing was very strange.

**Sharon:** What felt weird about it?

**Stix:** Just that like--proposal, like the, like men proposing to women. Maybe it's very gendered. Being married is not very gendered but being engaged is very gendered. Like you know, the woman typically has like a large diamond and you know, the man is like, you know, is very elaborate in the proposal, but because like gender identity is like much more fluid in queer relationships that I don't really identify as with that type of archetype of the woman being proposed to, do you know what I mean?

**Twiggs:** Or the bride.

**Stix:** Or the bride, yeah, like that was also very strange, was being a bride--that was very strange.

**Twiggs:** That was, yeah.

**Sharon:** Did you use that term?

**Stix:** No. I didn't. My family did though and that was weird, hard to reconcile with. Yeah... Yeah, yeah, totally. Yeah, like being labeled a

bride, and when you've had that kind of gender norm forced on you your entire life, it makes you want to punch them in the face. Like when, if I were to tell somebody "Oh yeah, Twiggs and I are engaged," and they'd be like "Oh, let me see your ring!" and I would have to like stick my hand out and it was such like this--it was this über girlie thing that I had to do because that's how they were making me respond; but it made me feel so like "you're not actually seeing me and you're not actually understanding me," and I wanted to punch them in the face, but I had to do it anyways... You know, I don't identify as the groom and I don't identify as the bride. I identify as somebody who's getting married. And those really heterosexist terms that we're forced to use because we're, you know, we are assimilating this straight kind of institution, they feel very awful for somebody who's battled gender norms for their whole life. And they made me feel very awful, yeah.

The fact that Stix had such a difficult time expressing herself as a subject independent of the classificatory concepts "bride" or "groom" illustrates the immense power that words have to construct social reality (Bourdieu, 1998). If there is no word to describe something, it can be neither expressed nor understood; in essence, it cannot exist. Therefore, in order to be an intelligible subject, Stix had to rely on the language and symbols available to her. The fact that she was forced to respond in a heteronormative way also highlights the pervasiveness and persistence of essentialist conceptions of gender and sexuality.

#### **4.5: Sources of Ideas**

Previous research has shown that the vast majority of heterosexual couples refer to "wedding guides," e.g. bridal magazines and planners to figure out how to plan their wedding. These guides play a crucial role in the wedding industry: Mead (2007) says that bridal magazines have been so constitutive of the wedding industry it's fair to say there would be no industry without them. Couples use these guides to gather ideas for

their weddings, such as what to wear and what type of food to serve, as well as to keep track of all of the tasks they need to complete as the wedding approaches (Blakely, 2007; Currie, 1993). When I began this research, I anticipated that my respondents would also use wedding guides--heterosexual, queer, or both--as sources of ideas and inspiration for their weddings. However, this was not the case: only 3 of the 12 couples I interviewed referred to wedding guides. Unlike many heterosexual brides who want their weddings to match what they see in bridal magazines (Currie, 1993), Wayne shared that looking at these guides actually repelled him from having a "traditional" lavish wedding:

No, I guess I, I looked at bridal books and stuff like that before. But a lot of those are geared towards women. And I do, I like the cakes, like the fondant and the icing and whatever, but a lot of it has to do with like bridal showers and bridesmaids dresses and frilly stuff that might look nice if you're actually getting married to a girl but for me and in a gay wedding it just seems not right, you know? So, I guess inspiration--those bridal magazines actually put me off traditional weddings. After looking at it I've decided I don't want anything complicated, I don't want anything frilly and pastel color and stuff like that.

When Wayne looked through the bridal magazines, he was reminded of the overtly gendered and (hetero)sexualized nature of white weddings, and determined that these sources had little to offer for a gay male wedding. In contrast, Simon and Darren said that heterosexual wedding planning sources have been helpful for them:

**Simon:** Like I think the whole bridal industry is geared toward heterosexual unions, for one thing. So, we've been using a lot of ideas from that. Like we watch this show called *Four Weddings*, on TLC, where they go through four different weddings in one show. And the brides from the four weddings attend the other brides' weddings and then they critique them. And we've--that's been really good. We've been getting a lot of ideas for, like, what makes a wedding flow smoothly.

**Darren:** Um hmm.

**Simon:** From start to finish.

**Darren:** And what doesn't work.

**Simon:** And what doesn't work, yeah. And I guess what we want is we want our guests to feel like they had a really good time; that they enjoyed their experience with us. And we've learned that the food should be good because you don't want anyone to leave a wedding thinking, "Oh, the food was terrible." And the cake should be good. You don't want people to say, "Oh the cake was kind of mediocre." [Laughs.]

**Darren:** And don't leave out the flowers. People expect flowers.

**Sharon:** So the sources that you've consulted so far, are they meeting your needs? Even though they're technically for heterosexual weddings?

**Simon:** Yeah, they're definitely meeting our needs. Yeah, absolutely. I think it would be nice if there was, like I said, a magazine for us, that was specific to us. But then, I wonder what would be different, really. I mean we are following, in a lot of cases, a heterosexual model for how the whole thing is taking place. So the resources have been okay, really.

Rather than using wedding guides, the majority of my participants said that they consulted friends for ideas and recommendations about how to plan their wedding, or simply came up with ideas themselves. All of the couples said that they used the internet to help with certain elements, such as finding a photographer or marriage commissioner. The common sentiment was that wedding guides are simply unnecessary, as Jackie and Renée expressed:

**Sharon:** Did you ever look at any magazines--bridal magazines, wedding magazines, gay wedding books?

**Jackie:** Never. Never even opened it.

**Renée:** I think the only thing I actually looked at was bouquets. And I wasn't sure if I should have a bouquet because my sari is wrapped around me like this so I can't really hold one [laughs]. Anyways, I did look at a bouquet magazine at the flower store and I literally looked at it to get an idea, I went to the art store and made my own bouquet. I like duplicated it. And that bouquet is still sitting in the salon, on the bookshelf where I made it and it hasn't left. I didn't even use it at the wedding.

**Jackie:** Yeah, you didn't.

**Renée:** Nope.

**Jackie:** No, I think sometimes people think of weddings as like [makes explosion sound] we need this, we need this, we need that. You know, like--you don't need it. You can do with what you have.

The belief that a wedding is the most important day of a person's life, or that a wedding must be perfect down to the last detail, often go unquestioned and unchallenged.

Ingraham (2008) explains:

In order for the wedding industry to be "recession-proof"--that is, that people will pay for a wedding no matter what--it must rely on a very powerful meaning-making apparatus guaranteeing our compliance and consent to participate. This *wedding-ideological complex* is made up of those sites in American popular culture--children's toys, wedding announcements, advertising, film, internet, television, bridal magazines, jokes, cartoons, music--that *work as an ensemble in creating many taken-for-granted beliefs, values, and assumptions within social texts and practices about weddings* (p. 119, emphasis in original)

As Ingraham describes, the wedding-ideological complex is an extremely powerful apparatus. The sites that make up this complex are ubiquitous, and the messages they convey are so embedded in popular discourse that they become taken-for-granted beliefs, or simply "what is." It is therefore quite remarkable that so many of my respondents were not only highly aware of the wedding-ideological complex, but also actively resisted it.

#### 4.6: Primary Considerations: Keeping it Simple

When I asked couples about their primary considerations in their wedding plans, almost without exception the response was that they wanted to keep it simple. Wayne and Marek explained:

**Wayne:** I guess my thinking is if we are gonna have a marriage, like [we'll] go to a, what did you call it, a marriage commissioner, and then we'll have a few friends and after that maybe take them out to a restaurant, just to have a nice meal together. I don't want people to say, "Oh this is the groom and this is the bride, you know, and give us cake in the restaurant and everybody toasting us--no--"

**Marek:** No, no.

**Wayne:** That's kind of cheesy. No. I mean, we want it simple. I don't want to even have to book a table somewhere in a fancy restaurant. It could be just somewhere with a few friends. I mean, budget is another thing. We don't want to spend like \$10,000 or, you know some people go up to \$100,000 on a wedding and marriage. I mean, I think we are a bit practical now. Some people have fantasy weddings. Maybe he [Marek] used to, but I guess we are not into that anymore. So, the wedding part of the marriage will be just a simple restaurant somewhere.

Similarly, Karen and Jamie explained that they wanted to keep cost and stress to a minimum:

**Sharon:** What factors were important to you in deciding what type of wedding to have? Or, in other words, what were your primary considerations--

**Karen:** Money.

**Jamie:** Money and stress.

**Karen:** Yeah, we just didn't—we didn't want to spend a whole ton of money on one day to like please all these other people. Like we just really wanted it to be about us, and not a ton of money and just have it really simple. Like we wanted people to be comfortable; like come and hang out and be comfortable and everyone have a good time.

The desire for the wedding to be “about us” was echoed by a number of couples. Akal and Cevdet, for instance, reflected that they did not want their wedding to be like “traditional” weddings they had been to:

**Akal:** ... I think, for myself, a lot of it is just because growing up going to a lot of Indian weddings, a lot of it tends to happen for show. You know, weddings in our culture, they’re very traditional, there’s a lot of different ceremonies and, you know, not to take away from them but a lot of people they just go because they have to go, because they should go. Nobody ever questions whether they want to do this.

**Cevdet:** Let’s say, even though you don’t want to do that, but your parents are going to say, “Hey, you know, our wedding was like this” or “Your uncle’s wedding was like this so you should do the same.” It’s the same culture in Turkey.

**Akal:** Exactly. So we both kind of decided that we didn’t want our wedding to be like that. We wanted it to be like *we* wanted and the people that were going to be there were going to be there to celebrate *us* . . . Obviously they’re a part of it, but it’s not really about them. It’s about us.

Jackie and Renée expressed that too many couples get caught up in the idea of having a “big fanatic” wedding, and end up in financial trouble because of it. They believe that it is important to be realistic and to remember that the wedding is only one day:

**Jackie:** You gotta be creative when it comes to marriages. You don’t have to--I know people watch Slice TV and see all these big fanatic weddings, you know?

**Renée:** Yeah but the thing is with our wedding, it was under \$8,000. Our whole wedding. And people that came to our wedding said it was one of the nicest weddings they’d ever been to. The most common thing about people actually breaking up within the first five years of their marriage is financial problems. And, to us, it wasn’t really that important to, you know, show everybody what we have--like we could if we wanted to. But, to us, it didn’t make any sense to have a \$20,000, \$30,000 wedding. Really, for one day, what’s the point in that? So we kind of gave ourselves a budget. You know, I was like, “Okay, \$10,000, the max.” That was like, the max. And we weren’t gonna go past that. If we got

near it, then we would just cut back. Who cares, right? Realistically, it's one day. And I'm pretty sure people won't remember, you know, the bows on the back of the chairs.

**Jackie:** Yeah.

**Renée:** That will cost you \$500. I'm like, "No."

**Jackie:** Yeah. You gotta be realistic, too, right?

**Renée:** And so we didn't want to be like, "Well, we just got married and now we're in this huge financial--

**Jackie:** Debt.

**Renée:** Debt. Over a day. We weren't gonna do that. So, you know, we sat down and we thought, "What is important to us? What parts of the traditional way do we want to keep? And what we want--like what really meant--made us feel like, okay this is our wedding. And this is what we want." And everything else we kind of just threw it out. We just made a list: Okay, this is what we want, this is what we *don't* want, we don't *need* that, we do need this. And so that's pretty much how we went through the whole thing.

Renée's reference to the fact that many newlyweds struggle with their finances is well supported by the literature. Currie (1993) found that many participants in her study began married life in debt, and Ingraham (2008) explains that although the level of debt accrued by newlyweds has received some media attention, this has had little effect on consumption patterns. It is therefore quite remarkable that couples in my study spent an average of \$7,867 CAD on their weddings,<sup>17</sup> which is significantly less than the Canadian average of \$30,000 CAD (Gazze, 2010).

In her study in the U.K., Smart (2008) found that her participants continually used heterosexual weddings as a frame of reference, and she suggests that this signifies

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<sup>17</sup> During interviews, I asked post-wedding couples how much they spent on their wedding in total, excluding the honeymoon. Pre-wedding couples were asked to project what the total cost would be. In cases where the couple indicated a range, I took the average. The majority of couples knew the exact amount they had spent, because they had kept careful accounts of their spending.



resistance to co-optation and normalization. Most of my participants, however, did not set themselves against heterosexual weddings necessarily, but rather against commercialized, lavish weddings. When they explained their primary considerations in planning their weddings, they made reference to other weddings they had been to in order to explain what they did not want. They described large weddings with hundreds of guests, expensive food and drinks, and opulent decorations, indicating that these lavish affairs were the antithesis of the wedding that they desired. This common trope implies resistance to the hegemonic, capitalistic discourses that comprise the wedding-ideological complex (Ingraham, 2008).

#### **4.7: Expectations and Scripts**

One point that all 12 couples continually raised is that queer weddings are different from heterosexual weddings because there is no particular model to follow. They expressed that they felt a sense of freedom from the scripts that marshal the “traditional” heterosexual wedding. Some participants, such as Magda and Patsy, expressed that one reason they had this freedom was because they were not concerned about meeting their parents’ expectations:

**Magda:** ... Like if you’re a straight couple there’s a certain way how a wedding has to be and not many break that habit because that’s what your parents want for you. If you’re gay you don’t have that pattern, you don’t have that traditional kind of picture of the wedding, how it’s supposed to be, so you can do whatever you want to do.

**Patsy:** That’s true.

**Magda:** Without upsetting somebody more than they might be already. You probably, your parents are probably already kind of “grrr” about the fact that you’re getting married, or they totally dig it, whatever you know. So you’re free to do what you want to do. In one way I would think that’s

a big benefit for us, because a lot of straight couples don't get to choose that freely without upsetting their parents, yeah.

Brad and Marc also felt a sense of freedom from expectations and scripts. They explained that the traditional wedding rituals that many people include without a second thought are certainly not mandatory. Rather, these rituals can be re-interpreted, adapted, modernized, or even jettisoned:

**Marc:** ... I mean there's certain things obviously that you're just--they're kind of just drilled into your head, like you have to have this and this and this for a wedding, and then I think a lot of times during the process of planning it we kind of just thought, we don't have to stick to any one idea, like this is *our* event, this is the way that *we're* interpreting it, and you know, so we just kind of made it up as we went along...

**Brad:** And with the rings actually we went and bought some at a jewelry store here, and, just cause we felt like we *had* to, like, that's just an expectation or that's just part of a wedding is to like, exchange rings. And then after a week we like tested them and wore them and we really didn't like them and we thought they were ugly and they just weren't us at all, and we actually returned them, and just like totally abandoned that whole idea. And that's when we realized--that was a key moment when we were like, "We can totally do what we want." And I remember thinking that's kind of what's neat about a gay wedding is that I think in some ways you're less restricted to the scripts--

**Marc:** There's not really many expectations--

**Brad:** There's not too many expectations at that point anyways on what they look like. Whereas I see in other straight friends getting married, there's so much pressure from like family to incorporate these pieces in even if they don't really want them. And that would be hard. But we never really--except for my mom wanting [us to wear] suits--never really had a lot of pressure to have those.

Some respondents expressed that this freedom from expectations compels queer couples to be conscious about the choices they make when planning their ceremonies.

Sandra for instance, put it this way:

You know what I think? I think when you have a queer wedding, you have to, like you're forced to think about these things, you know what I mean? If you're having a straight wedding, like, some people make the choice to think about, "How are we going to do this?" but I think a lot of people, you just like, there is a standard format for you to just follow, right. If you're not really that interested in thinking about it, you don't really have to think about it and make decisions. But if you're having a queer wedding, there isn't a standard format for you to follow... So yeah, it forces you to make those decisions consciously rather than just kind of do what is normally done.

Another couple, Sophia and Claudia, shared a similar perspective. For them, planning the wedding brought about a great sense of purpose, and a dedication to intentionality:

**Claudia:** I think also that another way in which I was aware that I was planning a queer wedding was that I really labored hard – we both labored hard always to answer the question: Why? So that everything that was happening in the day, when our friends were assembled with us, was meaningful, and had integrity with the original idea and intention.

**Sophia:** Do you think that is different than what any person getting married would do?

**Claudia:** Yes, because [with heterosexual marriages] the answer can be always, well, "Because everybody does it" or "Because they want to have a family."

**Sophia:** So what you're saying is, because there's no assumption that as a queer couple, that you would marry, then there's no assumption about how you should marry.

**Claudia:** Yeah, and there's no assumption about why you're marrying.

**Sophia:** So there's both freedom but more of a call in that sense, to think about every element, about whether it should be in or not, and what has meaning.

**Claudia:** I mean, it was all about intentionality, where I would think that a straight couple can just ride along on conventionality.

#### **4.8: Conclusion**

As this chapter has shown, planning a wedding is a time of much thinking, reflection, and decision-making. First, there is the decision to get married in the first place. Among the couples I interviewed, there were myriad personal, political, and social factors that motivated this decision. But of course, this is only the first of many decisions to be made along the way. The couples I interviewed reflected that they were particularly conscious in their decision-making because there is no particular model to follow when planning a queer wedding, so they were free to interpret the wedding ritual in their own ways, and to therefore have a wedding that reflected their own values and desires. This sense of freedom was heightened by the fact that they did not feel compelled to meet their parents' expectations. Most respondents were critical of the discourses that make up the wedding-ideological complex (Ingraham, 2008) and resisted those discourses by using their own ideas to plan their wedding rather than the "must-haves" outlined in mainstream wedding guides. In the next chapter, I discuss the labor that is involved in producing a wedding and describe the ways that my respondents relied on each other and their chosen family in this process. I also illustrate some of the challenges that my respondents faced when dealing with the (hetero)wedding industry.

## **Chapter 5: Wedding Labor**

### **5.1: Introduction**

Producing a wedding requires work. Creating a guest list, sending invitations, choosing an outfit, finding a wedding officiant, and selecting a venue are just a few of the tasks that couples need to complete in preparation for their wedding day. Because my respondents' weddings ranged from a simple gathering in a park to a destination wedding in Mexico and everything in-between, it is perhaps unsurprising that the amount of work involved was equally varied. Some couples started planning their wedding less than one month in advance, and others began about 14 months ahead of time. In general, couples agreed that wedding planning is time-consuming, but also fun and rewarding. Several common themes about wedding labor emerged during the interviews, as I will discuss below.

### **5.2: Do-It-Yourself Weddings**

All of the couples I interviewed planned their weddings almost entirely on their own. Most had significant help from friends and some had help from family, but with only one exception, couples in my study did not employ the services of a professional wedding planner.<sup>18</sup> This is quite an interesting finding when we consider that nearly all of my participants work full-time, and therefore had very little free time available to carry out the wide variety of tasks necessary to produce a wedding. It is also interesting when considered in light of Blakely's (2007) finding that the wedding planning industry is expanding, due to the increasing cost and opulence of weddings and the outsourcing of

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<sup>18</sup> One couple hired a planner to carry out the logistics of their ceremony and reception in Mexico. However, this couple still carried out the majority of wedding planning work themselves.

family functions to the private sector. There is no shortage of wedding planners in Vancouver. In fact, the “gay community directory” on [gayvancouver.net](http://gayvancouver.net) provides links to 15 wedding planners who serve the “burgeoning same-sex marriage market.” The couples in my study, however, opted not to use them. When I asked couples why not, they indicated that cost was the main reason:

**Claudia:** Well, cost was a consideration. It wasn't as if money was no object. We didn't hire a wedding event planner even though I'm sure that there are many very polished practitioners in that area and we probably would have been delighted with the outcome in many cases, but it just made more sense to us to make the arrangements personally. It was very time consuming.

Some added that they couldn't afford to hire a planner, but also didn't need one:

**Daniel:** Why not? Because we couldn't afford it, the bottom line. Thought about it, I thought about it but it's just, we just didn't have, weren't able to afford that. We didn't really need it actually.

**Jackie:** Like people think, “Hey, I need to get a wedding planner.” But if you just take the time and be creative about it, you can save so much money, you know doing it differently.

Many couples found creative ways to save money by “doing it differently.” For example, several couples made their own table centerpieces, some made their own invitations, and others cooked food for their guests rather than hiring a caterer. They reported that doing these things on their own was fun, rewarding, and a great way to incorporate their own style into the wedding. By doing their wedding preparations on their own, couples in my study resisted the pervasive discourse that professional help is needed to plan a wedding (Blakely, 2007).

### 5.3: (Un)Gendered and (Un)Divided Wedding Labor

When I asked couples how they divided up their wedding planning tasks, the most frequent response was simple: they didn't! All of the couples I interviewed explained that rather than dividing the labor, they completed their wedding work cooperatively and collaboratively:

**Sharon:** And in terms of planning, how did you guys divide up tasks between the two of you?

**Marc:** We did pretty much everything together, actually. And I think that's why we ended up with what we--we actually, well, we had pretty much the same views on everything. So you really see that--

**Brad:** We'd get frustrated with little details and then be like, "This is such a little detail. Let's just"--you know, that was often the process. We agreed on the big things--

**Marc:** But we usually planned to sit down together and look at stuff together and it was just, you know, it's sitting on the couch with a laptop; it's not like, hard. So I'd say probably 99% of it we did together.

Simon and Darren had a similar response:

**Darren:** Hmm. Well, we aren't dividing up the tasks. Simon's keeping track in the project planner of all the various tasks--

**Simon:** Right.

**Darren:** And who's doing them.

**Simon:** We've really been doing everything together so far--

**Darren:** Yeah.

**Simon:** You know?

**Darren:** It's been quite mutual.

Several couples made reference to the fact that planning collaboratively is not typical of heterosexual weddings (Blakely, 2007; Currie, 1993; Sniezek, 2005). They mentioned, for example, that among heterosexual couples they know, typically the bride takes on the bulk of wedding planning:

**Twiggs:** We know another couple who just got married, and one of them was saying how she did all the work and her partner didn't, he didn't do anything, which is very typical, I think, you know. We didn't have that; we were both totally involved in everything.

**Marc:** Cause I think again some of our straight friends that are getting married now it's like--it's the female doing it, and the guy is just like, "Yeah, whatever you want, honey." And you know it's just so funny whereas we totally did it together...

Jamie had a very interesting perspective on this distinction because she had been engaged to a man a few years prior to meeting her wife, Karen. She explained that the planning work with Karen was collaborative whereas for the first wedding she was "on her own":

**Sharon:** And in planning the wedding, how did you guys divide the tasks?

**Jamie:** We didn't.

**Karen:** [Jamie] did a lot of it.

**Jamie:** Yeah, I'm more organized. Like I'm more about lists and making, you know, tabulating expenses and things like that. But Karen and I talked about everything every step of the way basically, you know. I always told her the numbers and we always talked about all our ideas and there wasn't anything on our wedding day that I can think of that was a surprise to me, at least, or to Karen, I don't know.

**Karen:** Yeah, no.

**Jamie:** Like everything, everything was very equal.



**Karen:** Yeah, there wasn't--there wasn't a lot of decisions that needed to be made that we hadn't already talked about, so everything was just like things being needed to be called and booked and you had to get the marriage certificate and--

**Jamie:** Yeah, but we did all the crafts together; we did all the shopping together.

**Karen:** Yeah, and the last month before the wedding we both were really hunkering down on wedding planning and getting it done. So the last minute things, yeah, we got it done.

**Sharon:** In what ways would you say the planning of this wedding was different from the planning of the prior one?

**Jamie:** I liked it! [laughter] When I had planned the last wedding I was basically on my own. I was on my own in planning it but I had a very rigid structure in what was allowed, and if I had a rogue idea I would have to run it past my ex, and you know, get the A-okay. But I was doing all the work, and it was very stressful and it was a very different wedding. I mean we were thinking of going into a church, like we were both Catholic at the time, I had the white dress, and he had the tux and we were thinking of our parties. It was a very traditional wedding, and I hated it. I really--I just can't fathom how much I hated it!

The fact that my participants worked collaboratively to produce their weddings is a noteworthy finding, not only because it stands in direct contradiction to the literature on heterosexual wedding planning, but more importantly because of what this contradiction may imply. Wedding scholars argue that (heterosexual) wedding work serves to prepare women for their future traditional roles and to establish an unequal pattern of domestic labor (Currie, 1993; Sniezek, 2005). By contrast, I argue that queer wedding work can serve as an opportunity for queer couples to resist the traditional gendered division of labor. The wedding, the couple's first public act, presents an excellent opportunity to establish more egalitarian roles in performing family work.

#### 5.4: Parents' (Lack of) Involvement in Wedding Labor

Considering that most of my participants' parents had less than enthusiastic responses to the wedding announcement, it is perhaps unsurprising that few parents were involved in helping to plan or finance the wedding. My participants are not unique in this regard: the fact that parents of queer children are typically not involved or only minimally involved in helping to plan or finance the wedding is well documented (see, for example, Ayers 2009; Otnes & Pleck, 2003; Wythe & Merling, 2000). Otnes & Pleck (2003) explain: "It is very rare that parents of gay children spend as much money on their gay child's wedding as they would for that of a straight sibling. In most cases the couple foots the bill entirely" (p. 236). Among my participants, the majority (8 out of 12 couples) paid for their wedding on their own. Two couples split the cost of their weddings with their parents, and the remaining two weddings were fully funded by one member of the couple's parent(s).

Of course, there is much more to be said about parental involvement in weddings than simply who pays and who doesn't. As discussed above, heterosexual wedding work is typically the bride's primary responsibility, and brides often rely on their mothers, aunts, grandmothers, sisters and bridesmaids for support and assistance in this process (Blakely, 2007). For many of my female participants, that sort of family support was simply not an option. Patsy and Magda shared that Patsy's mother was not involved in the wedding preparations at all, and that this was hurtful to Patsy:

**Magda:** That was one of the challenges Patsy had to deal with. During the wedding, it's just, you know when you have this picture of getting married you kind of picture yourself with your mother and kind of going through the process together, and Patsy didn't have anything like that because her mom just totally stayed out of it. She was weirded out by the

whole concept, and she didn't know what to do, and she just totally stayed away.

**Patsy:** Yeah, and I tried to include her in some of the planning stuff and--

**Magda:** And that was a lot of heartache for her because she tried to involve her mother, to pull her into like the whole enthusiasm and the whole, you know, excitement about it. And she just wouldn't. But she did come, which I honor. That was nice.

On the other hand, Jackie and Renée shared that Jackie's female family members helped out tremendously:

**Renée:** ... In the beginning we were just like, "Okay, well we'll just do it for ourselves and won't make a big deal out of it." But then, yeah, once our parents got involved--once our mothers and stuff, especially Jackie's mom--everybody in the family has to be involved in everything [laughing.]

**Jackie:** Oh, it's a brown thing [laughs.]

**Renée:** It's good though, because her side of the family--I'm sure my mom would have loved to be there and stuff--but with her side of the family, because my mom lived in the Yukon at that time, she wasn't around. But her side of the family--the women--were so supportive. They came wedding shopping--gown shopping...

Several participants explained that if they were straight, their parents would have been more involved in the wedding plans. But they reflected that they are actually quite grateful that their parents were not so involved after all:

**Karen:** Yeah. It probably would have been different too, like I imagine if we were straight, our parents would have, our moms would have maybe wanted to be more involved, and like, traditionally like pay for it.

**Jamie:** Yeah, I think if we were straight my parents would have, like if you were a guy my parents would have paid for part of it.

**Karen:** Yeah. Which like, thank God we're not because we wouldn't have wanted that anyways.

**Jamie:** Oh yeah, yeah.

Wayne and Marek shared that they too are very happy that their parents were not involved in their wedding plans:

**Marek:** In my family, where we live [in Italy], when you get married you almost have to invite the whole town. When my cousin got married, she had something around 600 guests at the wedding. It's really crazy. I think if I had a good relationship with my parents and for example if we could get married in Italy, my mother and my father would invite the whole town. Wayne and I would go crazy.

**Wayne:** I guess the whole parent thing actually changes the whole dynamics. Like without the parents we can actually do what we want whereas--

**Marek:** And I think if we got married in Malaysia, I think also--

**Wayne:** No, in Malaysia my parents would probably ship us away somewhere else to get married so that they don't embarrass themselves [laughs].

**Marek:** No, if we could get married there, I think that also Wayne's parents would invite the whole town.

**Wayne:** Yeah. Basically, yeah. So I think, yeah, the whole parents thing changes so much. And I'm very glad about it because at least this way I can have the wedding I want rather than the wedding I'm supposed to give, or get, or something.

Some respondents had mixed feelings about their parents' lack of involvement in the wedding plans. Brad, for instance, says he would have liked his parents to be more involved, but wonders if perhaps that would have made things difficult:

**Brad:** It was pretty much just us doing the planning... as I say I kind of wanted [my parents] to be more involved but I hear from other friends how difficult it is to like compromise with parents that want one thing and you want another and the different set of parents want this and that...

Karen and Jamie's report also indicates some ambivalent feelings:

**Sharon:** Would you have liked your parents to be more involved?

**Karen:** No.

**Jamie:** Not necessarily. I think it would have annoyed me. I mean it would have--it would have been nice, you know, having that feeling knowing like "Oh, you're invested and you want to invest in this day." And like not having their involvement doesn't make me doubt that I guess, but it would have just been nice, I guess. But it would have also been very annoying.

As these narratives illustrate, many of the couples I interviewed did not have support from their families to help complete their wedding preparations. Respondents' feelings about this were complex; they found their parents' lack of involvement both painful *and* liberating. On the one hand, they would have liked for their parents to show greater enthusiasm about the wedding, but they also recognize that not having parents involved affords a greater degree of freedom.

### **5.5: Friends Pitching In**

While participants expressed that their parents were not particularly engaged in the wedding preparations, their friends, on the other hand, offered a tremendous amount of support. Couples gave countless examples of ways that their friends helped carry out the wedding labor. The following are just a few examples:

**Daniel:** Well, I had the support of my very good friend who offered her house. First of all she offered her home and then she offered to basically, you know, the day of the wedding to take care of everything for us. So they took care of all of our guests, made sure all the food was ready, that everything was all set up. They basically catered to the whole event for us, like took care of everybody and cleaned up after and put everything away. Without them doing that it would have been probably--it would have been impossible. We would have had to find somewhere else. I mean they opened their home to us freely, and it didn't cost us anything

and they gave of themselves for the whole, the day before and the day of. They just, they did everything for us.

**Renée:** One of our friends made--is a chef--and he made our--he and his wife made us our wedding cake. As our wedding gift. A lot of people actually were very giving in that way... everybody that was around just was so open, and helping, and--like there was not really any stress. We didn't really have to think about much because people were just like, "Here."

**Jamie:** My old boss--I used to work at a coffee shop--she made us our wedding cake. She donated it to us--donated it. She gave it as a gift, and I didn't know that. I thought we were paying for it. It was nice that she made cheesecake and then a whole bunch of little cheesecakes for people to eat. A lot of stuff was given to us. It was great, wow.

**Akal:** I mean, we had a lot of help from a lot of friends, fortunately. We had a lot of people that, you know, did a lot of things for us too so that was great. So that really helped with costs... one friend, he basically cooked an army's worth of Indian food. Yeah, so we had a lot of help.

During my interview with Sam and Barry, they continually repeated that they had an overwhelming amount of support from friends and neighbors. They explained that completing their wedding preparations became a fun and social affair: friends came over to their house for dinner or drinks and they did some wedding work together while socializing. Sam, who was previously married to a woman, contrasted this spirited, collaborative wedding effort with the more solitary wedding preparations he and his ex-wife carried out:

**Sam:** So everybody like, kind of just helped us. They just all were excited to get involved. And you know what, I think, when you were asking about the comparison between the first wedding and this wedding, my first wedding we didn't have participation of others--we did it on our own. Like, we didn't have friends jump in and want to help us. Where, this one, they were excited to help us! They were like, "When can we come over? When do you want this done?"

**Barry:** "What do you need doing?"

**Sam:** “What do you need?” The neighbors said, “What food do you need?” You know, that was all taken care of. We took care of the liquor. Yeah. So it was a big difference in that sense. I liked it. I had fun. You know, people come over to help, you have a few drinks, you laugh. So it was really relaxed.

As these reports show, many couples had a great deal of help from friends in carrying out their wedding preparations. Friends contributed in a myriad of ways, from helping to make decorations and preparing food to giving the couple money to help pay for the wedding. In a “traditional” heterosexual wedding, it is not only common but also *expected* that the couple’s parents will provide some form of support (Ayers, 2009; Boden, 2003; Otnes and Pleck, 2003). Clearly, for the couples I interviewed, families of choice stepped in where families of origin were absent. This finding is aligned with previous research indicating that friendship is particularly important in the lives of queer people (Roseneil and Budgeon, 2004; Weeks et al., 2001; Weston, 1997). Couples spoke with a great deal of emotion when they shared stories of how their friends helped out, and expressed that they were filled with gratitude for having such a supportive community. I argue that queer couples have a heightened sense of appreciation for this contribution from their families of choice, as it is not something they necessarily expected or anticipated. In this manner, wedding preparations served as an unexpected opportunity for connection and intimacy with families of choice.

### **5.6: Wedding Shopping as Labor**

In Canada and the U.S. today, producing a wedding has become an increasingly commercialized endeavor (Blakely, 2007; Boden, 2003; Currie, 1993; Freeman, 2002; Ingraham, 2008; Otnes and Pleck, 2003; Sniezek, 2005). Even for a simple wedding,

couples typically select and purchase a few important items such as a marriage license, a wedding officiant, an outfit to wear, wedding rings, food and drinks, and perhaps a wedding cake. Others procure a host of other goods and services: invitations, decorations, a band or disc jockey, a photographer, flowers, and of course, a honeymoon. Although many couples in Canada and the U.S. today do their wedding shopping online (Ayers, 2009), the process is still time-consuming. As Currie (1993) points out, “shopping itself is *work*” (p. 413).

Many couples in my study expressed that they spent numerous hours shopping for their weddings. Shopping involved a series of steps, such as researching different options, making phone calls, going to stores, making decisions, and negotiating prices. They indicated that at times the process was stressful and exhausting. Because cost was an important consideration for many of these couples, additional time was spent checking out prices and hunting for bargains. The time and energy investment in shopping for a wedding is certainly not unique to queer couples. However, through my interviews I found that queer people face several additional, unique challenges. These challenges stem from the fact that, on the whole, the wedding industry is unshakably heteronormative, and expects a strict adherence to normative gender roles. Dealing with the (hetero)wedding industry can therefore be troubling for many queers.

Some participants, for example, had difficulty finding a wedding outfit that they felt comfortable with. As the (hetero)wedding industry typically offers only two options for a wedding outfit (a gown for women and a suit or tuxedo for men), individuals who do not feel comfortable with either of those options are faced with a dilemma. Magda,



for instance, had decided that she would like to wear a white pantsuit to her wedding.

Much to her surprise, however, finding one was no small task:

**Magda:** So [Patsy] got a wedding dress, which was well, more or less easy--at least you had a lot of stores you could go to and get your dress. But I decided not to wear a dress because I'm just not the dress kind of girl. I wanted to wear just like a woman's pantsuit, like not a tux because I'm not a guy, right. That was interestingly enough very hard to find--there is nothing out there. Like you find suits as in work suits, that's the reason why you find them, but none in wedding stores.

**Patsy:** And those are limited in itself. Even pantsuits.

**Magda:** So that is definitely what is missing for, for--It doesn't necessarily have, it doesn't even necessarily have to be a same-sex wedding, like anybody who does not want to wear a dress, there's nothing out there. Now I was unbelievably lucky that I found a white suit at Tristan that 99.99% color matched her headdress. That was just unbelievably lucky and it was like dirt-cheap, it was like \$280. That was just pure luck.

**Patsy:** And the luck about it, the funny thing about it was in the one store, friends of mine and I, the weekend we went shopping, we went for about 6 hours between the Granville strip, Robson, Pacific Centre. I'm trying to think, see this place on West Broadway--we were looking at business suits... and as it turned out [Magda] just happened to be in the mall with her mum, and then ended up going back and buying it not too far later. But it was just so funny, I was so exhausted from that day, I was so mad and I went into the bridal store and I'm asking "Why don't you guys carry women's pantsuits for young women?" "Oh well, we have stuff for mothers of the bride," and I'm like "my wife's not going to buy some 80-year-old lady kind of outfit." And I was actually particularly in the store where I bought my wedding dress. I said "If you bring out a line of pantsuits for, you know, gay women, I'm sure you will have the customers that will come, if you advertise."

**Magda:** I'm sure there's a market.

**Patsy:** There is.

**Magda:** But nobody, nobody caters to it.

Another respondent, Jackie, decided to wear a tuxedo to her wedding. As tuxedos are staples in the (hetero)wedding industry, she had no trouble finding a place to rent one. However, she did run into other difficulties. When she went to the store for a fitting, the salespeople were rather confused. They could not conceive of why a woman had come in looking for a tuxedo. During our interview, she explained how things unfolded:

**Jackie:** ... So I went to Moore's in North Vancouver and got fitted which was--I'll tell you this, it was absolutely uncomfortable at first. Cause they're like, "Where's the groom? Where's the groom?" [Laughs.]

**Renée:** [Laughs.]

**Jackie:** You know what I mean? And these people looked at me like, "Oh my god. Okay. We are doing a gay wedding." And I had to end up dealing with a woman. Cause I guess she was more accep--you know, "I'll deal with it." Cause the guys there were older Persian guys. Not good.

**Renée:** [Laughing.]

**Jackie:** So I uncomfortably stood there getting fitted by this lady while all the men stared at me like, "This girl's crazy, get her out of the store." I didn't want to return the tuxedo. I made somebody else do it.

**Renée:** [Laughs.]

**Jackie:** That's how uncomfortable I was.

**Renée:** She made me pick it up [laughs.] And they were even still--when I went to pick it up, they were really awkward.

**Jackie:** Which--they should make like a gay-friendly freakin' tuxedo and wedding store, you know, that would help so much. I just wanted to get out of there. These guys were like--you know, whispering to each other about me trying this on--but anyways. The tuxedos--I had everybody fitted at that area and it was black and gold. So I played the gold off of her dress. It was so unwelcoming though. Doing that part. But it needed to be done, and it was done.

As these accounts reveal, shopping for a wedding outfit presents some unique challenges for queer individuals; particularly those who do not conform to gender norms.<sup>19</sup> Although my respondents who purchased outfits “appropriate” to their gender may have experienced some discomfort, for example when salespeople made heteronormative assumptions about who they were marrying, they did not report any incidences of outright homophobia like that which Jackie experienced. This stands as evidence for Peñaloza’s (1996) argument that ‘straight-looking’ queers are more welcome in the marketplace than those who cannot pass as heterosexual. It also serves to remind us of a very important point: at the root of homophobia and heterosexism is a deep-seated fear about the fragility and instability of sex and gender categories (Butler, 1990).

Many of the couples I interviewed shared that finding a wedding officiant was also difficult. For heterosexual couples in Vancouver, this process is fairly straightforward: if they are having a religious ceremony, they might ask a clergyperson to conduct the ceremony, and if they are having a civil ceremony, there are many marriage commissioners available throughout the city that they could hire. For my respondents, however, it was a bit more complicated. First of all, if they wanted to have a religious ceremony, they needed to find a queer-friendly house of worship and a clergyperson that performs queer weddings. As Jackie and Renée explained, this is not necessarily easy to do:

**Renée:** ... We were thinking about getting married in a church. But there’s only a few gay churches--like gay-friendly churches--

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<sup>19</sup> Similar observations have been made about butch women struggling to find maternity wear in the hyper-feminized maternity wear industry. For more information, see R. Epstein, “Butches with babies: Reconfiguring gender and motherhood.”

**Jackie:** I think we were gonna ch--if we didn't get the Conservatory we were gonna do the Rainbow Church. They're very open on that.

**Renée:** Right? And so in that aspect, yeah we did--you know we googled a lot of like gay-friendly churches and gay-friendly pastors and stuff like that. Or like--I mean there's a couple now. But it's not as common.

Jackie and Renée ended up deciding not to have a religious ceremony, so rather than looking for a clergyperson, they spent some time trying to find a queer-friendly marriage commissioner. Again, this presented some difficulties:

**Renée:** ...That was another thing we had a really hard time with. Finding somebody to marry us.

**Jackie:** Who accepted it, and yeah.

**Renée:** Yeah. And you know what, we had called quite a few people. And I think that was the one place in our wedding where we did--where our sexuality did come into it. Where that played a *huge* part.

**Jackie:** Yeah.

**Renée:** And it was like, "Okay, well, will you marry us?" "Yes." "Um, okay, well we're the same sex." And then it was kind of like, you could tell people would st--were more standoffish--were like, "Oh well, I've never done that before so I don't really know how comfortable I feel." Well, that's fine, you know, if you're uncomfortable. I'm more grateful that people were honest, but at the same time it was kind of like--we did find it harder to find somebody who would marry same-sex couples.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, all of the couples I interviewed indicated that finding a marriage officiant who is queer-friendly was a top priority for them. Some used the internet to find marriage commissioners who specifically market themselves as queer-friendly, and others asked queer friends for a recommendation. They quickly discovered that there actually are relatively few marriage commissioners in Vancouver who perform queer weddings. Also, a number of couples mentioned that they preferred their officiant

be the same gender as they are, which of course narrowed the choices even further.

Fortunately, all of the couples I interviewed did end up finding a queer-friendly officiant

that they were very happy with, but finding one did take some extra effort, as Daniel and

Dinho reported:

**Dinho:** We wanted someone who could be like gay friendly, because you know, and also a man, yes, yes. It has to be a man and has to be gay friendly. And I think [our marriage commissioner] has on that website—there is a sign of things like that. So that is why we selected him. And also I think--he lives in, close to North Vancouver, which would be more convenient.

**Daniel:** Yeah, so we needed someone who lived in the area; we didn't want it to be a woman, not because we have anything against women doing it, but there are--most of the marriage commissioners are women, actually. There are very few men that actually do it, and we just thought that we wanted to have a man because we just, that was just our preference. There wasn't really a lot of choice, so. But he was very good.

Patsy and Magda said that they did not have any trouble finding a marriage commissioner because their friends recommended one. Patsy expressed however that they were quite lucky in that regard; by contrast, they know other queer couples who have had more difficulty:

**Patsy:** ...So we didn't have problems, only because--I think we would have if we didn't have someone that knew someone. See we were very lucky in that sense that we knew someone that volunteered and said "Hey, I know someone that officiates weddings." But apparently there was actually, there is a magazine that comes out once a year that actually gives you a step-by-step guide to planning a wedding, if you were to do the full-on, all the details. And they actually give you websites for officiators, and they give you the price and they tell you what the regulations are. It's quite a handy-dandy guide. The challenge of that is that it's great for straight couples, but not necessarily, it doesn't give you a lot of same-sex couple stuff. For instance, it does tell you some of the places to host the ceremony or to have dinner, and it'll actually give you, you know, if it's handicap-friendly, or if you can serve your own beverages or things like that. Like they actually give you little clues on it, but unless you call to find out, for instance, if it's a religious officiated hall, like the Wise Hall,

or the Knights of Columbus or something, because friends of ours, remember, Jill and Lisa when they got married they ran into a couple of places where they weren't welcome.

As these reports show, the (hetero)wedding industry is not always a friendly environment for queers, and at times can be outright hostile. Yet there is another side to the industry that my participants had to grapple with. Some wedding businesses have begun to target queers with their marketing materials, but have not actually diversified the goods and services they offer or made their practices more queer-friendly. For example, some wedding planners, wedding photographers, and other wedding businesspeople place a rainbow flag on their website or brochures to indicate that they are “gay-friendly” even if they have no experience with queer weddings (for more detail on this topic, see Appendix C). This has led my participants to question whether these businesses are truly queer-friendly, or merely interested in accruing a larger share of the market. The pervasiveness of “queer market accommodation” in such industries as fashion, travel, and finance is already well-documented (see, for example, D’Emilio, 1996; Gluckman & Reed, 1997; Hennessy, 1994, 2000; Peñaloza, 1996). Several respondents commented that they have noticed this tendency in the wedding industry, and they are understandably wary:

**Sophia:** ... I see the wedding industry glomming on to the queer community. It’s like the tobacco industry with kids: “Isn’t this lovely? We have another whole slice that we don’t have market saturation of yet.” And I look at that and think, “Well, if you want to be suckered into that, go right ahead. But recognize it for what it is; it’s just big business at play and they prey on insecurity more than anything else.”

**Wayne:** And I think somehow gay weddings that I’ve seen advertised are trying to just--all these venues, anyways, are trying to just say, “Oh, okay, the gays are getting married now, why don’t we make a quick buck off of this, you know, offer them services? I mean we just treat the normal,

traditional weddings and cater it to two guys instead of a guy and a girl.” And I just don’t like how everything is planned like that. It feels so commercialized. That’s something I don’t want.

## **5.7: Conclusion**

Exploring the ways that my respondents carried out their wedding work has revealed some interesting themes. On the whole, couples opted for the “do-it-yourself” wedding rather than hiring professionals to assist or manage the wedding plans, indicating that they do not buy into the idea that professional help is needed. In contrast to the unequal division of labor in “traditional” heterosexual weddings (Blakely, 2007; Currie, 1993; Sniezek, 2005) couples in this study explained that they did their wedding labor together, suggesting that queer couples have a different understanding of family work roles. Parents’ lack of involvement in planning or financing the wedding was another significant difference from “traditional” heterosexual weddings (Ayers, 2009; Otnes & Pleck, 2003; Wythe & Merling, 2000). Although some couples expressed that they wished their parents were more enthusiastic about the wedding, they were also grateful for the freedom to create the wedding that *they* wanted. They were also extremely grateful for the support they received from friends and other chosen family, who provided assistance with the wedding labor in a myriad of ways such as cooking and baking, making decorations, giving money, and even hosting the wedding at their home. This finding is indicative of the particularly important role that friends play in the lives of queer people (Roseneil & Budgeon, 2004; Weeks et al., 2001; Weston, 1997). Finally, my respondents’ accounts revealed that dealing with the (hetero)wedding industry can be quite challenging for queer people, particularly those who do not conform to normative gender expectations or who cannot “pass” as heterosexual. Overall, this chapter

illustrates that wedding labor is both challenging and rewarding; but the particular challenges and rewards that queer couples face are distinct from their heterosexual peers.



## **Chapter 6: The Big Day**

### **6.1: Introduction**

In this chapter, I discuss my interview narrators' accounts of their wedding day. On the surface, many of these weddings resembled the "traditional" heterosexual model. They exchanged rings and vows at the ceremony and celebrated thereafter with food, dancing, wedding cake, and heartwarming toasts from family and friends. However, by taking a closer look, we can see that there are many ways that these weddings are unique, both from the 'traditional' heterosexual paradigm and from one another. Without exception, all of the couples I interviewed spent considerable time and effort considering how to shape their wedding day so that it would reflect their own beliefs and values. Many couples did keep 'traditional' wedding rituals, but by disrupting the heteronormative assumptions inherent in these rituals they were able to advance more egalitarian or inclusive understandings of gender and sexuality. Other couples adapted and reconfigured rituals to reflect their own interpretations, or even created new rituals altogether. Regardless, a common feature of all of these weddings is that couples had to balance their own desires with the needs and feelings of their guests, as well as the legal requirements of the state. As I will illustrate below, my respondents had to make choices and sacrifices that few, if any, heterosexual couples are ever asked to make.

### **6.2: Walking Down the Aisle**

In a typical heterosexual wedding, the ceremony begins with the Judeo-Christian ritual of the bride walking down the aisle to meet her groom at the altar. Traditionally, the bride is escorted down the aisle by her father, son, brother, or both parents: this ritual "giving away" of bride to husband has its roots in a patriarchal social order that deems

women as the property of men (Ingraham, 2008). For a number of presumably quite obvious reasons, this traditional heterosexual wedding ritual cannot be duplicated in a queer wedding ceremony. I was therefore not surprised to learn that most of my research participants spent some time considering if and how to adapt the ritual for their own purposes. Several couples decided to keep the tradition of walking down the aisle, but rather than being “given away” by their parents, they opted to walk down the aisle together. Brad and Marc, who had their wedding ceremony on a beach in Mexico, explained how they decided to do it:

**Sharon:** Was there a “walking down the aisle” ritual of some form?

**Marc:** Yup. There definitely was. But we did it a bit differently. We had our respective wedding party walk down the aisle, and then our parents, and then we just walked down together. So we weren’t given away by anyone... and it was something that the wedding planners were really like, “Well, you have to do this, you have to do that.” And we were just like, “Well, this is what we want to do.” So we ended up just walking down together. And I really actually enjoyed that. I think that was--it was definitely--no one person was waiting for their bride to come--it was just both of us.

Another couple, Jamie and Karen, put a creative twist on the ritual: Jamie walked down the aisle with her niece and Karen walked down with her nephew. They were very enthusiastic about the opportunity to have their youngest family members be part of this ritual, and to create a lasting memory of it. They explained:

**Jamie:** We wanted to have [our niece and nephew] in our lives in every way and it was just so special to share that day with them, and always be able to tell them, you know, “You walked me down the aisle! You were in our wedding. You were there with us the whole day.”

**Karen:** And like it’s cool for kids to be three years old and be in a gay wedding. I’ve never been to a gay wedding! So like, start out young, make it the norm.

Unlike the traditional “giving away” ritual in which a bride is “transferred” from father to groom, this adaptation is devoid of all heteronormative and heterosexist associations and imagery. Rather than drawing attention to the past, e.g. the father and his ‘little girl’, this new ritual focuses on future possibilities and the creation of new families. This approach evokes Kertzer’s (1998) theorization of political ritual. He argues that because memories associated with rituals color each subsequent performance, and thus link the present to the past, they can also by extension represent a relationship between the present and the future.

Two of the lesbian couples I interviewed explained that they decided to remain a bit closer to the traditional ritual. In their ceremonies, one “bride” walked down the aisle with a parent, while her partner waited at the altar. Therefore, these couples borrowed the traditional ritual and unhinged it from its original patriarchal meaning. Patsy and Magda were one of these couples. Magda explained that the moment when Patsy walked down the aisle was the most memorable moment of the entire wedding experience:

**Magda:** You know--everybody who gets married has a picture in their head how the day is supposed to be, you know, how everything is supposed to roll out. In the end, a lot of things didn’t happen that way, but our plan for the day went pretty smooth... A lot of things we would have wanted to do we couldn’t, but I have no remorse for having missed things or having done something different or--not at all because the only thing that mattered that day, and really the only thing that stayed in my memory, because everything else is just a blur, is that moment how I was standing in front, and I looked over and she was walking out in her dress in the arm of her Dad. Like that’s what in my head a wedding breaks down to, is that moment, right. Screw the rest, really. Like screw all the stress it was and you know, whatever, it’s irrelevant in that one particular moment, because that’s the moment you planned for.

**Patsy:** Yeah.

**Magda:** And as long as that moment is fine—yeah, whatever.

As Magda explained, seeing Patsy in her wedding gown walking down the aisle arm-in-arm with her father was a very emotional moment that has left a lasting impression. This speaks to the fact that the ritual of a father giving away his daughter holds a tremendous amount of cultural power. Perhaps this ritual was particularly powerful for Magda and Patsy for the very fact that queer couples cannot necessarily count on their parents to participate. As Lewin (1998) explains, weddings are rituals that reenact significant family ties and celebrate efforts to sustain those ties in the future, but for queer people, bonds with families of origin can be fraught with uncertainty.

This was certainly the case among my participants. In total, only 3 out of 24 participants walked down the aisle with their parent or parents. Certainly some participants chose not to walk down with their parent(s) because they are ideologically opposed to it, either because of the patriarchal roots of the tradition or other reasons. But for some respondents it was simply a result of the fact that their parent(s) did not attend the wedding. At the majority of weddings (7 out of 12), at least one parent did not attend because of their discomfort with or opposition to homosexuality. Some participants indicated that they invited their parent(s) but they chose not to attend. Other respondents explained that because they are queer, they are estranged from their parents. For instance, one respondent explained that his father disowned him when he came out. Also, as discussed in chapter 4, a few participants have had to keep the wedding a secret from their parents because they haven't yet come out to them or because the parent has indicated they would not approve of the marriage. When I considered other members of the family of origin, such as siblings, aunts, uncles, grandparents, and cousins, I found that all 24 participants had at least one member of their family of origin who did not

attend the wedding for the aforementioned reasons. This striking finding is aligned with previous studies clearly indicating that queer couples are less likely than their straight counterparts to receive emotional, financial, and other support for the wedding (see, for example, Hull, 2006; Lewin, 1998; Smart, 2007, 2008). It is for this reason that many queer wedding planning books devote so much space to helping couples cope with resistance from family and friends (Ayers, 2009; Otnes & Pleck, 2003). Dealing with resistance or outright rejection from families of origin is one of the most difficult aspects of having a queer wedding (Ayers, 2009; Otnes & Pleck, 2003; Wythe & Merling, 2000), and is unfortunately all too common.

### **6.3: The Marriage Ceremony**

For many of the couples I interviewed, the marriage ceremony itself was the most important part of the wedding. In general, my participants shared that their marriage ceremony resembled a typical heterosexual marriage ceremony in a number of ways. The ceremony was led by a marriage commissioner or clergy person, who usually gave a short speech and led the couple through a series of rituals, such as exchanging rings and stating vows. Some couples explicitly stated a preference for a traditional marriage ceremony. For instance, Simon and Darren, whose ceremony will take place at a cathedral, will include elements such as hymns, an organist, and a cappella. Darren shared that he prefers a traditional wedding ceremony because of the “pomp and circumstance of it.” Similarly, Barry and Sam explained that they wanted a traditional ceremony, and they especially wanted to have traditional vows.

**Barry:** ... We wanted to maintain some of the traditions. Especially like with the actual spoken part of our vows and things like that. We wanted those to be the same.

**Sam:** Our wedding vows, [the marriage commissioner], he helped us through that.

**Barry:** He said, "What would you rather do? You can write your own if you want to." And I said, "I would rather just have something that is just traditional."

Most of the couples I interviewed described their wedding ceremonies as neither traditional nor unconventional. Instead, they mixed tradition with modernity and infused convention with originality. Jackie and Renée, who described their wedding as "half-Indian, half-Western" said that their wedding ceremony was a perfect mix of old and new:

**Sharon:** In a few words, how would you describe your wedding ceremony?

**Jackie:** Creative, colorful, umm--yeah. It's hard to say.

**Sharon:** Would you say that it was traditional? Unconventional? Where would you say it falls on that scale?

**Jackie:** I would say it was a mix. It was a--

**Renée:** I think it was like--literally to describe our wedding is impossible. It just *was*. Like, there was nothing traditional or non-traditional. It was just everything was combined and came out perfect with the right amount of everything involved in it.

**Jackie:** Yeah. It was a perfect mix. Everything was perfect for us.

Stix and Twiggs, who described their wedding as "Jewish-ish," also blended convention and innovation in their wedding ceremony. They adopted a number of rituals from traditional Jewish (heterosexual) weddings, but reinterpreted and reconfigured them

to reflect their own values. For example, “breaking the glass” is a popular tradition in Jewish weddings. In this tradition, the groom stamps on a glass with his right foot, marking the end of the ceremony. Stix and Twiggs were uncomfortable with some of the heterosexist interpretations of this ritual, but did not want to discard it altogether because they believe it is a crucial element of a Jewish wedding. So, they modified it and inscribed it with their own interpretations. They described:

**Twiggs:** And also like in terms of the meaning, like the stepping on the glass, you can’t have a Jewish wedding without stepping on the glass.

**Stix:** Yeah, you had to look at the meanings of a lot of things, yeah.

**Twiggs:** There are so many really sexist, literal, and heterosexist interpretations for the breaking of the glass. So we, you know, we found interpretations that were very meaningful for us, ones that were related to social inequity and social equity and our commitment to, you know, healing the world and those kinds of things. And we both stepped on-- well we stepped on light bulbs--but we both did it together.

Sophia and Claudia’s ceremony is another interesting example of blending tradition and innovation. They did not follow the prescriptions of any one particular culture or religion, but rather incorporated a variety of rituals that they find personally meaningful. Sophia explained that they made a very conscious decision to design their own ceremony:

**Sophia:** . . . I mean, because we crafted our own ceremony and wrote our own ceremony, all of that was choice all the way along in terms of what we would do. I mean, we could have done something that was very terse. We could have accepted any officiant’s ceremony, civil or otherwise, and said, “That’ll do.” And we chose not to go that route at all.

They adopted some rituals from different religions and cultural traditions, but also invented new rituals all their own. One ritual they created was the stating of “personal pledges” to one another, as Sophia explained:

We had decided that we would do what Claudia called the personal pledges to one another, that came before our formal vows, and nobody knew what we were going to say. Like, our witnesses and our officiant had every other word of the ceremony but that. And so that was a very great act of disclosure, too, there before the vows. So I mean, in that sense, all of that was conscious to do those things. But it did propel us, too, into a place of greater intimacy, greater exposure . . . greater invitation to witness this to consider much more than just, “I do, I do.”

As this quotation illustrates, Sophia and Claudia found ways to introduce their own interpretations of what it means to enter into a marriage. The marriage ceremony was an opportunity for them to state who they are as a couple and to articulate their vision for the future together. This calls to mind Smart’s (2008) finding that queer couples shape their weddings into conscious reflections of the life they wish to support and advance. The marriage ceremony itself is the site par excellence for couples to perform those ideals for their family and friends, and for one another. In this sense, the ceremony can become a ritual of resistance (Lewin, 1998). Yet paradoxically the marriage ceremony is also a ritual of conformity. It is a *state institutionalized* ritual, and must meet certain conditions in order to be legally recognized. For instance, a state authorized marriage officiant must perform the ceremony and witnesses must be present. Furthermore, specific wording must be used in order for the marriage to be considered legal, as Sophia explained during our interview:

There were two clauses, not full sentences, but two clauses that we legally had to have in [the ceremony]. And we were both taken aback to realize that we could not use the word “my beloved” or “my partner” or “my spouse” or any other word that we wanted to--that we had to use “wife”



and “wife” – you have to use “husband” and “husband” or “wife” and “wife.” And it’s not a word we have ever used with one another; it’s not a word we wanted to use with one another.

Just as Stix and Twiggs were frustrated by the fact that their friends and family imposed heteronormative and heterosexist terms such as bride, engagement, and fiancé upon them (see chapter 4), Sophia and Claudia were embittered that they were required *by law* to use terms that are sanctioned by heteronormative practices. The fact that these two lines are mandatory by law and that the terms cannot be altered reminds us that while the state will accommodate queer couples by allowing them to participate in the institution of marriage, it will resist or refuse efforts to reform that institution. Simply put, although the state will allow queers to marry, it will not allow marriage to be queered.

Some couples also found that their freedom to express themselves during the marriage ceremony was constrained by the need or desire to be respectful of (heterosexual) family and friends and their varying comfort levels with homosexuality. For instance, Daniel and Dinho expressed that they shared only a brief kiss at the end of the ceremony for this reason:

**Sharon:** Did you do the kiss at the end of the ceremony?

**Dinho:** Yeah, yeah we did.

**Daniel:** Did we?

**Dinho:** Yeah, sure.

**Daniel:** Oh we did do it, yeah.

**Dinho:** [Laughs]

**Daniel:** It was just a real quick kiss, it wasn't anything [laughs] you know--because you know, we're--all our friends are all kinds of people, right, so we didn't want to be--we wanted to be polite and proper and not offend anyone in any way, so. They knew they were coming there for a gay wedding, so okay, it was. But we just didn't want to be over, overly over the top or anything, you know.

The fact that Daniel and Dinho needed to regulate their conduct at their own wedding in order to be “polite and proper and not offend anyone in any way” is a conspicuous reminder of the emotional labor that queer couples carry out on their wedding day. Daniel and Dinho wanted to attend to the needs and feelings of their guests, even if this meant that they had to censor their own behavior. Few, if any, heterosexual couples are faced with these types of negotiations. This is indicative of Oswald's (2003) claim that heterosexism creates a situation in which queer people have “double binds rather than choices” (p. 128).

#### **6.4: The Reception**

As discussed above, my participants' marriage ceremonies mixed tradition and innovation in a variety of ways. In a similar fashion, they tailored the wedding reception by mixing convention and originality. Not everyone had a formal wedding reception as popularized in wedding guides and in the media, but all couples had (or were planning to have) a celebration of some form. Some couples had small celebrations, such as an intimate lunch reception with their guests at a local restaurant; others had an informal outdoor party with homemade food and drinks. For example, Jamie and Karen had a potluck picnic in the park with their family and friends.

On the other hand, several couples did have a formal wedding reception. These receptions were held at a rented hall or restaurant and included hors d'oeuvres or a sit-down dinner, music, and dancing. An interesting theme emerged in my interviews with each of these couples: they were hesitant about doing the traditional "first dance." In this popular tradition the newlyweds open the wedding reception by sharing the first dance, typically to a slow, romantic song (Ingraham, 2008). Many of the couples I interviewed explained that they did not feel comfortable with this ritual. They said that doing a traditional slow dance in front of their guests would feel extremely awkward because of the highly gendered, heteronormative nature of this type of dance. As Oswald (2003) illustrates, dancing at heterosexual weddings is governed by a number of heterosexist rules, and queer people often feel coerced by the homophobia inherent in the ritual. Perhaps having faced this discomfort at the weddings of their heterosexual friends and family members, several couples expressed that they wanted the dancing at their wedding to be different. One way they established this was by replacing the traditional model of the "first dance" with something fun, inclusive, and queer-friendly. For example, Simon and Darren are planning to do "The Hustle" with their guests at their reception. Another couple, Patsy and Magda, decided to do a fast-dance rather than a slow-dance. Patsy was concerned that doing a slow, romantic dance with all of their guests watching would make her parents feel uncomfortable. This was the reason they chose to do a fast-dance, as explained below:

**Patsy:** ... We had a first dance. We did our first dance as a fast dance rather than a slow dance actually, which is interesting for us to try and do a crash course in two weeks how to dance together.

**Magda:** Four nights to choreograph our first dance.

**Patsy:** Yeah! [Laughs.] But, if we had more time. But we wanted to do a fast dance because both of us--just because of the music. I think the reason why I wanted to do more of a fast dance than a slow dance is because I was worried about my parents feeling uncomfortable. Not about anybody else because everyone else at the wedding was gay-friendly or gay themselves, but I was a little bit more wary about my parents.

Patsy and Magda's decision to do a fast-dance rather than a slow-dance to avoid making Patsy's parents uncomfortable is another striking example of emotional labor. It is a testament to the "ethical balancing" (Smart, 2007, p. 680) that queer people carry out in order to attend to the needs of their families of origin. Similar to Daniel and Dinho's "brief kiss" at the end of their marriage ceremony, it is a decision that few, if any, heterosexual couples are ever expected to make on their wedding day. These examples remind us that a queer wedding is necessarily a "compromise between competing desires and sensibilities" (Smart, 2008, p. 765).

Jackie and Renée had planned to dispense with the first dance tradition, but were swindled into it at their reception. They said that it was very awkward and uncomfortable at the time, although during our interview they were able to laugh about it:

**Renée:** Yeah, well, originally--we're both really shy when the spotlight is on us--and so everyone in the family is like, "So you guys are gonna have a--your first dance, right?" And we're like, "No, we're not doing that." And they're like, "Well, it's the tradition." We're like, "Well, if you didn't notice, this isn't really a traditional wedding [laughs.] Like that's what we were kind of using against it. We're like, "No, no, we don't want that. It's awkward enough, you know, the spotlight being on us all day, we don't need this song and dance and whatever. And then her sister tricked us! Everybody got in on it. And she picked her and her husband's wedding song for our first dance. And everybody made us do it. And it was just really awkward. Because it was some song we didn't even know, and just--

**Jackie:** We don't know how to wedding--we don't know how to do dances like that.

**Renée:** [Laughs.] Yeah.

**Jackie:** I held on to her and was like, “What way do we move?” She’s like, “This way!” “Okay!”

**Renée:** [Laughs.] It was pretty awkward and I think they noticed we were awkward so the DJ kind of dimmed the lights so you couldn’t tell how awkward we were--stepping on each other’s feet and oh gosh yeah.

**Jackie:** It helped out when everybody else came on the floor to join us.

**Renée:** Yeah. We were like, “Come on! Hurry up! The first dance is done now, come join!”

**Jackie:** But it was literally funny because we’re like, “Okay, how do I hold you? How do you hold me? What way do we start? [Laughs.] That was funny. It was good.

**Renée:** Yeah, it was a little awkward.

As the examples above show, “slow dancing” is a gendered and heteronormative custom. This type of dancing has a heterosexual imperative and follows certain heterosexist rules and prescriptions, such as the man as lead and woman as follow. For these reasons, many queer people have long felt alienated from the practice. It is therefore unsurprising that many of my respondents felt nervous at the prospect of doing a traditional slow dance in front of all of their guests.

Some respondents were equally uncomfortable with another traditional wedding dance, the “father-daughter dance.” In Canada and the U.S., the father-daughter dance, also known as the “honors dance,” traditionally follows the couple’s first dance and is symbolic of the father letting go of “Daddy’s little girl” (Ingraham, 2008). For a combination of reasons, Stix and Twiggs elected to discard this ritual and replace it with something more fun and inclusive, as explained below:

**Twiggs:** So what we did for--this is cute--for the traditional father-daughter dance, which I--first of all, my dad was kind of an asshole, even though I love him. Second of all, he's dead. Either way, you know, it presents a problem and there's no way either of us are ever dancing with Stix's dad. I love her dad so much, but I didn't want to dance with--any man.

**Stix:** Yeah.

**Twiggs:** Especially when it's my father-in-law. Or anybody. Anyways, that's not the point.

**Stix:** But the thing is that for him not being able to have like that kind of ritual for him, like because we were trying to negotiate what he kind of wanted to get out of the wedding, as well. And so we had to--we still had to--you know, work with the gender norms in that, in what we did. And we ended up doing a line dance. So we ended up having the two of us, my mum and my dad and then her mother in a line dance. So it was never like anything--it wasn't very ungendered, but I mean completely gendered, but not gendered.

**Twiggs:** It was a great line dance. What was it? We did that, what was the song about sex? It was like, oh [singing] "I want to have sex on the beach." It was so cool, it was really cute.

**Stix:** Yeah, it was really funny.

As this example shows, even though Stix and Twiggs dispensed with the traditional "father-daughter" dance, they still needed to negotiate norms and expectations in the new line dance ritual they created. They considered the needs and feelings of their families of origin, acknowledging that the wedding rituals were important for them, too. In order to have a wedding that reflected their beliefs and values while still honoring the wishes of their families of origin, all of my participants made delicate negotiations like these.

## 6.5: Receiving Gifts

Couples also needed to negotiate “competing desires and sensibilities” (Smart, 2008, p. 765) when considering their approach to the wedding gift ritual. In Canada and the U.S., giving and receiving gifts is perhaps the most prevalent of all wedding rituals. Although the particular prescriptions of this ritual vary by class as well as cultural and historical context, there is no question that gifts have become an obligatory component of weddings, and of course, a central node in the wedding-industrial complex (Ingraham, 2008). In the U.S., more than \$18 billion USD is spent on wedding gifts each year<sup>20</sup>, and advice about what to buy, where to buy, and how much to spend on gifts abounds in popular media (ibid). Furthermore, department stores and other retailers are devoting extra time to their “bridal registry” services, acknowledging that these services can account for a very high percentage of sales. Department stores have eagerly welcomed queer couples by changing the name of these services from “bridal” registry to “wedding” registry, or simply “gift” registry, thereby capitalizing on the non-wedding market as well (Howard, 2006; Ingraham, 2008; Mead, 2007).

Many of my participants had complicated feelings about the wedding gift ritual, and spent considerable time thinking about and discussing how they would like to approach it. All of my respondents pointed out that they already had an “established” life before getting married, e.g. an apartment or condominium, furniture and other household equipment, and therefore did not need to receive these types of items as wedding gifts. Queer people are not entirely unique in this regard, however. Across Canada and the U.S., men and women both queer and straight are marrying at a later age, and are entering into marriage having already established a home and career (Mead, 2007). However,

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<sup>20</sup> I was unable to locate a comparable Canadian statistic.

Mead argues that the engaged heterosexual couple, and the bride in particular, nonetheless views her wedding as an opportunity to acquire the equipment of domestic life. It is therefore quite remarkable that nearly all of my participants, regardless of age, gender, 'race'/ethnicity, or class, reported that they did not wish to receive wedding gifts. In fact, 5 of the 12 couples explicitly requested "no gifts" at their wedding, some by including a small note in their invitation stating this request, and others by mentioning it verbally or via email. These couples explained that they received gifts anyhow, although they received money or gift cards primarily rather than purchased gift items. Barry and Sam, for example, requested "no gifts":

**Sharon:** How about wedding gifts? Did you receive gifts?

**Barry:** Yeah.

**Sam:** Yeah. We got gift cards.

**Barry:** Mostly gift cards. We got a beautiful vase and stuff from –

**Sam:** --Hand blown glass. Our doctor, who is a personal friend of ours and has a partner, brought us the biggest bottle of champagne I've ever seen. Yeah, mostly gift cards. And we told them, we didn't want gifts, but everyone brought one.

**Barry:** Which was okay. They didn't have to bring anything at all. We just wanted them to turn up.

**Sharon:** So you told people that you didn't actually want anything?

**Barry:** Yeah. I had it on the invitations, not to bring anything, just to turn up.

Daniel and Dinho had a similar experience: they asked their guests not to bring anything, but many did anyhow. Again, typically money was given rather than



traditional wedding gifts. Daniel reported that this worked out well in the end, because it helped them to cover the costs of their wedding and related marriage expenses:

**Sharon:** Did you receive wedding gifts?

**Dinho:** Yeah.

**Daniel:** Yes we did. We had asked our guests not to give us gifts, but pretty much everybody gave us gifts and they gave us, they--we didn't really get much in the way of actual things, we got money. We got a lot of money from the people that did give, so it was unexpected. We didn't want it. We asked people not to--please don't--but they did anyway. So that was really good because we needed that money to pay our wedding, our travel, our immigration fees. We needed money and we didn't have it, so that was very good actually. We needed that money for those things.

For Daniel and Dinho, receiving gift money was an unanticipated but useful outcome of their wedding, because it allowed them to offset their wedding costs. Other couples, however, had thought about this possibility well in advance. Simon and Darren, who are planning a relatively large wedding reception, have determined that asking for money rather than "things" is both practical and acceptable. They expressed that they simply do not need the household items that are traditionally gifted to heterosexual newlyweds. Furthermore, they anticipate that receiving gift money will enable them to offset some of their wedding costs in light of the fact that their families of origin may not contribute financially:

**Sharon:** Do you have any support from friends or family to help plan the wedding, or to help finance it?

**Darren:** Well, like we said, we do have these friends on our wedding team who are willing to help us and I know they'll do pretty much any task we assign them. Financial help? I think my parents *intimated* that they may help a little bit. But we haven't asked directly and there hasn't been anything forthcoming yet.

**Simon:** And we've talked to a few people about this, as well--about the gifts. And we've gotten very good feedback that most people are perfectly fine with us saying "No gifts." At the wedding. Because we really don't need any stuff. We're an older couple, you know, we've established our--we don't need toasters, microwaves, blah blah blah.

**Darren:** We're constantly getting rid of stuff--

**Simon:** It's perfectly okay to ask for money, for wedding gifts, basically. And we've talked to a few people, including our Dean, and he said, "That's perfectly acceptable because people understand, especially in same-sex unions, that your parents aren't necessarily contributing to the wedding, financially." So people are okay with--and actually some of my guests have said that they're actually relieved that we're asking for just money instead because it takes the pressure off of what gift to get. So we are actually thinking that we will be able to cover a good portion of the costs through the gifts that we get from our guests.

As the examples above show, most of my participants' weddings were not linked to the consumption of household equipment, as is typically the case with middle-class heterosexual weddings (Howard, 2006; Ingraham, 2008). This suggests that compared to their heterosexual counterparts, queer weddings may not be as entrenched in the "homeward bound movement" (Howard, 2006). It also adds some complexity to the argument that marriage domesticates queer couples (see, for example, Robson, 1998; Warner, 1999) and brings new sexual citizens under the neo-liberal order (see, for example, Butler, 2002; Young & Boyd, 2006).

There were a few exceptions, however, as several couples did receive traditional wedding gifts, i.e. household equipment. Two of these couples registered for gifts at The Bay, a large department store in downtown Vancouver, even though they were a bit averse to the idea initially. Brad and Marc explained that they had a gift registry, but only for their guests who really wanted to give a gift. On the whole, they discouraged

their guests from buying gifts, instead encouraging them to donate to a charity organization they were involved with in Mexico:

**Marc:** And I think that was--again we just didn't want people bringing presents and because we'd been together for so long we had a lot of our own stuff. I mean we had a wedding registry but it was just for the people who really wanted to get us a gift. But I'd say even our Vancouver reception I'd say probably about 50% of people donated to this cause, which was fantastic... and it's something that we're both quite passionate about so it was nice to be able to do, and you know, give back a little bit. Because, I don't know, it's one thing that we talked about. We didn't want to make it so like--I mean it is your day but you know there's also like, there's bigger things in this world.

**Brad:** And I originally wanted no wedding registry. And we argued about that a little bit. But, Marc and some other people tell me that some people just really want to give you gifts and like, you know, I did end up respecting that. So I liked what we did in the end. Having a registry for people who just really want to get you something and then having this [donation] option.

**Sharon:** Where did you register?

**Brad:** At The Bay. Which I hated. But. We got these mugs [laughs.]

Stix and Twiggs were also ambivalent about registering for gifts, but ultimately did so for a couple of reasons. First, it was a practical option for their out-of-town guests and extended family of origin who wanted to give gifts but didn't know the couple's particular tastes. Second, it was a way to honor the generosity of their friends and family who wanted to help the couple to "get established." While Twiggs said that The Bay was "totally queer friendly," Stix countered that she felt uncomfortable facing the registry service people there. They explained:

**Twiggs:** The thing about registering is it's just so much easier because people don't know what to get you, especially people like Stix and I who have such different tastes than everybody that we know, let alone our families... We did talk a lot about if we shouldn't have presents--we should just like have people make donations and we'll pick a local charity.

And you know we were like really into that at first. And then you know, and I felt bad, and then a lot of people, you know, one person I talked to said “Well you know, having presents at weddings is really a great way for people who sort of are established to help people who aren’t established yet get established.” Which was really nice, and it was really true. And it was like, you know, that was really cool and generous of people. And so having it registered was really great because then we could just like take it back and get other stuff because it was so--it’s like a big corporation, you know, downtown Vancouver, so they were totally queer friendly and stuff like that. They just, like we just hate everything that they had there.

**Stix:** Yeah. But every time I had to go upstairs for that stupid registry spot, like I just wanted to, it was like “can’t you just go deal with it and I’m going to go look over here and I just don’t want to have to, you know, come up to these people and tell them that I’m getting married and stuff.”

**Twiggs:** It’s too bad. Like the public sort of wedding, it’s like no matter how hard you want to fight it, other people want you to--other people want to, you know, bestow that wedding special time in your life upon you. And as much as you want it you can never have it because it’s never, you know, to engage in it is to undermine the very reason why you’re getting married in the first place, you know. Does that make sense?

Both Stix and Twiggs and Brad and Marc were initially resistant to the idea of receiving wedding gifts. However, they opted in to this custom primarily because some of their (presumably heterosexual) friends and family members indicated that they “really wanted to buy gifts” for the couple, and suggested that the wedding gift ritual is a wonderful way to help a couple get “established.” This practice, although prevalent among middle-class heterosexual weddings in modern times, is an invented tradition and is certainly not universal (Howard, 2006; Oswald, 2003). Many working-class couples and queer couples of all backgrounds do not receive comparable help when setting up their households or entering into committed relationships (Oswald, 2003). In this context, it is understandable why queer couples would have some internal conflict about receiving wedding gifts. On the one hand, they may believe the practice is unnecessary

and materialistic; a tradition invented by the wedding industry to accrue larger profits. On the other hand, they may feel honored that their family and friends want to bestow them with the same generosity that heterosexual couples receive, and desire to participate in this material and symbolic creation of a new household. This is an instance of one of the persistent paradoxes of queer weddings: the desire to resist assimilation and cooptation is always mediated by the desire for recognition and belonging.

### **6.6: Reflections on the Wedding Day**

This theme, the desire for recognition and belonging, appeared repeatedly when respondents discussed their impressions of the wedding day. Before the wedding, some participants were afraid that their guests would not take the marriage and the wedding seriously. They worried that their guests would not consider it to be a “real” wedding, or that they would diminish the importance of it. Marc expressed that he had this concern, but he believes that ultimately his guests did understand the wedding as legitimate:

**Marc:** I think everyone, you know--there's something I guess you could worry about as being one of the first gay marriages like that people wouldn't really take it for real, but I think everyone took it as like a very real thing. You know like it was definitely a legit wedding in everybody's mind, right?

Twiggs shared that she also had fears that people in her life would not treat the wedding as legitimate. In particular, she worried that her extended family of origin would not view her relationship with Stix as equal to a heterosexual relationship. In the end, she felt very touched that her extended family participated in the wedding and treated it with reverence.

**Twiggs:** I was nervous for so long that my family--like my extended, you know, not immediate family, but my other family members--would come,

but that they wouldn't actually see us as having a real relationship and they wouldn't see us as two people who actually like have sex and have a life and have all of the things that you, you know, straight people have. Even though we have so much more. And so, the fact that they would engage in it, the fact that they would attend our wedding and the fact that they would send a present was meaning that they, you know, they did see--they saw it as us having a legitimate relationship.

These accounts remind us of two critical points. First, many queer people struggle throughout their lives to have their loved ones see their relationships as having equal value with heterosexual relationships. This is a persistent challenge for queer people because of the boundless power of institutionalized heterosexuality and its organizing ideology, the heterosexual imaginary (Ingraham, 2008). Second, a wedding is a ritual display of legitimacy, and an opportunity--if only for a day--to experience a sense of validation and belonging. Although weddings serve this function for heterosexual couples as well, I argue that this theme is far more salient for queer couples--couples who have never before had access to the "symbolic profit of normality" (Bourdieu, 1998, p. 69). For these reasons, queer couples are particularly moved when family and friends come together for a day to celebrate and show support for their relationship. Like participants in Smart's (2007) study, the couples I interviewed highlighted that recognition and validation from family and friends was one of the most rewarding parts of the wedding experience. Perhaps this recognition and validation was most remarkable for these couples precisely because they did not know if they would ever experience it. As Sam explained, having so many important people from all areas of his life come to witness the wedding was extra special. He suggests that queer people often do not expect or anticipate acceptance from others, so when others do show their support, it is exceptionally poignant:

**Sam:** Even my ex-wife was there! [Laughs]. And so having her there, and having my kids there, and all the neighbors and everything, it was a great feeling.

**Barry:** It was amazing.

**Sam:** It made the day just--for anyone, getting married is a special day for them, but for me, it was extra special just because of the extra things. Like being gay, you don't know people are going to accept you and everything. So having everyone there and such a positive feeling, it was just extra special for me. It was such a good feeling.

As my respondents' reports clearly show, the wedding is a wonderful, rewarding, and very special day. The wedding produced feelings of connection and intimacy with friends and family and validated the couple's relationship. The wedding, however, holds a unique temporal and spatial position. The wedding is a ritual and a performance, and therefore does not necessarily reflect the realities of the everyday world in which these couples reside. When Jackie reflected on what made her wedding day special, she explained that it was very powerful to bridge Western and Indian cultures. But what she said thereafter reminds us that the wedding unfolds in a distinct, perhaps even utopian time and space:

**Jackie:** ...So it was kind of like bringing two worlds together. Even though in reality the two worlds wouldn't really accept the idea [of queer marriage]. [Laughs.]

What Jackie has conveyed here is very telling. She expressed that the two worlds, Indian and Western, wouldn't accept queer marriage "*in reality*." What she is suggesting is that the wedding was in fact removed from reality; that the wedding occupies a distinct time and space where the couple is embraced, validated, and legitimized. In the

following chapter, I will illustrate that although the couple is granted legitimacy at the wedding itself, their access to it thereafter is neither consistent nor reliable.

## **6.7: Conclusion**

In this chapter I have shown that a queer wedding is a performance in which both the actors and the audience play important roles. The couple plays the leading role, of course, and they have the greatest stake in how the performance is received. To ensure it is successful, they must therefore carefully consider a number of important factors. The wedding should be a reflection of the couple's own beliefs and values, but it also should honor the needs and feelings of the guests. Moreover, the wedding must meet certain conditions if it is to be understood and accepted as legitimate by friends, family and the state. These multiple factors are often in competition with one another and must be carefully negotiated.

My respondents put forth considerable emotional labor on their wedding day. At times they even regulated or censored their behavior in order to ensure the comfort of their families of origin. This attests to the fact that families of origin are extremely important to queer couples, even if their support cannot be consistently relied upon.



## **Chapter 7: After the Wedding**

### **7.1: Introduction**

In this chapter, I explore how my interview narrators' daily lives have both changed and remained the same since the wedding, with a particular focus on four areas of the post-wedding life. First, I discuss the honeymoon. I demonstrate that many queer honeymooning couples are silenced and erased; their experiences contrast the affirmation and legitimization they received on the wedding day itself. I then move to a detailed discussion of several aspects of everyday post-wedding life. Next, through a detailed examination of the myriad ways that they use the terms "husband" and "wife," I suggest that they both resist and reinscribe the married couple as the legitimate form of family. In the final section, I consider the ways that my respondents' relationships with their families of origin have shifted since the wedding. Their reports illustrate that marriage is a powerful way to attain greater respect from and intimacy with families of origin, regardless of whether this outcome was intended or anticipated. By exploring couples' observations about how their daily lives are both the same and different since the wedding, I reveal the complex and even contradictory nature of the institution of marriage. I also uncover many of the taken-for-granted cultural assumptions about marriage and 'family' that shape their experiences.

### **7.2: The Honeymoon**

Among the couples I interviewed, the vast majority (10 out of 12) went on a honeymoon shortly after their wedding. Some couples went away for only one night, and others for as long as three weeks. Some traveled only a couple of hours to reach their honeymoon destination and others flew across an ocean. But regardless of the time,

distance, or money spent, the couples had similar intentions: to spend time together as a couple, to escape from everyday life for a short while, and to recover from the stress of planning and executing a wedding. According to Mead (2007), the honeymoon is understood as an once-in-a-lifetime experience, like the wedding itself. It is meant to be a carefree time for the couple to simply enjoy their time as newlyweds. For queer couples, however, the honeymoon is not necessarily so carefree, as my interview narrators explained.

For example, on their honeymoon, Sam surprised Barry with a suite at a very nice hotel on the Fraser River, a short distance from Vancouver. But when they arrived at the hotel, they were confronted with flagrant homophobia:

**Sam:** You know, the only thing that put a damper on the wedding was that evening when we left the party. Barry didn't know about it; I had booked a honeymoon suite at the Quay, down at the water. And you know, arranged for champagne and stuff to be waiting in the room. And so we went to the hotel. The guy at the desk, I guess he was expecting a bride and groom, and when he saw that it was both guys, well, we just got such a *cold, cold* treatment. Actually, we were going to actually write the hotel and complain and we never did. But it was just the most *uncomfortable* feeling. And I think that is the most uncomfortable feeling I have ever had since I came out. And that was the only thing that kind of--because it was supposed to be a really kind of special thing. I mean, when we got the room it was. I mean, the room was nice, and everything that I had arranged was there.

**Barry:** It was his attitude. That was a personal thing. It was his attitude.

**Sam:** Oh, it was. But I say, that was the most uncomfortable time I have ever felt being a gay man.

**Barry:** We were going to get up and have breakfast, all that sort of stuff. We just got up and packed up our stuff--

**Sam:** --and got out. Which I mean, we should have maybe wrote the hotel and mentioned it, but we just wanted out [laughs]. We just wanted to have it done with.

I remember being very affected by this story and found myself thinking about it for many days after the interview. I reflected upon the stark contrast between Sam's feelings at the wedding itself and the feelings that surfaced when he and Barry arrived at the hotel just a few hours later. As discussed in Chapter 6, Sam described his emotions at the wedding in very happy terms such as "positive feeling," "extra special," and "such a good feeling." Therefore, his emphatic statement that this encounter at the hotel was "the most uncomfortable time I have ever felt being a gay man" was particularly striking. This illustrates the remarkable temporal and spatial disjuncture that newlywed queer couples experience. Although the couple may be legitimized and affirmed at the wedding itself, outside of that particular time and space they experience continual effacement. The legal sanctioning of their relationship does little to change this.

I heard similar accounts from many of the couples I interviewed, indicating that this temporal and spatial disjuncture may be a common facet of the queer wedding experience. Jackie and Renée, for instance, took a honeymoon in Whistler, British Columbia. During their time there, however, they did not reveal to others that they were on their honeymoon. Instead, they stated that they were there for just an ordinary visit. They were uncertain as to how people would respond if they told them the truth, so they chose to be on the safe side and keep it to themselves:

**Jackie:** We didn't really tell anybody, you know. "Oh what are you guys here for, just visiting?" "Oh, we're from Vancouver." "Oh so what are you guys here for?" "Uhhhhh"--

**Renée:** [Laughs.] Oh yeah. To see Whistler [laughs.]

**Jackie:** To see Whistler. Yeah. We would love to say, "Oh, we're here for our honeymoon" to get like the honeymoon discount, you know, but--

**Sharon:** You didn't tell people you were on a honeymoon?

**Jackie:** Yeah.

**Sharon:** Why's that?

**Jackie:** Well, cause there's so many tourists up there, you don't know, like, you know--

**Renée:** Oh, Whistler's pretty hater of a town, too...

It is particularly interesting that Jackie and Renée did not feel safe to be “out” in Whistler, because Whistler is aggressively marketed as a queer-friendly town, and is in fact a very popular locale for queer destination weddings (Tourism Vancouver, 2010). Nonetheless, Jackie and Renée did not feel at ease there, and decided to keep quiet about the purpose of their trip. As they explained, they would have loved to tell people that they were on their honeymoon. Doing so would have allowed them to take advantage of the “honeymoon discount” that many hotels, travel agencies, spas, restaurants, and other businesses offer. But concealing the true reason for their visit denied them of much more than their honeymoon discount. It also deprived them of the chance to celebrate their newlywed life publicly, to display affection, to speak freely, and to have the carefree, uninhibited, demonstratively romantic honeymoon that so many heterosexual couples can have without even thinking about it.

For heterosexual newlyweds, the honeymoon is an important public ritual for demonstrating their gendered and sexualized identities (Dubinsky, 1999). But as the examples above suggest, many queer newlyweds are not able to express their identities publicly while on the honeymoon. Patsy and Magda explained that they were very careful not to display affection in public when they were on their honeymoon in Puerto

Vallarta, Mexico. Although Puerto Vallarta is reputed to be one of the world's most queer-friendly tourist destinations, Patsy and Magda felt that it was best to be cautious:

**Magda:** In Mexico we absolutely behaved ourselves.

**Patsy:** It was very hard for us.

**Magda:** Even if Puerto Vallarta is considered kind of the gay capital of Mexico, it is still different. So we behaved there, of course.

Patsy and Magda's careful and deliberate decision to "behave" in Puerto Vallarta is another vivid example of the way that queer couples adjust and adapt their relationship as they move through time and space. As queer people do every day throughout their lives, Patsy and Magda determined how to conduct themselves based on their intuitive feelings of safety and comfort in that particular place and time.

Some couples shared that they did feel comfortable being "out" during their honeymoon. For example, Jamie and Karen took a honeymoon in Victoria, British Columbia. They stayed at several different hotels during their time there, and they asked for the "honeymoon discount" at each one:

**Karen:** Every single one of them we said "We just got married," and they're like "Oh, we'll upgrade you!" So every single one we got a king-sized bed and a view.

**Jamie:** Balcony, king-sized bed, a view of the harbour, parking, breakfast, oh!

**Karen:** Yeah, it was nice.

**Sharon:** So, you just mentioned that you were on your honeymoon?

**Karen:** Just like when we checked in.

**Jamie:** Yeah, when we checked in we'd say, "This is our honeymoon, we just got married, do you happen to have any free upgrades?" And they would usually say "Oh, of course! Of course, congratulations."

**Karen:** Yeah.

**Jamie:** I don't think we ever got any negative reactions, no.

**Karen:** No.

**Sharon:** Did you feel really comfortable in Victoria, being on a honeymoon and being queer?

**Karen:** Pretty comfortable. Someone yelled at us one night. "Lesbians!" But that's all they said.

Jamie and Karen's experience with the hotels in Victoria was overwhelmingly positive. Still, they admitted that they felt only "pretty comfortable" as a queer couple in Victoria, and remembered that a stranger yelled, "Lesbians!" at them one night when they were walking in the street. Karen seemed to minimize that encounter, however. As she explained later in the interview, people stare at them and make homophobic and heterosexist comments to them regularly, even in the parts of Vancouver that are supposedly most queer-friendly.

### **7.3: Postnuptial Quotidian Life**

After the wedding and honeymoon have ended, the gifts have been opened and the expenses paid, couples settle back into "normal life." But what is "normal life" and how is it different after the wedding? I was very interested to hear what my respondents had to say about this. Perhaps not surprisingly, the answers to this question were quite varied. Some couples feel that life after marriage is very different, and others said that really very little has changed for them. Among those who said that life is different, many of them explained that their relationship now feels more serious and committed. For

example, Jackie and Renée said they feel more dedicated to work on their relationship and to stay together even when challenges emerge:

**Jackie:** Yeah. I really like marriage. Yeah. And it *is* different.

**Renée:** Oh yeah.

**Jackie:** It is different than saying, “This is my girlfriend.” Being married is completely different than dating. Your whole entire world is intertwined. Everything you do, she does, is intertwined.

**Renée:** Um hmm.

**Sharon:** How do you think it would be different if you were living together, in a common-law relationship, but not married?

**Jackie:** I think--the reason why I say it would be different if we were common-law is [pause] it’s so easy to say, “I quit.”

**Renée:** Yeah.

**Jackie:** It’s so easy to say--

**Renée:** “I’ve had enough.”

**Jackie:** “I’ve had enough, I’m leaving for a week, you go deal with your own things.” In a marriage it’s not like that. In a marriage, you need to work out your issues. You need to make sure everything’s compatible. I’d rather be married than common-law.

**Renée:** No, it’s definitely like she said. There’s been times where--like everybody fights, obviously, we’re not the perfect couple--but it’s just like, “I’m leaving you!” and it’s like, “No you aren’t--we’re married, that’s gonna cost you a pretty penny, you’ll be back tomorrow” [laughs.]

**Jackie:** [Laughs.]

As the above narrative shows, Jackie and Renée feel that being married is notably different from being in a common-law relationship. Although Renée referred to divorce jokingly, her suggestion that divorce is a major disincentive for ending a marriage is a relevant point to consider. The idea that married couples are more likely than unmarried

couples to stay together is difficult to prove, and the divorce rate in North America leaves us to wonder whether or not this argument holds water. Still, many believe that married couples are more committed to “sticking it out.” In fact, this assumption about marriage is so taken-for-granted that it often goes unnoticed and unexplored. One participant, Sandra, articulated the belief that marriage signifies a commitment to be together forever. Her words illustrate the assumption that marriage implies a lifelong commitment:

Yeah. Before we were married it’s not like I questioned the commitment and I was like, “Oh, maybe we won’t last.” Like, before we were married I thought we would be together forever. I guess the difference is, before we got married, I thought we would be together forever, but once you’re married, you *know* you’re going to be together forever. So it, I don’t know, it just changes the way you think about things.

In discussing how life is different after marriage, and why marriage feels more committed, Sandra and Vivianne focused on external factors, such as the role of family, friends, and the public. They explained:

**Sandra:** Yeah, I found it really changed our relationship actually. Like before I got married, I thought it was just kind of like a formality that you go through. You can have that intense commitment without getting married, but I found actually that it was different after we got married.

**Vivianne:** Definitely.

**Sandra:** Yeah. So definitely it’s like a more serious commitment, I think.

**Sharon:** How is it different after you got married?

**Sandra:** I think having that kind of like, acknowledgement from friends and family. And maybe this is more so if you’re queer, I don’t know, but having that acknowledgement from friends and family and even like, strangers, you know, when you fill out a form and you check off “married.” Just having that kind of public acknowledgement I think has an impact. You know, internally, and within the relationship and within yourself and how you view the relationship. It just, yeah, it just feels like a more serious commitment. Yeah, and I think it just shifts the way you think about the relationship. It’s hard to say really concretely like--



**Vivianne:** --what exactly it is, but--

**Sandra:** --Yeah. I think it's a different identity to be married than to be in a long-term relationship.

**Vivianne:** That sums it up pretty well.

Sandra and Vivianne's account illustrates one of the reasons that the institution of marriage is so complex. As they said, it is very difficult to put into tangible, concrete terms how married couples are different from unmarried couples. Nonetheless, they expressed that marriage feels very different; that it feels like a "more serious commitment." They point out that it *feels* like a more serious commitment precisely because others *acknowledge* it as such. This acknowledgment of marriage as a more serious relationship, and in fact as a "different identity" is very much engrained and *institutionalized* into North American cultural and legal practices. As Bourdieu (1991) explains, rituals such as weddings consecrate a simple difference of fact as a legitimate distinction. In this manner, the simple difference between married and unmarried couples, a difference that would otherwise have little meaning, is inscribed with great social significance.

Regardless of whether or not the difference between married and unmarried couples is a legitimate distinction, it is clear that many of the couples I interviewed feel that being married has allowed them to enter into a deeper level of commitment. As discussed above, some couples expressed that this commitment means they have greater dedication to work through challenges. Other couples shared that the commitment has given them a higher level of security and trust. For example, Brad and Marc said that

they now have an “extra level of trust” which has helped to strengthen and develop their relationship:

**Brad:** And our relationship has changed and evolved over time since we got married. And I think it did--that did make a difference. Not like immediately as I said but we definitely have grown as a couple in some ways because of it. I think if we hadn't gotten married we still would have had similar experiences but it definitely--it did make a difference I think.

**Marc:** Oh yeah, absolutely.

**Brad:** Yeah.

**Sharon:** In what ways in particular has it made a difference?

**Brad:** [laughs.]

**Marc:** [laughs.] Well um, we, I mean, we're not as jealous of one another and we actually have experienced or experimented with opening up the relationship as well, so. And I think that might not have worked so well had we not had this amazing commitment to each other and--I mean there's definitely--it's something that we talked about for a long time but I think after we got married we actually acted on it and I think in a lot of ways again, as you, [Brad] said, it strengthened our relationship because, you know, it brings you--I think it brings you closer, as well, in a weird way. I don't know. [Laughs.] So, in that sense, I think definitely that's changed.

**Brad:** Yeah and when we started opening up our relationship, people asked me, “Did it just happen overnight?” And I was like, “No, we talked about it for a long time.” And I honestly do think that it works and it's been positive because we got married and there's the extra level of trust that just doesn't exist for us if we weren't married. So now we have such a solid commitment to each other that we can engage in those other things and it's totally healthy and fine and we're not jealous of each other. And I don't know if that would have worked out if we weren't married, so. So that's been interesting.

Perhaps ironically, getting married has allowed Brad and Marc to expand their relationship beyond the bounds of monogamy. Conventional understandings of marriage define it as a long-term, dyadic, monogamous relationship (Coontz, 2005). But Brad and

Marc interpret marriage in their own way and in doing so they resist dominant, morally regulated discourses on marriage and family. In this way, they have found greater freedom within marriage and perhaps even inspired others to do the same.

When asked how life is different after marriage, other participants explained that their lives are more joyful, relaxed, and free. For example, Sophia expressed that she feels joy and gratitude for the very fact that she and Claudia had the right to marry one another. She also said that she feels liberated to speak to others about her life in an uncensored and uninhibited way:

... I would say it has expanded my joyfulness. Because it is, it's a joyful thing to be able to do this with total freedom. I mean, to do what we did, to exercise the expression that we did in every element of it, when you think about how recently, what short time it has been since people have felt comfortable walking hand in hand or kissing on a public street or not feeling alarmed about where they were going to walk or who found out or who you disclosed yourself to... and so in contrast, it does feel very abundantly joyful to be able to just be who one is so publicly and so fully, and to feel, just to celebrate what we have with one another, but to have that celebrated by our friends and by family, too. That's I think, the thing that--it has felt freeing. And it has felt like it has just released any management requirement... this decision to publicly honour and deepen the commitment that we have to one another and to host all of this and plan this, it's been a kind of shedding of any requirement to be careful about which elements of who I am get presented and in what sort of package combination.

In a similar way, Sam expressed that having a wedding has released him from the worrying responsibility of self-censorship. Sam and Barry had a backyard wedding reception and invited all of their neighbors, so everyone in their neighborhood now knows they are a couple. This has contributed to a greater sense of ease and comfort, as Sam explained:

So the marriage to me was a good thing, because there were no more questions, I guess, like questions in my head, like "Do they accept us? Or

“do they really know we’re a couple?” So the marriage brought it all together, and now it’s a really comfortable feeling in the neighbourhood. We don’t have to hide; we don’t have to worry about what we say, or who we invite over. So the marriage--that was a good thing.

Barry and Sam feel that being married has given them more freedom to be themselves, specifically in social interactions with their neighbors. However, they are highly aware of the fact that this freedom has its limits. While Sam expressed that there is a “comfortable feeling in the neighborhood,” he explained that they still exercise caution with public displays of affection:

**Sam:** And so the stuff that still bothers me is the affectionate part of it. Like, with my wife I could walk down the street and hold her hand. We have to be very careful where we do that. The West End, yes. But outside of the West End? We’re very--

**Barry:** --We’re very conscious of that.

**Sam:** Yeah.

**Barry:** Even though it’s the law, people break the law every day. So we’re very conscious of that.

Barry and Sam are mindful that their freedom to be open about their relationship varies as they move through different spaces. They are perhaps most aware of this fact when they travel across the border to the United States, which they do regularly because they are members of a motorcycle club that spans across Washington, Oregon, and British Columbia. When they move across the national border, their relationship temporarily disappears:

**Sam:** It’s funny. We’re married. But when we travel to the States we travel apart. We don’t say we’re married.

**Barry:** We don’t say we’re married.

**Sam:** They say, “Are you travelling alone?” We always say, “Yes.” They just make it very difficult. So that’s kind of hard to do [laughs].

**Sharon:** Anywhere you go in the States?

**Barry:** Anywhere. Yeah. Whenever we’re going across the border at any point, we always go through separately. We never, ever travel together. Because we’ve just heard of some absolute horror stories where they’ve harassed the couple, and then refused entry. And once they have refused entry, they won’t give it back. So you can’t go back in there.

Brad and Marc, who also travel regularly, echoed that the time-space of border crossings heightens their awareness of what it means to be legally married. Their experiences demonstrate that the state plays a powerful role in recognizing certain relationships and erasing others. Their experiences also remind us that Canada is unique:

**Brad:** I would say to people--when I notice it the most is this interacting with other countries, like crossing borders, and dealing with all this paperwork and visa stuff. Then you realize the benefits you get or don’t get if you’re married. And the first time we came back to Canada married that was really cool. You know, that’s when you notice it.

While many couples identified ways that their lives and their relationship have changed since getting married, some seemed to feel that things are very much the same. Stix and Twiggs suggested that marriage has not altered their relationship, nor how other people treat it:

**Twiggs:** I never forget we had a wedding, but I always forget we’re married. It doesn’t really change how anything is.

**Stix:** Yeah, not at all.

**Twiggs:** Yeah.

**Sharon:** So would you say your relationship hasn’t changed since you’ve been married?

**Twiggs:** Not at all.

**Stix:** No... and I feel it hasn't changed how people respond to us, either.

**Twiggs:** Yeah.

**Stix:** Since we've been married now.

**Twiggs:** Whereas I find with a lot of straight people--like first when we got married there were tons of people, mostly straight people, "Wow, you're married now, what's the married life like? How's married life? What's it like being married? How does it feel to be married?" All these like married questions, and it was like nothing, like the whole--

**Stix:** Yeah, we had already been committed, like before the marriage. That kind of, that point of commitment, even though it was captioned in a ceremony, it was still, it was still there before.

**Twiggs:** Yeah, and I don't think the wedding legitimized or changed--

**Stix:** Yeah, it didn't legitimize it.

This commentary is interesting for two major reasons. First, it reminds us that not everyone understands marriage as the definitive marker of a committed relationship. Second, this narrative suggests an apparent contradiction: Stix and Twiggs said that marriage hasn't changed how people respond to them, but then report that they were barraged with questions about "married life," showing that many people do in fact treat marriage as an important distinction. Twiggs made a point to emphasize that it was "mostly straight people" who asked such questions, suggesting that queer friends and family members responded differently. Later in the interview, when we were discussing the legal benefits of marriage, Stix and Twiggs explained that although the material benefits are relatively small, the social distinction is quite significant:

**Sharon:** What are the benefits of being legally married?

**Stix:** Not much different than not being legally married, because you still have common-law. Like if you think of the tangible benefits. There's not

much, there's nothing different about being legally married, if you think about that.

**Twiggs:** But socially it's *so* different. It's like--

**Stix:** Socially they're so different.

**Twiggs:** But socially it means so much. It means *so much* to people. When other people ask you things like "Oh, you can have children," or like we could have--I feel like we were legitimized in a way.

This commentary reveals an important point about legitimization and recognition of relationships. Even though Stix and Twiggs were a legitimate couple in their own eyes and the eyes of their loved ones long before getting married, it was not until after the wedding that they were granted universal recognition by the state and by society on the whole. As Stix and Twiggs point out, marriage is an important social distinction that "means *so much* to people." They explain that after they were married, people began to ask them about having children, suggesting that marriage is popularly understood as a different order of relationship, and the only relationship context in which it is rightful and appropriate to have children. The implication is that the married couple is the foundation of a family, whereas the unmarried couple is not. This is just one of the reasons that Stix and Twiggs and other respondents have perceived that they are treated differently now that they are married. Regardless of whether or not the couple believes that marriage is an important distinction, the reality is that married couples hold an incredible amount of symbolic capital. This symbolic capital grants them access to social and material privileges that mutually support and build upon each other well into the future.

#### 7.4: Deployment of the Terms “Husband” and “Wife”

The important social distinction between married and unmarried couples is reinforced in the English language by using special titles to refer to those who have undergone the ritual. While anyone can use “spouse,” “partner,” “boyfriend” or “girlfriend,” only those who are legally married can rightfully use the labels “husband” and “wife.” These terms wield a great deal of power because they are protected by the institution of marriage. When spoken, written, or checked off on a legal document, these terms grant more respect and credibility to a relationship. They also make it easier for a couple to take important actions such as making medical or legal decisions for one another, buying a home, and visiting (or immigrating to) another country.

My interview narrators explained that they employ the terms “husband” and “wife” in different ways and for a variety of purposes. At times, they use the terms deliberately because of the power that they exert; they utter them as an entrée into the social privileges of married life. Other times, or even at the same time, couples use the terms to resist heteronormativity. Because most people automatically associate the terms “husband” and “wife” with heterosexual relationships, their usage in a queer context has the potential to make others aware of their heteronormative assumptions and perhaps even shift their views on what counts as “family.”

Brad and Marc expressed that they use the term husband regularly, especially when meeting new people. They have found that it has a powerful effect on others, as it forces them to understand the relationship as legitimate:

**Brad:** I like introducing Marc as my husband, socially. I find that’s quite powerful. I would say that’s a really nice--that’s a big reason. It really legitimizes it. Especially like at work functions and everything, it like forces people to treat us on an equal level. Almost all of our friends and



colleagues are fine anyways, but it's--I don't know--it's nice. And when you go to like a new setting, like even when we met my new supervisors and colleagues in New York, it's like not questioned, it's just like, "Yeah, this is my husband. That's the way it is."

**Marc:** I'm not just your cohabitating partner [laughs.]

**Brad:** Yeah. So, socially it makes a difference, I think.

**Sharon:** So you [Marc] use the term husband as well?

**Marc:** Oh yeah, definitely. I mean all our friends and colleagues it's a non-issue completely, but it is nice to throw it out when you're meeting new people. Definitely. You get a little bit more "cred," I guess [laughs.]

This report is an excellent demonstration of the symbolic power of marriage. By simply introducing Marc as his "husband," as opposed to his "partner" or "boyfriend," Brad is able to gain more respect from his colleagues. Given this fact, it is perhaps unsurprising that he uses the term "husband" often and enjoys doing so:

**Brad:** As I said earlier though, introducing someone as your husband, to me, really matters. That's like a huge thing that I love doing. Pretty much wherever we go. The only time I find it weird is on the phone, to like a total stranger.

**Marc:** Ooh, that's when I like it.

**Brad:** Is it really?

**Marc:** I like when the telemarketers phone and they're like, "Is Mrs. Marshall there?" I'm like, "I'm Mrs. Marshall."

**Brad:** [Laughs.]

**Marc:** They usually hang up pretty quickly [laughing.]

**Brad:** You love doing that, don't you? [laughs.]

When I asked Stix and Twiggs about their use of the term "wife," they explained that they don't use the term very often. Most of the time they use "partner," they said,

and at times they even “slip up” and use “girlfriend.” Still, they do use the label “wife” at certain times. Their explanation of when they use the term reveals that they switch between using it strategically and ironically:

**Twiggs:** I call, I always say “my partner,” but I’ll say “my wife.” Sometimes I say “wife.” One time I called, one time I called--Stix was picking up something from the pharmacy and I called and I said, “Oh, my wife’s picking up something, blah, blah, blah.” And she got there and the guy was like “Oh yeah, your wife called,” and Stix was all shocked.

**Stix:** I was like, “what?”

**Twiggs:** I like to say “wife” sometimes. It’s fun and it connotes that we’re married. That’s why I say it actually, if I need to, you know, get across to somebody that, you know, my person whom I’m married to is picking up something for me at the pharmacy, please give it to them, because we’re married, so she’s like my family. So I’ll say that instead of just “partner.” But most of the time it’s just “partner.” It’s easy, it’s more ambiguous.

**Sharon:** So do you, [Stix], use the term “wife”?

**Stix:** Well, sometimes I do, yeah sometimes, probably not a lot. Maybe I might use it in like a joking, like a joking way, like, “haha, I have a wife” type of thing.

**Twiggs:** Yeah, my wife. Or “I’ve got to check with the wife, my wife,” if we’re joking.

**Stix:** Yeah, something like that, but mostly “partner.”

**Twiggs:** I’m sure I’ve introduced you as my wife before to people. “This is my wife.” Don’t I say that sometimes?

**Stix:** Maybe, and I’m probably like, “Don’t say that. Don’t call me wife!”

**Twiggs:** We’re always talking about having a wife, we’re always saying how we need to get a wife.

**Stix:** Yeah.

**Twiggs:** Yeah. We’re always like “Oh, we need a wife,” we’re both really messy. Sometimes we live like two teenage boys.

As this narrative reveals, Stix and Twiggs deploy the term “wife” in multiple ways. Their tongue in cheek usage of the term demonstrates that they are critical of its traditional, heterosexist meanings and associations. Still, they use the term strategically when they want or need to convey that they are “family.” We can therefore see that Stix and Twiggs have a great deal of agency in this aspect of their lives. They can refashion the use of “wife” for their own purposes, thereby subverting normative gender roles and traditional definitions of family. Yet they can also take advantage of the symbolic capital that it affords.

Sandra spoke directly about the repurposing of “wife” in a queer context. She expressed that while the term evokes a connotation of subservience in heterosexual relationships, in queer relationships she feels that it expresses caring, devotion, and a commitment to egalitarianism:

I think actually really, in like a straight context, I really don't like the word “wife.” I feel like there's really bad connotations with someone's “wife.” But in a queer context, I like using the word “wife.” And I really, I don't know, I always say how it's so nice having a wife and like, everyone should have a wife. Because it's really--I feel like we do have that wifely role towards each other, which I think, it's problematic when you have a husband and a wife and the wife looks after the husband, and, you know, puts the husband's needs first and those kinds of things. But when you have two wives, and you're both putting the other's needs first and looking after and caring for and being nurturing towards, I think that's actually really much better than two husbands in the typical sense. I mean, I'm sure gay male couples aren't like that, but if you have to have two of one of those halves of the relationship, the stereotypical roles, then I like the--I think the two wives is really--yeah. It's so good having a wife. Vivianne will cook for me, and I'll be like, “Oh, it's so nice having a wife.” But I also cook for you. So then you get the benefits of having a wife as well. Yeah, so I don't know. I think the word has negative connotations, but yeah, in a queer context I think that you can kind of make those into positive connotations.

Jamie and Karen explained that they enjoy using the term “wife” for three important reasons. First, they are proud of the fact that they are married and using the term is a way to show this. Second, they realize that when they use the term it makes people think, if for only a moment, about their heteronormative assumptions about marriage and the family. Last, they feel that saying “wife” is an easy and straightforward way to “come out.”

**Karen:** I usually say “wife.” Just because I’m like--I like it when I’m saying “wife.”

**Jamie:** I’m so proud of saying “wife”.

**Karen:** Because I said “partner” when we were dating and then now I can say “wife,” because people always are like “Oh, really?” Double-take.

**Jamie:** Yeah, yeah [laughs]. Double-whammy. Yeah, it’s wife or partner. I mean--I like to play “gay safe,” and I’m hesitant about people if I know that they’re not gay safe, like if I know--if I don’t know whether they’re not homophobic or whatever, I’m not going to be very forthcoming in the first interaction, so that is when I usually say “partner.” But if I know the person in any way, they know I’m gay, I’m sure, and I will say “wife.”

**Karen:** Yeah, I just say “wife.”

**Sharon:** How do people react when you say “wife”?

**Jamie:** Sometimes they pause.

**Karen:** Yeah. People--sometimes they pause.

**Jamie:** But sometimes I enjoy when they pause and I make them think about it. And I’ve never had anybody be outwardly negative, like at least since we’ve been married I’ve never had anybody say anything outwardly slanderous or demeaning or negative towards me. I think I’ve heard maybe passive aggressive remarks, maybe. But I don’t know, I don’t take it to heart, so I don’t think about it. I try not to think about stuff like that, at least.

**Karen:** Yeah, I never usually get a reaction. And for me it’s just easier than--I feel like I think more of the other person. And when they’re questioning like “Is she gay, is she not?” and then “wife” just gets it on the

table and then it's not a question of it anymore. And it just makes it easier for everyone.

**Jamie:** It's easier when you're constantly coming out just to say "wife" and get it over with.

Jackie and Renée relayed that they use different terms depending on whom they are speaking with. Neither of them use "wife" freely in their respective places of work. Renée, who owns a hairdressing company, only uses it with select clients, otherwise she uses "partner." Jackie, who works for the City of Vancouver, mostly uses "spouse" with her co-workers:

**Jackie:** I like to say "my wife" with people I'm comfortable with. But generally at work people ask, well, blah blah and I'm like, "my spouse." That's because I'm in a very old-fashioned-still area. But, Rosie says "my wife," I believe?

**Renée:** Yeah, I call her my wife. And same, if--cause I have certain clients that I know aren't okay with it--I just say my partner. And then they correct me, "You mean your husband, Rosie." I'm like, "Yup, my partner."

**Jackie:** I say "my spouse." With the guys at work.

**Renée:** Well, "spouse" can be different things but when I say "my partner" normally--

**Jackie:** Yeah, you think, yeah.

**Renée:** Yeah. A lot of people ask that question actually. "What do you call Jackie?" She's my wife.

**Jackie:** Yeah. I am. Princess.

**Renée:** [Laughs.]

**Sharon:** Which term do you prefer? Which term do you like?

**Jackie:** I--don't matter. I don't mind. Whatever, wife is fine with me. For myself, when it comes to people that I don't know, and people that I have to be careful about what I say, I say spouse. But to the everyday

person I do see, [I say] “my wife,” “my wife.” But like, to the guy I have to exchange trucks with--you know, “Oh how was your day?” “Oh, it was great. My spouse and I blah blah blah.” Right? So. There are still some barriers you gotta watch out for. There are people that still--who don’t accept it.

**Renée:** Well, you just want to protect yourself. If you’re not comfortable with it, then you keep it to yourself.

**Jackie:** Yeah. You’ve gotta be careful.

### **7.5: Relationships with Families of Origin After the Wedding**

During interviews, I asked couples to tell me how their wedding has impacted relationships with families of origin. Nearly all of them shared that the wedding had a significant impact in several important ways. First, the wedding compelled their families to comprehend and accept that the couple’s relationship is a lasting one, and not merely a phase. Marc explained that his parents had this realization after the wedding:

**Marc:** I think when it finally really hit home to them was when it was like, “Oh my god, he’s married. This is definitely not just a phase anymore.”

In a similar way, Daniel expressed that since he married Dinho, his family has begun to recognize that the couple’s relationship is serious and committed. He suggests that this realization has encouraged them to treat the couple with more respect:

**Daniel:** And my family, although they were very against it at the beginning, the more time that goes by the more they’re starting to come around, and were “Oh, these guys you know weren’t just, this isn’t just a fad or a thing they’re doing, it’s serious,” you know. My mum right away was supportive, but now we just, my brother who’s in town, he went for dinner with us. He hadn’t met Dinho until now, and they’ve said that we can come to their home and visit them for a weekend, which at first never would have been possible. And my younger sister isn’t supportive of gay marriage but she did meet us last year only when he was here and we went to Victoria. We’re not allowed to go to their *house*, but she met us at a restaurant... and she’s not, she’s been nice, like she’s not been mean or anything. It’s just that for them it’s really not a good, you know, they

don't believe in it, so. But they're all coming around, they're all realizing that this isn't just a, you know, like a fad or a fashion thing. Yeah, they really figure, "They really do love each other and they do want to be together always, so maybe we should reconsider how we're treating them and what we think about this." I'm getting that feeling.

Another point that emerged is that after the wedding, family members were forced to be more open about the couple's relationship. For instance, parents that habitually denied or glossed over their child's personal life feel that they can no longer do so now that he or she is married. Instead, they must answer questions more directly, as Patsy explains about her mother:

Well actually with my mum, it impacted a lot. Because my mum, remember she said to me that now that we're getting married she didn't--I can't remember how she said it--but she said that she needs to recognize you, [Magda], when she talks to other people. For instance, if they say, "Oh, how's your daughter doing? Is she dating anyone, is she married?" Now, my mum can't say "no," she has to say "yes." And she particularly said that. She said that she now has to more or less respect her as being my wife. She could no longer do the "Oh no, she's not dating."

As previously discussed, marriage is a defining element of normative family structure. It is popularly understood as the process by which two families join together, as well as the foundation for the creation of new families. The wedding itself is the pivotal moment when these new family boundaries are drawn. Most of my participants observed significant changes in the ways that their families of origin treat their spouse now that the couple has married. Jamie reported that her family of origin has demonstrated a remarkable shift, and they now embrace her wife Karen as a "daughter."

**Jamie:** My parents think marriage is like the official step of somebody entering a family. Before that, Karen could be my girlfriend or my partner, but she is nothing to them, you know, and marriage is what brings her together as family, in their eyes. They're very traditional, and yeah, they really, really acknowledge you, [Karen], as their daughter and like

she was equal to me. Like at Christmas, total equal, everything is equal and every time we get together in family conversations, definitely more so.

**Karen:** Yeah!

**Jamie:** And yeah, I don't know, for some reason for them it's like the magical change, and it helps them accept our relationship as valid, I guess.

**Karen:** Yeah, because even at Christmas dinner when we walked in--we were late--he made a point to be like, "Come here, come here!" And he was like, "Everyone, this is Jamie's partner Karen and Karen, this is everyone," and really made a point to stand up and say it.

**Jamie:** Oh yeah, my dad has changed.

Jamie seemed to attribute her parents' sudden embracing of Karen as family to the fact that they are "very traditional." However, my findings suggest that this embracing of the spouse as a new family member is not only the case with "traditional" family members, but in fact with *most* people. Discourses that shore up marriage as the gold standard of all forms of relationship are ubiquitous in North American culture, and even those who are critical of marriage cannot avoid their influence. Therein lies the reason that marriage appears as a "magical change" that compels people to recognize and legitimize relationships, and for parents to accept their new son- or daughter-in-law as family. It is quite "magical" if one considers that a mere marriage license can bring about such a transformation, but in reality there is nothing mysterious about it. Taken-for-granted beliefs about marriage, such as the notion that it is a more serious and committed relationship, a marker of adulthood, and the only legitimate foundation for family, have become invisible precisely because they are so pervasive.



## **7.6: Conclusion**

This chapter highlights several important contradictions about queer weddings and queer marriage. First, we see in this chapter that marriage offers couples a promise of legitimacy and belonging. In many ways, this promise is kept. Couples reported that after getting married, they were taken more seriously by colleagues, friends, families of origin, and the broader public. Members of families of origin, even those who previously held homophobic views, were compelled to accept the couple's relationship and to embrace the new son- or daughter-in-law as a genuine member of the family. Yet in many other ways, validation and acceptance still elude queer married couples. As their narratives reveal, they continually move across spaces of legitimacy and illegitimacy, places where they are allowed to appear and others where they must disappear.

The stories of my 24 narrators show that marriage means nothing yet it means everything. Marriage had few "tangible benefits" for them, and in many ways their lives haven't changed since the wedding. Yet at the same time, their lives have changed completely because their new relationship status is laden with social significance and symbolic capital. Regardless of whether or not they believe that marriage is an important social distinction, they are embedded in a social context where this distinction matters.

## Chapter 8: Conclusion

### **8.1: Discussion of Findings**

When I embarked on this research, I had several objectives. I wanted to understand what the wedding signifies for queer couples, and I hoped to explore the complex feelings that queer couples navigate when they plan and host a wedding. I also wanted to learn about the wedding industry in Vancouver and what this industry offers queer couples. With these objectives in mind, I conducted in-depth qualitative interviews with 12 queer couples in Metro Vancouver. I also interviewed one professional wedding planner who specializes in ‘same-sex’ weddings, and I conducted participant observation at an ‘alternative’ wedding show in Vancouver. My interview narrators are men and women of a variety of ‘races’, ethnicities, nationalities, religions, and ages; seven of them are ‘non-White’<sup>21</sup> and six are recent immigrants to Canada. Their rich and textured accounts expand our understanding of the decision-making and labor practices involved in planning and hosting a queer wedding. Their stories also illuminate how queer weddings both support and challenge the institution of marriage. My findings suggest some significant distinctions between heterosexual and queer weddings, highlighting that producing a queer wedding presents unique challenges and rewards.

Throughout my research, I was guided by three central questions:

- 1) What motivates queer couples to wed and what factors shape their decisions about what type of wedding to have?*
- 2) In what ways do queer weddings constitute the normalization of queer couples?*

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<sup>21</sup> For the sake of clarity and consistency, I use the term ‘non-White’ throughout the thesis to refer to all participants who do not identify as White, Caucasian or European. I am alert to the problems associated with classifying people as racial or ethnic minorities, as we know the very concept of ‘race’ to be historically and geographically contingent as well as socially constructed. Nonetheless, there are very real material consequences to being born ‘non-White,’ and particularly relevant to this thesis are conditions of double oppression, such as by ‘race’ and sex or ‘race’ and sexuality (Hill Collins, 2005).

3) *In what ways do queer weddings subvert heteronormativity, traditional gender roles, and the wedding-industrial complex (Ingraham, 2008)?*

In this chapter, I briefly summarize my research findings and discuss how they shed light on these important questions. I also outline the limitations of this study and sketch several lines of future inquiry.

My respondents' primary motivations for having a wedding were as varied as the couples themselves. Some expressed that their reasons were purely personal: simply put, it was about love and commitment. Others felt that their reasons were more complex: for instance, Simon said that initially his motives were personal, but as things progressed he realized that there were other factors, such as the desire to "legitimize same-sex marriage in society." While my interview narrators' motivations for having a wedding were varied, on the whole, there is one point they agreed upon: a major purpose of a wedding is for couples to declare their love and commitment *publicly*; that is, with their family and friends as witnesses. Weddings presented these couples with the opportunity to attain recognition, validation, and a sense of belonging from family and friends. For queer individuals, this is an especially valuable opportunity, particularly for those whose relationships with their families of origin are fraught with uncertainty (Smart, 2007; Lewin, 1998).

Because of this uncertainty, many respondents were anxious about announcing the engagement to their families of origin. In fact, several didn't tell their families about the wedding at all. This finding is aligned with previous research indicating that queer couples often face resistance or outright rejection from their families when they express

their intentions to marry (Ayers, 2009; Lewin, 1998; Otnes & Pleck, 2003; Smart, 2007; Wythe & Merling, 2000).

Perhaps not surprisingly, another unique attribute of the queer wedding experience is that parents are typically not involved or only minimally involved in helping to plan or finance the wedding (Ayers, 2009; Lewin, 1998; Otnes & Pleck, 2003; Smart, 2007; Wythe & Merling, 2000); my interview narrators' weddings were no exception. My narrators expressed ambivalence about their parents' lack of involvement in the wedding preparations. While they would have liked their parents to show greater support and enthusiasm, they also feel grateful that they were able to shape their weddings according to their own beliefs, desires, and values, rather than their parents' expectations. Freedom from parents' expectations is a theme that couples continually made reference to during interviews, and they suggested that this could be one reason why they did not feel tied to the scripts that marshal many heterosexual weddings.

Although families of origin had limited involvement in the wedding preparations, on the whole, participants did not feel they were planning their weddings on their own. First of all, couples carried out the majority of the wedding labor *together*. This stands in direct contradiction to the unequal division of labor in heterosexual weddings. In heterosexual weddings, the bride often takes on the heft of the work, especially the "invisible" tasks, or stereotypical women's work, while grooms are involved in the more visible aspects such as making final decisions (Blakely, 2007; Currie, 1993; Sniezek, 2005). I maintain that queer couples have a different understanding of family work roles, and their cooperative, egalitarian approach to wedding labor is one illustration. As Jamie shared, when she was planning her first (heterosexual) wedding she had little help from

her fiancé. She explained, "... I was basically on my own. I was on my own in planning but I had a very rigid structure in what I was allowed, and if I had a rogue idea I would have to run it past my ex, and you know, get the A-okay." In describing the labor for her and Karen's wedding, however, she said, "Everything was very equal...we did all the crafts together; we did all the shopping together... I liked it!"

In addition, couples were not on their own when planning their weddings because friends, neighbors, and other members of their families of choice (Weston, 1997) assisted in numerous ways. Where families of origin were absent, families of choice stepped in to help with the wedding labor, helping with everything from making decorations and baking cakes to acting as emcee at the wedding reception. Some friends even offered to host the wedding at their home, and others helped to pay for some of the wedding expenses. Conscious of the fact that parents, siblings, and other members of the couple's family of origin may not offer support, friends take it upon themselves to help the couple in whatever ways they are able. Queer wedding labor therefore can become a highly social, lively, creative, and collaborative affair, as well as a tremendous opportunity to fortify ties with families of choice.

With few exceptions, participants in this study were keenly aware of the discourses that constitute the wedding-ideological complex (Ingraham, 2008) and refused to accept them. They criticized taken-for-granted assumptions such as the notion that the wedding is the most important day in a person's life (Currie, 1993; Howard, 2006; Ingraham, 2008; Mead, 2007) or that a wedding must be 'picture perfect' down to the last detail (Currie, 1993; Mead, 2007). The wedding industry tries to conceal the powerful arrangements these discourses serve, but many of my interview narrators were not fooled.

Although many heterosexual couples resist the wedding-ideological complex and the wedding-industrial complex (Ingraham, 2008), previous research findings and my own suggest that queer couples are more likely to do so. While other researchers have pointed to lack of family support as the principal reason why queer couples spend less on their weddings than do heterosexuals (Ayers, 2009; Otnes & Pleck, 2003; Wythe & Merling, 2000), I argue there are additional underlying reasons for this tendency. First and foremost, when I asked my narrators if they ever thought or fantasized about having a wedding when they were younger, many reported that they did not. Their accounts suggest that queer individuals are less likely than heterosexuals to have envisioned that they would have a wedding one day, let alone a ‘traditional,’ lavish, white wedding:

**Karen:** ...Some girls have such a dream in mind of their wedding day and it has to be perfect and this and that, and I didn’t have any of that.

**Marc:** I just really never saw myself doing that. Kind of always knew I would be with somebody but the logistics of it all [laughs] I guess not really.

**Vivianne:** No, I wasn’t really into it, into the idea. I was never the kind who planned out the wedding or played ‘wedding’ with friends or anything like that. I just wasn’t really into the idea of marriage...

I maintain that because the wedding ‘fantasy’ is absent for these individuals, they are less likely to identify with or be persuaded by the rhetoric of the wedding industry, especially the deployment of (heterosexual) romantic ideology (Boden, 2003). Scholars of consumption have defined *consumer desire* as “the deeply embodied and socially embedded emotional and imaginative impulses that underpin much consuming behavior” (ibid, p. 12). It is quite likely that for many queer people, the emotional and imaginative impulses that underpin wedding consumption are not so entrenched.

As well, previous research has shown that queer individuals often experience heterosexual weddings as emotionally difficult or even traumatic events where they are silenced, invalidated, and erased while heterosexuality is elevated (Oswald, 2003). Having these experiences at heterosexual weddings reinforces the queer individual's alienation from the wedding fantasy, and therefore reinforces his or her inclination to view weddings from an "outsider" perspective. I argue that this outsider perspective is more likely to produce a reasoned, practical perspective on weddings that evades many heterosexual brides and grooms (Boden, 2003; Currie, 1993; Curran, 2007; Mead, 2007).

On the whole, my interview narrators did not identify with the heteronormative, heterosexist, and consumerist tropes that are pervasive in mainstream wedding guides and that underscore many 'traditional' heterosexual wedding rituals. It is therefore unsurprising that they eschewed wedding guidebooks and magazines. They designed their weddings according to their own beliefs and desires, rather than following the hegemonic discourses about weddings that are crystallized in the wedding-industrial complex. Couples edited, adapted, and re-wrote 'traditional' heterosexual wedding scripts for their own purposes. By performing various 'traditional' wedding rituals in a queer context, they disrupted the heteronormative assumptions inherent in those rituals. By walking down the aisle together, for instance, Brad and Marc reminded their guests, "no one was waiting for their bride to come." Similarly, by doing a line dance in place of the 'traditional' father-daughter dance, Stix and Twiggs interrupted the heterosexist and patriarchal meanings that underlie this custom. In this manner, my interview narrators advanced more egalitarian and inclusive understandings of gender, sexuality, and 'family.'

To be certain, my interview narrators felt they had a great deal of freedom in their decision-making about the wedding. Many of them said that they could do “whatever they wanted to do” in their weddings. But their stories reveal that there were numerous constraints on their freedom before, during, and after the wedding. First of all, couples were confined by the pervasive power of gendered and heteronormative language and practices. They felt they needed to rely on terms such as fiancé, bride, groom, wife, and husband when communicating with others, even if they did not identify with those terms. As Stix shared, many of her family and friends labeled her with the terms “fiancé” and “bride.” While this was very difficult for her to reconcile, she felt she had no alternative but to accept it. In order to relate to them and be understood, she had to rely on the gendered, heteronormative language and symbols available. As Bourdieu (1998) stated, words create consensus, and ‘family’ is constructed by the vocabulary that the social world provides us with in order to describe it.

The state is heavily invested in the use of heteronormative language at weddings, and queer weddings are no exception. As several of my respondents recalled, they were *required* to be pronounced “wife and wife” or “husband and husband” at the end of the wedding ceremony in order to be considered legally married. Although couples can, in theory, use whatever terms they prefer thereafter, the only terms that can be deployed to access the privileges of marriage are husband and wife. These are the terms that hold symbolic power, and they possess that power precisely because of the recognized authority of the speaker, i.e. clergy person or marriage officiant, who utters them (Bourdieu, 1991). The state is indeed “the main agent of the construction of the official categories through which both populations and minds are constructed” (ibid, p. 71).



Queer couples' freedom to do "whatever they want to do" in their weddings is also moderated by their desire to attend to the feelings of their guests. My interview narrators' reports suggest that they were especially sensitive to their parents' feelings. For instance, Patsy's decision to use a fast song for the first dance to avoid making her parents "feel uncomfortable" was a conscious choice to prioritize her parents' feelings above her own. Making negotiations like these, a process that Smart has referred to as "ethical balancing" (2007, p. 680), is especially common in queer weddings and it is clear that queer couples often compromise their own well being in order to preserve family ties (Oswald, 2003). While many of my respondents stated that they had a great deal of freedom in their wedding plans and preparations because they did not need to be concerned with making their parents happy, their actual experiences show that they prioritized their parents' comfort even when doing so required self-regulation and restraint.

The queer weddings in this study resist heteronormativity, traditional gender roles, and the wedding-industrial complex in a number of ways. Yet the capacity to resist is always mediated by a longing to be understood and validated; in a word, to be granted legitimacy. Many of my participants had a particularly profound yearning to be recognized and embraced by their families of origin, and some viewed the wedding as an opportunity to achieve this. For some, the wedding did produce the desired change. They explained that the wedding brought about a "surge in intimacy" with families of origin and that it compelled their parents to accept their new son- or daughter-in-law as a part of the family. For five of my narrators, however, there was no such chance. Because of their parents' disapproval of homosexuality, they were not able to tell them

about the wedding at all. This is but one illustration of the fact that legitimacy is a very elusive goal for queer couples, even after the wedding. On their honeymoons, couples were silenced and erased; their experiences contrast the affirmation and legitimization they received on the wedding day itself. When they move across national borders, their freedom to be open about their relationship disappears. Furthermore, they do not feel free to use the terms “husband” and “wife” with everyone, rather they exercise caution and use it only with those they deem to be “gay safe.” All of these examples show that queer couples navigate across spaces of legitimacy and illegitimacy, places where they are allowed to appear and others where they must disappear.

## **8.2: Limitations, Recommendations, and Areas for Future Research**

Though my narrators’ testimonies have much to tell us about queer weddings, this research is limited in a number of important ways. First, the sample size is relatively small. Due to the time and resource constraints of a Master’s thesis project, I was only able to interview 12 couples. Furthermore, my sample has a middle-class bias. It does not represent the experiences of working-class queers, nor does it reflect the experiences of non-urban queer couples. I did not ask my interview narrators about their gender identity, and I was therefore unable to comment on how this factor shaped their particular experiences. As well, this research does not adequately incorporate an intersectional analysis of the queer wedding experience. Issues of ‘race’, ethnicity, gender, class, and religious faith were all at work in these weddings. It is significant, for example, that a disproportionate number of non-White participants did not tell at least one of their parents about the wedding before it took place. It is also important that some wedding

rituals considered ‘traditional’ in one culture are completely foreign in another, and that an individual’s wedding ‘fantasy’ is conditioned by all of the above named factors.

These are all significant drawbacks to my project, and ones that should be addressed in future research on queer weddings.

Considering the ubiquity and social importance of weddings in the West, and the fact that these rituals remain relatively unexplored by academics (Boden, 2003), future research on weddings (both heterosexual and queer) is critical. Empirical work in this area has tremendous potential for the development of theory in the sociology of families, gender, sexualities, and consumption. First of all, future research on heterosexual weddings must account for the experiences of a diverse range of couples. Much of the previous literature focuses on the increasingly commercialized nature of wedding planning and the hegemonic power of the wedding-industrial complex (Ingraham, 2008). Although this research is extremely important, it unfortunately does not account for the myriad ways that many heterosexual couples are resisting the wedding-industrial complex (Ingraham, 2008). Future research should consider the ways that heterosexual couples are creating alternatives to the ‘traditional’ white wedding.

Although this study sampled only Vancouver residents and therefore excluded destination weddings, future research in this area would be fruitful. Considering that Vancouver is one of the most popular locations in the world for queer couples to wed (Daggett, 2009; Huus, 2004; Naumetz, 2005), it seems important to explore the experiences of non-resident couples. As well, it would be useful to understand more about the destination wedding industry in Vancouver. What trends have taken place in this industry since ‘same-sex’ marriage was legalized in British Columbia? How has the

destination wedding industry in Vancouver been affected by the increasing number of countries and states in the U.S. allowing 'same-sex' marriages?

Another interesting and important area for future inquiry is the experiences of clergy people and marriage commissioners who perform queer weddings. Considering that these individuals are not legally required to officiate for queer couples, it would be interesting to understand what factors motivate them to do so. How do they feel about performing queer wedding ceremonies? Have they had any internal or interpersonal conflicts about it? Are queer weddings good business for them? Research in this area would greatly enhance our understanding of the roles of religion and the state in queer weddings.

Although not directly related to the study of weddings, I would be remiss if I did not suggest that future researchers examine queer divorce. As 'same-sex' marriage has been legal in British Columbia for more than eight years, the time is ripe to embark on research in this area. How prevalent is divorce among queer couples in Vancouver? How have these couples lives been affected by divorce? How are their experiences similar to and different from heterosexual couples that have divorced?

Finally, exploring queer weddings from the perspective of heterosexual guests would be compelling and valuable. How do heterosexual guests at queer weddings understand these rituals? How do they feel when they observe and participate in them? Has the experience of attending a queer wedding impacted their beliefs and feelings about heterosexual weddings?

### 8.3: Concluding Remarks

Queer weddings are saturated with paradoxes. My narrators' stories illustrate that they carefully navigated through the border zones of resistance and normalization, legitimacy and illegitimacy, recognition and regulation. Patricia Hill Collins (1991) described *outsider within* as the position of being subjugated in a social situation where dominant cultural norms are performed and insiders are oblivious to your subjugation. The *outsider within* knows the inside rules, but also understands the power relations behind those rules and what alternative realities they obscure. Oswald (2003) argues that when queer people attend the weddings of their heterosexual friends and family members, they inhabit this paradoxical position. The stories of my 24 narrators demonstrate that at their own weddings, queer people inhabit the position that I call *insider without*. The *insider without* can participate in dominant cultural norms, but does not have full access to the symbolic and material power that other insiders enjoy. Since 'same-sex' marriage has been given the state's seal of approval and an increasing number of queer couples are choosing to have weddings, queer couples are new insiders to this important 'rite of institution' (Bourdieu, 1991). Nonetheless, they remain *without* the privileges that many heterosexual couples take for granted<sup>22</sup>: the freedom to announce your engagement to everyone and know that they will support you, the ability to walk into a store and buy an outfit for your wedding with no questions asked, access to financial and emotional support from your family of origin, the liberty to display affection on your honeymoon, and countless other advantages of having a "symbolic profit of normality" (ibid, p. 69). If one thing is clear, it is that queer married couples are

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<sup>22</sup> I acknowledge that many heterosexual couples do not enjoy these privileges, especially, for instance, couples who (like queer couples) defy the norms of sameness and difference, e.g. couples that cross lines of 'race'/ethnicity, class, age, (dis)ability, religious faith, etc.

still not yet legitimate: their access to legitimacy is unreliable, inconsistent, spotty at best. Before, during, and after the wedding, queer couples occupy “hybrid regions of legitimacy and illegitimacy” (Butler, 2002, p. 19) and therefore experience dissonance as they move through time and space.

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## **Appendix A: Interview Guide**

### **Background:**

- Where are you from and how long have you been living in Vancouver?
- In what part of Vancouver do you live?
- What do you do for a living?
- How would you describe your race/ethnicity/national origin?
- How old are you?
- How did you two meet?

### **Decision to Marry and Have a Wedding:**

- How long had you been together as a couple before deciding to get married?
- What does marriage mean to you?
- How did you decide to get married?
- How did you decide to have a wedding?
- What is the difference between getting married and having a wedding? Did you consider having one without having the other?
- Was there a proposal? If so, could you tell me about it?
- How did your friends and family members react when you told them you were getting married and planning a wedding?
- Have other same-sex couples you know decided to get married and have weddings? If so, do you think this influenced your own decisions?
- Have either of you been married before?
- What terms do you use to refer to one another, e.g. husband, wife, partner? Why?
- How did you feel about marriage when you were younger? Have your feelings changed? If so, in what ways?

### **Wedding Planning:**

- How much time was involved in planning your wedding?
- Where did help, inspiration, and ideas about your wedding come from?
- In what ways were these sources helpful?
- Were the sources you used geared towards heterosexual couples, queer couples, or both?
- Please describe the tasks that were involved in planning your wedding.
- Who was in charge of each of these tasks and why?
- What was your favorite part of wedding planning? What was your least favorite?
- Did you have any support from family or friends to help plan the wedding? If so, in what ways did they help?
- Did you hire a professional wedding planner? Why or why not?
- What would you say your main priorities and considerations in your wedding preparations were?
- Were there any types of wedding that you would not consider?



### **Comparisons With Other Weddings:**

- Have you attended any heterosexual weddings before? If so, how would you describe them?
- Have you attended any same-sex weddings before? If so, how would you describe them?
- How would you describe *your* wedding? How was it similar or different from other weddings you have attended?
- If you were having a heterosexual wedding, would things be different? If so, how?

### **Wedding Day:**

- Where and when was the wedding ceremony held?
- How many guests were invited? How many attended?
- Was there a reception? If so, where and when?
- Were there flowers or decorations at the wedding ceremony and/or reception? Why or why not? If yes, please describe.
- Was there music at the wedding ceremony and/or reception? Why or why not? If yes, please describe.
- Did you have a wedding cake? A cake topper? Why or why not? If yes, please describe.
- Did you hire a photographer and/or videographer? Why or why not? If yes, please describe how you selected him or her.
- What did you wear to your wedding? Why?
- Did you have a 'wedding party' (e.g. bridesmaids, groomsmen, flower child, etc.)? Why or why not? If yes, what did they wear? How did they each participate in the ceremony?
- Was your wedding a civil or religious ceremony? Why? What is your religious background?
- Who officiated the wedding? Why?
- Did you go through any of the 'traditional' rituals in your wedding ceremony? Why or why not?

### **Wedding Related Events:**

- Did you have any pre-wedding events, such as an engagement party, bridal shower, bachelor/bachelorette party? Why or why not?
- If you had any of these events, can you tell me a little bit about what each one was like?
- Did you go on a honeymoon? Why or why not? If yes, please tell me about what your honeymoon was like.
- Did you receive wedding gifts? If yes, what sorts of gifts did you receive? Were they the kinds of gifts that you expected?
- Did you do a wedding gift registry? Why or why not? If yes, where did you register? What sorts of items did you register? What was that experience like?

### **Reflections on Friends and Family:**

- What do you know about your parents' weddings? How similar or different was your wedding from theirs?
- Have your siblings had weddings? If so, how will yours be similar or different?
- How has your decision to get married and have a wedding impacted your relationships with family members? With heterosexual friends (married and unmarried)? With queer friends (married and unmarried)?
- Did any of your friends or family members express disagreement or discomfort with your decision to marry and hold a wedding? If so, how did they express their disagreement or discomfort and what were their reasons?
- Do you know any queer folks who are politically or ideologically opposed to marriage? How do you feel about this position?
- What did your friends and family members say about your wedding after it was over?
- In general, what do people say when you tell them you're married? Do they assume that you're married heterosexually? What other assumptions do people make?

### **Financial Matters:**

- Do you know how much you spent (in total) on your wedding, including all pre- and post-wedding events such as an engagement party or honeymoon?
- Did you have any support from family or friends to help finance the wedding? If so, how much did they contribute?
- If you had an unlimited budget, would you have done things differently?

### **Beliefs about Weddings:**

- What were your individual and shared motivations for wedding?
- Did you have the dream of becoming a bride/groom when you were younger? What did that dream look like?
- Have you seen TV shows or movies that feature queer weddings? If so, what was your impression?
- Did you fantasize about the 'perfect' wedding? If so, how did you imagine the 'perfect' wedding to be?
- What is a wedding for?
- If you had to do it all over again, what would you do differently?
- Looking back, was it all worth it?
- Is life together any different now that you are married than before marriage?
- Do you plan to have kids? Have you thought about it?

### **Other:**

- Are there any other details or issues that you think we need to cover?

## **Appendix B: Reflections from my Interview with a Queer Wedding Planner**

Prior to my interview with Darryl Persello, founder of Two Dears and a Queer, a Vancouver-based wedding and event company specializing in queer weddings, I had the perception that there are numerous queer wedding planners in Vancouver. I did some research on the internet, which generated the names of approximately 3-5 wedding planners that specifically mentioned they specialize in “same-sex weddings.” My search also uncovered approximately ten wedding planners who have indicated that they are “gay-friendly” by including their names and contact information on a list maintained by gayvancouver.net. With all of these names right at my fingertips, I assumed that I would have no trouble finding wedding planners to interview for my study.

I soon discovered, however, that the wedding industry in Vancouver is not as queer-friendly as my initial search suggested. For example, several of the queer wedding planners listed on the internet appear to be out of business; their webpages no longer exist and their telephone numbers are not working numbers. Also, it appears that consultants who would like to be included on the “gay-friendly” list need only complete a basic online form. There is no indication of whether or not these consultants have actually planned any queer weddings.<sup>23</sup>

During my interview with Darryl Persello, I discovered several important points about queer wedding planning in Vancouver. First of all, I learned that the vast majority of couples who use queer wedding planners in Vancouver are not from Canada. They come to Vancouver from places like the U.S., the U.K., Australia, Hong Kong, and

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<sup>23</sup> Nearly all of these “gay-friendly” wedding planners I found on the internet have their own websites. On their websites, they provide testimonials from former clients, including their names and photographs. I did not find any testimonials from queer couples. 2 Dears and a Queer is the only company I could find that had testimonials and photographs of queer couples.

Taiwan. In other words, they are consumers of “destination weddings.”<sup>24</sup> In this respect, it can be said that queer wedding planning businesses in Vancouver are more part of the tourism industry than they are a part of the local wedding industry. A second important point is that the demand for queer wedding planners in Vancouver is relatively low. Even though clients come from all over the world, and even though Two Dears and a Queer is the only company in Vancouver specifically devoted to queer weddings, Darryl explained that the wedding planning business is only a part-time, second job for him. He stated that it would be impossible to make a decent living planning queer weddings in Vancouver, and if he ever were to consider making wedding planning into full-time work, he would need to expand the business to also include heterosexual weddings.

Darryl also indicated that business has been on the decline over the past few years. He said that business was very good in the first few years after queer marriage was legalized in British Columbia, however he believes that as queer marriage is becoming more “accepted and widespread,” fewer couples are flocking to it. Simply put, the money to be made on queer weddings is from the novelty of it. If and when queer marriage is legalized across the U.S., the U.K, Australia, and other countries, this will undoubtedly have a dramatic impact on his business.

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<sup>24</sup> During a telephone conversation with Darryl, he estimated that 99% of the weddings he has planned were destination weddings. For more information, see Daggett, G. (1990, May). Oh Canada! Getting Married Up North. Passport Online. Retrieved from <http://www.passportmagazine.com/GayWeddings/Canada>.

### **Appendix C: Observations from an “Alternative” Wedding Show**

The “Indie I Do” wedding show looked a lot like any other wedding show. There was a large room with about 30-40 exhibitor tables lined up around the room. The exhibitors included all of the wedding industry staples: photographers and videographers, caterers, bakeries, gown designers, florists, jewelers, and stationary designers. Other exhibitors included disc jockeys and bands, beauty parlors, chaplains, financial planners, accessory designers, and an array of creative wedding services such as a mobile bartending service and a designer that makes matchboxes that feature pictures of the bride and groom. What distinguishes these exhibitors from the ones you might find at a larger wedding show is that they are typically small, independent, local businesses. Many of them offer a new or hip twist on typical wedding fare; for instance, eco-friendly invitations, gluten-free wedding cakes, and custom-made bridal gowns.

But despite the marketing materials suggesting that this “alternative” wedding show is hip, creative, and edgy, on the whole the show did not challenge the heteronormativity, heterosexism, and above all, consumerism that characterize the typical white wedding. Of particular interest for me, of course, was the fact that although the show’s website specifically states that the event is geared towards non-traditional weddings, including the “same-sex do,” the show did not appear or feel like a queer-friendly space. Although I acknowledge that this is a highly subjective assessment, I can provide several illustrative examples. First, the show was dominated by normatively gendered and sexualized imagery. I explored this by looking closely at the exhibitors’ displays, reading their marketing materials, and conversing with the vendors themselves. On the whole, the displays and materials were exclusively heterosexual; for instance, all

of the photographers at the show displayed sample albums. I looked through all of these albums, but did not find any photos of queer couples. This was also the case with the gown designer's catalogue and the photobooth rental company's sample images. In addition, the 100+ page magazine distributed to all "Indie I Do" attendees did not have even one picture of a queer couple. The only exception was that the eco-friendly invitations vendor did have several bride-bride and groom-groom invitation samples on display.

So far as I could tell from my observations, there were no queer couples in attendance. In fact, my observations suggest that nearly all of the attendees of this "alternative" wedding show were heterosexual brides-to-be. A few of these brides-to-be came to the show on their own, but most of them were accompanied by an older woman; presumably the mother of the bride. Others came with a female friend or their sister, and small minority attended with their fiancée. These characteristics provide support for previous research showing that heterosexual wedding labor is feminized and that brides carry out the bulk of the work (Blakely, 2008; Currie, 1993; Sniezek, 2005).

I engaged in conversation with several businesspeople at the show to find out if they have had queer clients. One photographer shared that she did photograph one lesbian wedding, however the couple was from Australia. She explained that there are photographers in Vancouver who "specialize in gay weddings," and that those photographers shoot most of the queer weddings. After much searching, I did finally discover one vendor (an event planning company) that displayed a rainbow flag on their brochure. It was a very small rainbow flag that I probably would have never noticed if I wasn't looking for it, but nonetheless, it was there. When I asked one the director of the

company if they have planned any queer weddings, he said that they haven't done any yet, but that they have one gay man and one lesbian on staff. Then he shared that they are planning one lesbian wedding coming up in 2013, but the couple getting married is from the U.S. These conversations reminded me of what Darryl Persello, founder of the 'same-sex' wedding planning company *Two Dears and a Queer*, told me during our interview: most of the queer wedding planning that happens in Vancouver is for "destination weddings."

My overall impression of the "Indie I Do" show is that it was not a particularly welcoming space for queer couples. The space was overwhelmingly heteronormative and gendered and the services catered to heterosexual, female clientele. The organizers of the "Indie I Do" show are, in fact, using false advertising when they state that the show "promises something for everyone – be it an off beat theme wedding, same-sex do, or simply a traditional couple looking to add a touch of their own unique personalities into their event."<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> This statement comes from the event's homepage: <http://www.indieido.com>.