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The Experiences of Legally Married Same-Sex Couples in California

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The Experiences of Legally Married Same-Sex Couples in California

By

Erin C. Falvey

A dissertation submitted to the Faculty of
Claremont Graduate University and San Diego State University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy in the
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Claremont, California
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2011

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APPROVAL OF THE DISSERTATION COMMITTEE

This dissertation has been duly read, reviewed, and critiqued by the Committee listed below, which hereby approves the manuscript of Erin C. Falvey as fulfilling the scope and quality requirements for meriting the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the Graduate Faculties of Education.

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Abstract

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Claremont Graduate University and San Diego State University: 2011

With the aim of increasing practitioner competence, this dissertation provides marriage and family therapists and mental health service providers with insight into the experiences of legally married same-sex couples. Specifically, the inquiry's objective was to elicit narratives of strength and agency from these couples who navigated the oppressive circumstances of an anti-gay amendment campaign situated within the debate over the extension of marriage rights to same-sex couples. Fourteen couples were interviewed in order to respond to the dissertation's overriding question: *How do the lesbian and gay couples and families who are among those who were legally married in California before the passage of Proposition 8 narrate their experiences of their marriages?* Through portraiture (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997), a method of inquiry situated within a postmodern, social constructionist framework, a narrative was produced which evolved through five emergent themes: 1) *Our Commitments Have Rich Histories*—the symbolic and legal ways in which these couples commemorated and brought definition to their commitments, in the absence of a nationally-sanctioned and collectively-recognized state of legal marriage; 2) *Not a Simple Matter: The Complexities of Language Choice*—their contextual language choices, which reflected the absence of representative and collectively-recognized language options for their relationships after

their legal marriages; 3) *The Battle Metaphor*—the couples' experiences of California's political debate over the extension of marriage rights to same-sex couples; 4) *Support Shaped Lived Experiences*—the impact of support from friends, family, and community; and lastly, 5) *Legal Marriage Shaped Individual, Relational, and Social Identities*—individual, relational and social shifts that occurred for the couples through the experience of being legally married. A follow-up focus group further validated the theme *Support Shaped Lived Experiences*, and examined more deeply the tensions that occurred when important persons were silent about and/or did not recognize the legitimacy of the couples' legal marriages, and/or the discriminatory context in which their legal marriages were situated. In addition to its contribution of the experiences of legally married same-sex couples to the family therapy literature, the dissertation concludes with important implications for affirmative therapeutic practice, research, education, training, advocacy, and social policy.

DEDICATION

In memory of
my father, Coach Falvey.

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CHAPTER ONE

ORIENTATION

Introduction

On May 15, 2008, a highly controversial ruling by the California Supreme Court asserted that under the state constitution, same-sex couples in California had the right to civil marriage as a means of legally recognizing their relationships (Feldblum, 2009).

According to Lambda Legal (2008), The California Supreme Court stated the following:

In light of the fundamental nature of the substantive rights embodied in the right to marry—and their central importance to an individual’s opportunity to live a happy, meaningful and satisfying life as a full member of society—the California Constitution properly must be interpreted to guarantee this basic civil right to all couples, without regard to their sexual orientation (p. 1).

Same-sex couples were able to legally marry in California beginning June 16, 2008. Over the next four and a half months, the state of California issued marriage licenses to approximately 18,000 same-sex couples. Concurrently, the months leading up to the November 2008 elections saw one of the most controversial political campaigns in California history, garnering the attention of the entire nation. In the midst of the 2008 economic recession, The California Marriage Protection Act or Proposition 8 proposed to amend to the California Constitution to eliminate the right of same-sex couples to marry in California. Proposition 8 designated marriage between a man and a woman as the only form of marriage valid or recognized in California (California General Election Voter Information, 2008). Proposition 8 became the most heavily-funded and widely talked about ballot initiative in California’s and likely the nation’s history.

Proposition 8 was passed by a slim majority at the November 2008 elections. This meant that same-sex couples were only able to legally marry in California between June 16, 2008 and November 4, 2008. While the proposition eliminated the right of same-sex couples to marry in California after it was passed, it did not apply to the 18,000 couples who had married legally between June and November (Nussbaum, 2010). On May 26, 2009, the California Supreme Court ruled that Proposition 8 was valid. The Court also upheld the marriages of those same-sex couples who wed before Proposition 8's passage. *Perry v. Schwarzenegger*, a U.S. District court case which challenged the validity of Proposition 8, resulted in a ruling by Judge Vaughan Walker of the U.S. District Court in San Francisco on August 4, 2010 that Proposition 8 is unconstitutional. As of this writing, the case is being appealed to the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals (Equality California, n.d.).

Objective of the Dissertation

One overriding narrative research question guides this inquiry: *How do the lesbian and gay couples and families who are among those who were legally married in California, before the passage of Proposition, 8 narrate their experiences of their marriages?* Through situating portraiture, a method of narrative inquiry which challenges the tendency in the social sciences of focusing inquiry on “pathology and disease rather than on health and resilience” (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997, p. 8) within a postmodern, social constructionist framework, the objective of this dissertation was to elicit narratives of strength and agency from lesbian and gay couples and families who are among those who were legally married in California before the passage of Proposition 8. In particular, this study explores the strategies that the couples utilized in navigating

their experiences of the ongoing local and national debate on the extension of marriage rights to same-sex couples.

Situated within the scholarly literature, the current sociopolitical context of the debate on the extension of marriage rights to same-sex couples, and the results of the pilot study that I conducted, the dissertation is guided by these specific areas of focus:

1. How has the presence of legal status affected the couples' relationships?
2. How do anti-gay amendment campaigns affect same-sex couples?
 - a. How has the local and national debate about extending marriage rights to same-sex couples impacted the couples' experiences of marriage?
 - b. How have these couples navigated the experiences and challenges of the discriminatory ballot measure Proposition 8 and all of the ongoing legal battles connected to its passing together as a couple?
3. What are the implications for gay and lesbian affirmative therapeutic practice from this inquiry?

Political Context of the Dissertation

Marriage in the United States

The institution of marriage is culturally, spiritually, and historically bound. It follows that the meaning of marriage has evolved and changed over time. Throughout most of Western history, marriage was utilized as a means of securing property, wealth, power, and status (Coontz, 2005; Herek, 2006). The more contemporarily-understood description of marriage characterized by emotional intimacy and romantic love did not come to define marriage until the 19th and 20th centuries in Western culture (D'Emilio, 1983; Herek, 2006).

Today, marriage provides couples with many legal and financial benefits to which unmarried couples do not have the same access (Nussbaum, 2010). For example, some of these benefits include (but are certainly not limited to) access to healthcare through joining the policy of an employed spouse, legal definition as *family* when it comes to medical care participation such as hospital visitation and medical decision-making, legal definition as *family* for federal income tax purposes, adoption and custody rights, immigration rights, and spousal privilege exemption in court testimony situations (Killian, 2010; Nussbaum, 2010).

Although some states do offer marriage-like rights and privileges to same-sex couples through civil unions, domestic partnerships, and civil marriage at the state level, the federal Defense of Marriage Act (DOMA) which was signed into law by President Bill Clinton in 1996, precludes those marriage-like rights and privileges from being equivalent to those available to opposite-sex couples through marriage (Cahill, 2004; Chauncey, 2004; Herek, 2006; Nussbaum, 2010). This is because the DOMA defines marriage, for federal purposes, as a union between one man and one woman. It also exempts states from recognizing same-sex marriages performed in other states, and restricts the availability of federal benefits to heterosexual couples only (Cahill, 2004; Chauncey, 2004; Herek, 2006; Nussbaum, 2010). Consequently, although some states have extended legal relationship recognition to same-sex couples through the aforementioned designations, the rights and privileges afforded to same-sex couples through those designations are not fully equal to the legal marriages available to opposite-sex couples in that they are not required to be recognized by other states and are not recognized by the federal government (Nussbaum, 2010).

Marriage Rights and the LGBT Rights Movement

The meaning of marriage and access to marriage rights has also evolved and is continuing to evolve within the lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) community. In fact, it was not until the 1990s that same-sex marriage rights became a widespread goal within the LGBT rights movement. As with the larger cultural shifts in the U.S. surrounding the institution of marriage, controversy has also shaped the evolution within the LGBT community regarding the meaning of, access to, and desirability of marriage rights for same-sex couples. This controversy within the community has surrounded the use of the word *marriage*, the feminist critique of the role that marriage has historically played in the institutionalized oppression of women, the relevance of marriage within the queer community's deconstruction and reconstruction of notions of intimacy, and the potential that access to marriage could provide to assimilate gays and lesbians into mainstream society (Chauncey, 2004). Additionally, it has been argued that the allocation of rights through designations such as *domestic partnership* and *civil union* constitutes a second class status rather than an alternative to marriage (Chauncey, 2004). Further, many within the LGBT community have argued that marriage is a flexible institution which is continually changing and therefore, despite the controversy, the LGBT community has remained mobilized to this day around the legal designation and protection of their relationships made possible through the institution of marriage.

Personal Context of the Dissertation

In order to orient the reader to the autobiographical themes that shape the lens I brought to the focus, implementation, analysis, and reporting of this inquiry, I believe it is

important to position myself as a researcher situated in my interrelated personal, social, professional, and educational contexts. I am a 30-year-old, partnered, lesbian, Caucasian woman. I live in San Diego, California and participate socially, politically, and occupationally in the active LGBT community there.

Professionally, I am a practicing marriage and family therapist (MFT). I have worked in the mental health field in San Diego for the past seven years. As a marriage and family therapist, my clinical focus has been largely shaped by my work with adolescents, adults, couples, and families within the San Diego LGBT community who struggle with challenges related to their relational and social contexts.

My graduate studies and professional practice in the field of marriage and family therapy as well as my life history and experiences have incited my strong commitment to social justice in my personal, professional, and educational endeavors. More specifically, the acute discriminatory experiences I have encountered as a lesbian woman as well as the pervasive heterosexist contexts that I have navigated in my personal, professional, educational, and larger socio-political contexts prompted me to continue my studies at the doctoral level. These experiences, coupled with the fact that I have struggled to locate opportunities to develop my work from a social justice perspective within the mental health field, motivated my decision to pursue doctoral study in education at San Diego State University and Claremont Graduate University.

During this time, I witnessed history in the making. The powerful social conflicts of the aforementioned 2008 California Supreme Court ruling (which asserted that under the state constitution, same-sex couples in California had the right to civil marriage as a means of legally recognizing their relationships) as well as the campaign for and passing

of Proposition 8 (which designated that only marriage between a man and a woman is valid or recognized in California) unfolded during my doctoral studies. At that time, I both lived in and worked as a MFT in Hillcrest, the heart of the San Diego LGBT community.

Within the context of my past relational history, I have been very aware of the consequences of the absence of relationship recognition for same-sex couples on the national level which results from the federal Defense of Marriage Act (DOMA). Further, during the four and a half months that marriage was legally available to same-sex couples in California, my now domestic partner and I felt that our relationship was too new to move forward with such an important legal and symbolic step. However, the two of us were very aware of the attention that Prop 8 was garnering on both the local and national levels. We both marched in the San Diego Pride parade that year, along with our coworkers, reveling in this visible celebration of the LGBT victory in California. The newly available option of legal marriage for same-sex couples inspired that year's theme: *Live. Love. Be*. In addition to the visible reminder of our victory, the 2008 San Diego Pride parade and festival also provided reminders of the battlefield that Prop 8 had brought to our doorsteps: the vivid yellow *Yes on 8* signs, the hate-filled slogans scrawled across the posters that protesters displayed, the menacing chants that spewed from their megaphones. Further, prominent figures, businesses, organizations, and institutions who were in support of the proposition were angrily and visibly named and often boycotted by the LGBT community.

Additionally, we also were present for and participated in the uproar that occurred throughout Hillcrest as a result of the passing of Prop 8. This came in the form of some of

the largest rallies and protests in the state of California. In the two-and-a half-years that have followed, my partner and I, along with the rest of the LGBT community, have experienced the ongoing local and national debate over the extension of marriage rights to same-sex couples. As a result, in addition to its alignment with my personal, professional, and educational commitments to social justice, this study reflects a specific time in both the LGBT rights movement and the nation's history that has also been an important part of my own personal, relational, and social history.

Social Context of the Dissertation

As previously mentioned, I am a MFT working in the mental health field. The sections that follow provide an overview of how the mental health field intersects with lesbian, gay, and bisexual (LGB) individuals, couples, and families in ways which have historically shaped and impacted their lives. First, the macro and micro level impacts of the mental health field on LGB individuals, couples, and families are presented. Next, the current state of the mental health services provided to the LGB community is discussed. Third, a brief introduction to the literature on the mental health effects of institutionalized stigma and discrimination on the lives of LGB individuals, couples, and families is presented in order to draw the connection between mental and relational health and discriminatory ballot initiatives such as those which restrict the availability of legal marriage to same-sex couples. Finally, the established suggestions for future research based upon the above-mentioned literature on the mental health effects of institutionalized stigma and discrimination on LGB lives provides a transition to and supports the purpose and rationale of this study.

The Macro and Micro Level Impact of the Mental Health Field on LGB Individuals, Couples, and Families

The mental health field has historically contributed to the marginalization and oppression of LGB individuals, couples, and families (Davidson, 2005; Malley & Tasker, 1999). This has occurred on the macro or societal level with the overt stigmatization of gay men and lesbians through the profession's homophobic and heterosexist discourses. For example, the stigmatization of gay men and lesbians was substantiated at the institutional level in 1952 when the American Psychiatric Association's first *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (DSM-I) included homosexuality as a sociopathic personality disturbance. The first revision of the manual, the DSM-II, was released in 1968 and listed homosexuality in the category of non-psychotic mental disorders (Miller, 2006).

The formal classification of homosexuality as mental illness made a significant contribution to the legitimization of a social and political context which has historically been hostile towards gay, lesbian, and bisexual individuals, couples, and families. Further, the field's homophobic and heterosexist legacy has impacted LGB individuals, couples, and families at the individual and relational levels. As a result of living in an oppressive society, gay, lesbian, and bisexual people experience higher rates of depression, anxiety, and suicidal ideation in comparison with heterosexual persons (Israel & Selvidge, 2003; Pearson, 2003; Rudolf, 1988). Consequently, 25% to 65% of LGB people seek counseling. This percentage is 2-4 times higher than the rate of heterosexual people seeking counseling (Rudolf, 1988).

The Current State of Mental Health Services Provided to the LGB Community

Although the American Psychiatric Association (APA) removed homosexuality as a formal diagnosis of mental illness in 1973, the attitudes, clinical practices, and training curriculums of therapists, therapist educators, and therapist training programs continue to promulgate dominant heterosexist bias with regard to therapeutic treatment and intervention (Pearson, 2003; Rudolf, 1988). In a review of existing survey research, Rudolf (1988) contends that approximately 50% of LGB persons who have sought counseling have reported low satisfaction with their counseling experience. This was primarily due to the client's experience of his or her counselor as prejudicial, negative, or lacking understanding of LGB experiences and concerns (Pearson, 2003; Rudolf, 1988). Given these findings, it is not surprising that in a study of members of the American Association of Marriage and Family Therapy (AAMFT), Doherty and Simmons (1996) reported that just over 50% of surveyed marriage and family therapists (MFTs) felt that they were competent in treating lesbian and gay male clients. Further, in my 2007 study of the attitudes and beliefs of MFT educators toward course content related to LGB themes in Commission on Accreditation for Marriage and Family Therapy Education (COAMFTE)-approved MFT graduate programs, almost 40% of participants were uncertain or disagreed that they felt they were knowledgeable about the current literature regarding gay, lesbian, and bi-sexual family therapy. Further, over 35% were uncertain or disagreed that they believed that they had adequate information and expertise to educate students on gay, lesbian, and bisexual therapeutic issues (Falvey, 2007).

Recent research suggests that therapists' attitudes and beliefs about their work with LGB clients remain consistent with findings reported in the late 1980's (Pearson, 2003). The need for increased competence in affirmative mental health services provided

to LGB individuals, couples, and families has been well documented in the literature. Both education and training have been linked to mental health professionals espousing more LGB affirmative attitudes and practices in their clinical work (Fletcher & Russell, 2001; Israel & Selvidge, 2003; Kocarek & Pelling, 2003; Long & Serovich, 2003; Malley & Tasker, 2004; Pearson, 2003; Rudolf, 1988). Findings from the aforementioned mental health literature indicate that progress in the area of counselor education and training is still needed in order to reduce the gap between the position of the APA and the attitudes and professional practices of therapists and mental health professionals (Pearson, 2003).

Until recently, the existing body of marriage and family therapy literature, as well as the majority of the literature in the mental health field on gay and lesbian individuals, couples, and families, has been sparse and ridden with deficit-based language (Malley & Tasker, 1999; Riggle, Whitman, Olson, Rostosky, & Strong, 2008). As cultural and political attitudes are shifting from intolerance toward tolerance and even acceptance of LGB individuals, couples, and families, researchers and clinicians have begun to evaluate the applications of heteronormative models of psychotherapeutic theory and practice in their work with LGB populations (Malley & Tasker, 1999). It is also a more recent trend within the human sciences to utilize research as an activity which promotes social justice by seeking to decenter dominant understandings of wellness and dysfunction, and by describing or facilitating contexts which promote human agency (Prilleltensky & Nelson, 2002).

More specifically, gay and lesbian affirmative therapy emerged as a response to the need in the mental health field for a therapeutic stance which recognized the position of the APA that homosexuality is not a condition which needs to be treated or corrected

(Kort, 2008). However, upon review of the gay and lesbian affirmative therapy literature, I discovered that the majority of the literature related to theory and practice was written from a modernist perspective (Falvey, 2010). Although the literature provides a critique of society including the mental health field for stigmatizing gay men and lesbians through its homophobic and heterosexist discourses, it largely utilizes modernist research methods and theoretical models to describe the effects of this stigmatization. This disconnect is indicative of a contradiction between an awareness and critique of oppressive social conditions and a failure to critically analyze the effects of these conditions in theory and in practice.

Further, much of the research reviewed promoted a deficit understanding of gay and lesbian experience, punctuating insufficiencies and shortcomings, rather than describing the strategies same-sex couples can enlist to navigate oppressive contexts, thereby creating agency and promoting social change. This is problematic because when people are assigned to categories, such as diagnostic categories recognized within the public domain, they become limited by imposed restrictions of whom or what they can be. The more these oppressive restrictions become internalized as belonging to psychological mechanisms, the less likely it is that a person will look outside his or herself to the unjust political and social circumstances which maintain his or her deficit construction of identity. When we formulate descriptions based upon mentalistic accounts, conditions of inequality are not altered (Prilleltensky & Nelson, 2002).

The Intersection of Discriminatory Politics and Mental Health

The following section provides a brief introduction to the literature on the mental health effects of institutionalized stigma and discrimination on the lives of LGB

individuals, couples, and families, in order to draw the connection between mental and relational health and discriminatory ballot initiatives such as those which restrict the availability of legal marriage to same-sex couples. This section is only meant to introduce this literature in order to further orient the reader to the objectives, purposes, and rationale of the dissertation study. A detailed discussion of the following literature will be provided in Chapter Two.

As previously mentioned, research suggests that due to stigma and discrimination, gay men and lesbians experience a greater prevalence of mental health concerns than heterosexual persons (Hatzenbuehler, McLaughlin, Keyes, & Hasin, 2010; Herek, 2006; Israel & Selvidge, 2003; Pearson, 2003; Rostosky, Riggle, Horne & Miller, 2009; Russell & Richards, 2003; Rudolf, 1988). Bans on the extension of marriage rights to same-sex couples are an example of institutionalized discrimination (Hatzenbuehler et al., 2010; Herek, 2006; Rostosky, Riggle, Horne, Denton, & Huellemeier, 2010). Marriage amendments and anti-LGBT campaigns are understood as acute prejudicial events and thus constitute a minority stress factor (Rostosky et al., 2009). Herdt and Kertzner (2006) assert that the denial of marriage undermines the citizenship and compromises the well-being of gay and lesbian individuals and couples.

There have only been a few studies which have specifically examined the effects of institutionalized discrimination through marriage denial on LGB individuals (Hatzenbuehler et al., 2010). The results of these studies indicate statistically significant increases in minority stress, psychological distress, negative affect, and depressive symptoms (Rostosky et al., 2009), and statistically significant increases in mood disorders, generalized anxiety disorder, and alcohol use disorders (Hatzenbuehler et al.,

2010) among LGB participant samples related to the passing of anti-gay marriage amendments.

Drawing on similar results garnered from their study, Mathy and Lehmann (2004) propose that the Defense of Marriage Act has had significant public health consequences for lesbian and bisexual women in the United States. They went on to conclude that “because homosexuality is not a psychopathology, the relation between sexual orientation and stress-related disorders must be explained by social rather than psychological factors” (p. 192). Studies have also described the stress factors facing lesbians and gay men in the context of discriminatory politics. Further, a few studies have also encountered and documented resilience and coping strategies exhibited among the study participants in navigating their experiences with discriminatory politics (Rostosky, Riggle, Gray, & Hatton, 2007; Rostosky et al., 2010; Russell & Richards, 2003).

Conversely, numerous studies conducted with opposite-sex couples have illustrated the positive mental health gains associated with marriage (Herdt & Kertzner 2006; Herek, 2006; Kertzner, 2009). According to Kertzner (2009) “the literature supports the conclusion that it is the effect of being married, that is, the legal, financial, psychological, and social benefits that come with marriage, which is primarily responsible for the mental health gains associated with marriage” (p. 189). A few studies have begun to document the effects of legal recognition on the experiences of same-sex couples who are in legally-recognized relationships. These studies indicate several positive outcomes for same-sex couples who are able to and choose to enter into legally recognized relationships. These positive outcomes include: a greater likelihood of staying together (Balsam, Beauchaine, Rothblum, & Solomon, 2008); enhanced levels of

commitment (Clark, 2007); an enhanced sense of comfort, safety, societal legitimacy, and inclusion in society as well as diminished vulnerability (Rankins, 2008); increased social recognition and access to social privileges and civil rights (Goodwin & Butler, 2009); and statistically significantly less psychological distress and more well-being (Riggle, Rostosky, & Horne, 2010).

Suggestions for Future Research in the Literature

The above-mentioned literature on the mental health effects of institutionalized stigma and discrimination on the lives of LGB individuals, couples, and families illustrates the connection between mental and relational health and discriminatory ballot initiatives such as those which restrict the availability of legal marriage to same-sex couples, as well as the positive outcomes for same-sex couples who are able to and choose to enter into legally recognized relationships. Several of these studies have proposed direction as to the future of research regarding this population, which specifically support the rationale and purpose of this study. For example, Rostosky et al. (2009) assert that mental health professionals should implement contextually based and culturally responsive studies that will “facilitate positive development and psychological health at the level of the individual as well as the positive development and health of a socially just society” (p. 65).

More specifically, there are few studies linking psychological distress and constitutional restrictions on marriage. Herek (2006) proposes that research is needed on the unique challenges and stressors experienced by LGB individuals and their families as a result of both national and international discrepancies in the extent to which same-sex relationships are currently recognized under the law. Levitt et al., (2009) propose that this

warrants an intensive qualitative analysis in order to consider systematically how LGB people understand their experiences including their relationships with others and their environments in the face of anti-gay politics. Additionally, Rostosky et al., (2010) propose that although the recent literature is beginning to provide a greater understanding of how minority stress affects LGB individuals in terms of mental and physical health, little is known about how anti-gay amendment campaigns affect communities and families. They also propose that research is needed to investigate whether anti-gay amendment campaigns have the power to “inhibit or mobilize the development of sexual minority identities, strategies of resistance, or activism on the macrolevel” (p. 308). Similarly, Russell and Richards (2003) point to the importance of a movement perspective which understands LGB experiences as part of a larger social and political movement. They assert that “efforts to minimize the stressors and capitalize on the resilience factors promise the potential not only for interrupting the damaging consequences of antigay politics but also for actively building a stronger movement on behalf of equal rights for LGB people” (p. 326).

Finally, because the studies of legally-recognized same-sex couples are the product of relatively new marriage legislation, Rothblum, Balsam, and Solomon (2008) explain that these studies have been largely descriptive of who chooses to have a legalized partnership rather than the effects of being in a legalized relationship. They propose that there is a need for future research on how the presence of legal status affects a relationship.

Rationale and Purpose of the Dissertation

Family therapy theory and practice has been largely heterocentrist in its history, privileging heterosexual family constellations through the omission of the discussion of gay and lesbian family constellations (Clark & Serovich, 1997; Malley & Tasker, 1999). The family therapy literature has traditionally been based upon and contributed to modernist discourses on what constitutes normalcy and functionality with regard to family relationships. To story family following these parameters centers a heterocentrist construction of the purpositiveness of such relationships, marginalizes relationships not defined by legal marriage or biology, and seeks to legitimize the primacy of the nuclear family constellation. This legitimatization of biological and marital normalcy serves the function of supporting/stabilizing powerful structures in Western society while simultaneously masking its constitutive nature.

According to Rostosky et al. (2009), mental health professionals who work with LGB clients and/or train professionals in the field to work with this population should carefully consider the social contexts that create, sustain, and exacerbate stressors which impact mental health and well-being. Mental health professionals can collaborate with their clients in developing a critical consciousness that situates their experiences of distress within a context of pervasive homonegativity.

Additionally, Wolfson (2009) asserts that:

The mental health profession and its members have been very important and continue to be very much needed in this struggle to educate people, to explain the lives of gay men and lesbians, to connect the dots for people about our common humanity and how exclusion from important participation in society harms people and harms our society, harms our country (p. 195).

Given their positions of power and influence in Western culture, mental health professionals have the ability to work with gay and lesbian individuals, couples, and families in ways which can either “create more of a story of personal inadequacy, a story of the individual” (different than the term *individuality*), or “bring forth other descriptions of ability, agency, choice, social context, or stories of groups and, by implication, group experience, group history, and group strength” (Simon & Whitfield, 2000, p. 159). Because the mental health field has historically contributed to the marginalization and oppression of LGB individuals, couples, and families, it follows that the future of research and therapeutic practice with this population must challenge the profession’s history and advocate for social change.

With the aim of increasing practitioner competence, the purpose of this dissertation is to provide marriage and family therapists and mental health service providers with insight into the experiences of legally married same-sex couples, as well as the strategies that the couples employ when navigating oppressive circumstances such as anti-LGBT amendment campaigns, in order to improve their knowledge of this specific population. Due to my background as a marriage and family therapist and doctoral student of education and social justice, I conceptualize this study as a counter-practice to the oppressive legacy of the mental health field in its contributions to and interactions with marginalized populations.

Audience of the Dissertation

Because of the forum that a dissertation provides, it is assumed that the audience of this inquiry in its current presentation will be largely made up of academics, mental health professionals, and/or others who are situated within contexts where the

experiences of legally married same-sex couples in California hold relevance to their lives in personal or professional ways. In acknowledging this likely audience, I would also like to make it explicit that my intention through this writing is first and foremost to accurately represent the lived experiences of the participants whose personal stories I have been entrusted to tell. In order to do so, I have presented their testimonies, in their own words, as well as the contextual dimensions which situate their testimonies across tellings in the form of emergent themes.

The 14 legally married same-sex couples who agreed to go on record by sharing their lived experiences often expressed that they did so because of their desire to be a part of creating a greater visibility for the lives of LGBT individuals, couples, and families. As we will see through the course of this inquiry, they often reported that their lived experiences were unfamiliar to or misunderstood by persons outside of, or in some cases even within, the LGBT community. The couples frequently expressed their hopes that their participation in this project would, in some ways, incite a larger public knowing of their lived experiences which could help others to understand and relate to their lives, thus, effecting social change. Like them, I argue that these stories are worth knowing. Like them, I also believe that through knowing these stories, change can occur.

Definition of Relevant Terms

Definitions of the terms required for understanding the following text are provided here. While it is beyond the scope of this document to provide definitions for all of the localized terms relevant to LGB lives, the reader should understand that these terms are situated in discourses of gender, geographic location, generation, age, and culture. The terms homosexual, homosexual orientation, LGBT, LGBTQ (lesbian, gay,

bisexual, transgender, questioning) GLB (gay, lesbian, bisexual), GLBT (gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender), LGB, queer, and same-sex may be used interchangeably throughout the text, and their usage has been selected based upon the literature being cited or the historical or political idea being presented in the text.

The B and T in LGBT or GLBT includes bisexual and transgender individuals as a part of a community marginalized by dominant culture based upon sexual orientation and/or gender identity. Understanding the experiences of transgender and bisexual persons and their relationships should include specific considerations unique to the marginalization these populations have experienced, which go beyond the intended scope of this document. However, the reader will likely draw parallels between the information provided in this document and its applicability to understanding the individual, relational, and social experiences of transgender and bisexual persons.

Relevant Terms

Sexual Orientation: Fletcher and Russell (2001) define sexual orientation as:

A person's self concept as based on sexual and emotional attractions to other persons who are of the same sex (a homosexual orientation), the other sex (a heterosexual orientation), or both same and other sex (a bisexual orientation) (p. 36).

Sexual Identity: "Personally and outwardly identifying oneself as heterosexual, gay, lesbian, bisexual . . . A consistent, enduring sense of the meanings that the sexual orientation and sexual behavior have for a person" (Fletcher & Russell, 2001, p. 36).

Queer: Chernin and Johnson (2003) cite Humphrey's 1999 definition of queer as encompassing "people who suffer from a combination of material disadvantages and

cultural devaluations on account of their sexual orientation (lesbians, gay men, bisexuals), sexual practices (sex workers and sadomasochists), gender performances (transvestites), and gendered identities” (p. 12).

Heterosexism: Fletcher and Russell (2001) describe heterosexism as, “The presumption that every one is (or should be) heterosexual, resulting in the ignorance of or devaluing of LGBT behavior, orientations, identities, or relationships, and the labeling of these as deviant” (p. 36). Herek (as cited in Malley and Tasker, 1999) defines heterosexism as “a worldview, a value system that prizes heterosexuality, assumes it is the only manifestation of love and sexuality and devalues homosexuality and all that is not heterosexual” (p. 4).

Heterosexual Privilege: Grants privileges automatically to persons who identify as heterosexual and/or couple heterosexually. Heterosexual privilege includes institutionalized privileges such as employment benefits, housing, child adoption, military service, and participation in a religious institution, legal freedoms such as the right to marry, and societal privileges such as the freedom to hold hands in public (Kort, 2008).

Internalized Homophobia: Introjection of dominant societal beliefs about homosexuality resulting in shame about one’s same-gender attraction and behavior (Chernin & Johnson, 2003).

LGBT Affirmative: Israel and Selvidge (2003), in citing Morrow (2000), contend that the term LGBT affirmative refers to the view that LGBT people and issues are “central and self-defining as opposed to marginal and defined by the heterosexual norm”(p. 86).

Additionally, Worthington, Dillon, and Becker-Schutte (2005) assert that LGBT

affirmativeness requires “a recognition of heterosexual hegemony that extends beyond tolerance” (p. 105).

Organization of the Dissertation

This dissertation consists of six chapters. Chapter One orients the reader to the historical, personal, social, and political context of the inquiry. Chapter One also presents the objective, rationale, and purpose of the dissertation, the definitions of relevant terms, and an organizational summary. Chapter Two provides a literature review in order to orient the reader to the historical precedents and the scholarly literature which supports the rationale for the current study. Chapter Three details the theoretical and philosophical framework which guided the methodology of the study, as well as a description of the participants, materials, procedures, analysis, and assumptions and limitations of the study. Chapter Four presents the narrative that was produced through the stories of the fourteen couples who were interviewed for this dissertation. Chapter Five presents the results of the follow-up focus group. Finally, Chapter Six discusses the results of the study with relation to the areas of focus guiding the study, the therapeutic implications and suggestions for practice in multiple contexts based upon these results, and my personal reflections on the process and outcomes of the inquiry.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

The purpose of this review is to orient the reader to the historical precedents and the scholarly literature which supports the rationale for this study. First, the key historical precedents related to the extension of marriage rights to same-sex couples are presented. These precedents include important shifts in the meaning of marriage in Western culture as well as the shifts that have occurred within the gay and lesbian community with regard to the meaning of marriage and the importance of legal relationship recognition. The legal precedents set by the overturning of antimiscegenation and sodomy laws as they relate to the extension of marriage rights to same-sex couples are also discussed. The legal decisions related to same-sex couple recognition are presented as well as the national and statutory legal decisions which limit or prohibit same-sex relationship recognition. Additionally, recent political shifts and tax law changes which impact relationship recognition for same sex couples are presented.

Next, as the marriages of the couples who have been interviewed in this study have existed in the context of the discriminatory ballot measure Proposition 8 and the ongoing legal battles which ensued from its passage, the literature which describes the effects of stigma and discrimination on the mental health and well-being of gay men and lesbians is presented. The social effects of discriminatory politics and legal battles are then described. This includes the literature on the negative effects of discriminatory politics and legal battles on the mental health and well-being of lesbians and gay men. Next, the literature related to the resilience strategies of lesbians and gay men in the

context of discriminatory politics and legal battles is presented. The relationship between marriage and mental health is then explored and the literature on the effects of legal recognition on the experiences of same-sex couples in legally recognized relationships is described.

The Extension of Marriage Rights to Same-Sex Couples: Key Historical Precedents

The institution of marriage is culturally, spiritually, and historically bound. It follows that the meaning of marriage has evolved and changed over time. Throughout most of Western history, marriage was utilized as a means of securing property, wealth, power, and status (Coontz, 2005; Herek, 2006). The more contemporarily-understood description of marriage characterized by emotional intimacy and romantic love did not come to define marriage until the 19th and 20th centuries in Western culture (D'Emilio, 1983; Herek, 2006). Today, marriage provides couples with many legal and financial benefits to which unmarried couples do not have access (Nassbaum, 2010).

In early United States history, marriages were civil contracts. Civil marriage has been distinguished from religious marriage in the United States since pre-colonial days (Cahill, 2004). However, the availability of civil marriage has not been afforded equally to all people. For example, African American slaves were not permitted to marry legally (Cott, 2000). Further, many states enacted interracial marriage bans which extended to African Americans, Asians, and American Indians (Chauncey, 2004). In 1912 an amendment was proposed to the U.S. Constitution that would ban interracial marriages throughout the country (Cahill, 2004). By 1913, 42 of the then 48 U.S. states had enacted antimiscegenation laws (Coontz, 2005).

In 1948 the General Assembly of the United Nations adopted the Universal Declaration of Human Rights which proposed that the “right to marry” is a fundamental right of human kind (Chauncey, 2004). Additionally, in the 1948 *Perez v. Sharp* case, the California Supreme Court was the first high state court to decide that the ban on interracial marriage was unconstitutional in that it violated the 14th Amendment (Chauncey, 2004; Cott, 2000). This decision set a precedent which led many other states to revoke their own antiscegenation laws (Cott, 2000). In 1967, the U.S. Supreme Court overturned antiscegenation laws in *Loving v. Virginia* (Nussbaum, 2010). At that time, 72% of Americans opposed interracial marriage and 48% believed it should be a crime (Cahill, 2004; Chauncey, 2004).

Marriage Rights and the Gay and Lesbian Rights Movement

The relationships of same-sex couples have also been excluded legally from the rights, benefits, and privileges associated with nationally-recognized civil marriage, thus constituting a civil rights issue with parallels to the antiscegenation laws which were overturned by *Loving v. Virginia* in 1967 (Nussbaum, 2010). While the extension of marriage rights is certainly a focus of the gay and lesbian rights movement today, this was not always the case (Chauncey, 2004). An exhaustive account of the evolution of the aims of the gay and lesbian rights movement is beyond the scope of this review, but the inclusion of a few key turning points will help explain this controversial shift in the movement’s agenda.

Although the 1950s saw the rise of groups such as the Mattachine Society and the Daughters of Bilitis which sought to further the rights and visibility of gay men and lesbians, one event, collectively known as Stonewall, gave rise to the modern gay and

lesbian rights movement. In June, 1969 the police raided the Stonewall Inn, a Greenwich Village gay bar. The bar's patrons and other Greenwich Village residents rioted in protest of the raid and returned in greater numbers the following evening. The event birthed the gay and lesbian revolution, serving as a catalyst for gay men and lesbians to visibly and vocally organize in order to incite social change (Miller, 2006).

Consequently, the 1970s saw the establishment of national gay and lesbian rights organizations such as the Lambda Legal Defense and Education Fund (1973), the National Gay Task Force (1973), the Gay Rights National Lobby (1976), and Lesbian Rights Project (1977). These organizations largely concentrated on the rights of individuals facing discrimination rather than those related to the recognition of same-sex couples (Chauncey, 2004). However, as early as the 1970s, gay liberationists began applying for marriage licenses at their county clerk's offices citing that they should be allowed the same rights and privileges as their heterosexual counterparts. These applications were denied, and some couples filed lawsuits citing that marriage was not specifically noted in state law as restricted to heterosexual unions. These suits were quickly dismissed, and many states went on to pass legislation limiting marriage to heterosexual couples (Cahill, 2004; Chauncey, 2004).

In the 1980s, the visibility of gay men and lesbians increased as the AIDS crisis forced many couples as well as the gay and lesbian community to confront death (Chauncey, 2004; Miller; 2006). This was exacerbated by the fact that gay couples had no legal standing to protect their relationships or surviving partner. With a median age of 36, most people diagnosed with AIDS were in 20s, 30s, and 40s and were often too young to have seriously considered decisions about estate planning, burial plans, and medical

decision-making in the event that they were unable to make such decisions. Further, due to the lack of national health insurance in the U.S., many men were without health insurance when they became too ill to work (Chauncey, 2004).

Responding to the AIDS crisis fostered lesbian and gay community solidarity. (Chauncey, 2004; Miller, 2006). Further, the AIDS crisis galvanized the participation of gay men and lesbians into the gay and lesbian rights movement, many of whom were new to active participation in this civil rights struggle (Miller, 2006). The refusal of the medical profession to recognize their relationships complicated the experiences of couples facing AIDS. Oftentimes, AIDS patients were estranged from their biological families. Their partners and friends were not considered next of kin which created serious problems: they could be refused visitation rights, medical professionals did not consult with them or inform them about the patient's medical treatments, and they were denied the right to sign forms authorizing medical treatment. In some cases this occurred even with a legal power of attorney (Chauncey, 2004).

This turned the question of who counted as family into a political issue for the gay and lesbian community. It also highlighted the need for gay men and lesbians to seek legal documentation to protect their relationships. However, a significant barrier existed for those who sought to gain legal protections for their relationships as it costs thousands of dollars to prepare documents with protections similar to those obtained with a marriage certificate. Further, lesbians and gay men who sought to expand their families by raising children faced a myriad of legal obstacles. Thus, legal vulnerability was an important reason that propelled the gay rights movement in the direction of seeking marriage rights for same-sex couples (Chauncey, 2004; Miller, 2006).

By the 1990s, same-sex marriage became a widespread yet still controversial goal in the gay and lesbian community. The majority of this controversy centered around the word *marriage* itself. Many argued that *marriage* is a flexible institution which was changing and would continue to change. Additionally, it was largely understood that the allocation of domestic partnership status constituted a second-class status rather than an alternative to marriage (Chauncey, 2004). Many feminists felt that the gay and lesbian community should seek alternatives to marriage because of its historical role in the institutionalized oppression of women and also felt that prioritizing marriage would dishonor the queer community's deconstruction and reconstruction of the notion of intimacy. Still others felt that marriage brought with it the potential to assimilate gays and lesbians into mainstream society (Chauncey, 2004). Despite the controversy, the gay and lesbian community has remained mobilized to this day around the legal designation and protection of their relationships made possible through the institution of marriage.

Timeline of the Legal and Political Battles for the Legal Recognition of Same-Sex Couples

Gaining national attention in 1993, the Hawaii Supreme Court ruled in *Baehr v. Lewin* that banning marriage for same-sex couples presumptively violated Hawaii's Equal Rights Amendment because it constituted sex discrimination which required state justification. *Baehr v. Miike*, the court trial that followed, ruled in support of gay couples and was appealed by the state. However, a winning ballot initiative in November 1998 amended Hawaii's constitution defining marriage as a union between a man and a woman (Cahill, 2004; Chauncey, 2004). In 1999, Hawaii's high court ruled in *Baehr v. Miike* that the state's constitution no longer prohibits sex discrimination with regard to state law

governing marriage eligibility (Lambda Legal, n.d.). Some considered Hawaii to be a turning point because it made the extension of marriage to same-sex couples an issue for national debate (Chauncey, 2004; Miller, 2006).

Prompted by the Hawaii controversy, the federal Defense of Marriage Act (DOMA) was signed into law by President Bill Clinton in 1996 (Cahill, 2004; Chauncey, 2004; Herek, 2006; Miller, 2006). The DOMA defines marriage as a union between one man and one woman. It also exempts states from recognizing same-sex marriages performed in other states, and restricts the availability of federal benefits to heterosexual couples only (Cahill, 2004; Herek, 2006). Although some states later went on to extend marriage rights to same-sex couples through domestic partnerships, civil unions, and legal marriages, the rights and privileges afforded to same-sex couples through those designations are not fully equal to the legal marriages available to opposite-sex couples in that they are not required to be recognized by other states and are not recognized by the federal government (Nussbaum, 2010).

In 1999, just 3 years later, the Vermont Supreme Court found it unconstitutional to deny same-sex couples the rights, protections, benefits, and obligations which were available to opposite-sex couples through marriage in *Baker v. State*, because it violates the constitutional equality guarantee (Lambda Legal, n.d.). In April of 2000, the state's legislature passed a civil unions measure which gave same-sex couples access to the rights, protections, benefits, and obligations which were available to opposite-sex couples through marriage. Vermont became the first state in the U.S. to comprehensively recognize legal status for same-sex couples. In July 2000, the civil union law went into effect (Lambda Legal, n.d.).

Meanwhile, the definition of marriage as it related to the extension of marriage rights to same-sex couples and other issues with specific relevance to the rights of gay men and lesbians, such as family values and military service, played a visible role in the 2000 U.S. presidential election (Cahill, 2004). The Republican platform of the 2000 election included the following position statements on gay and lesbian rights issues:

We [the Republican Party] support the traditional definition of ‘marriage’ as the legal union of one man and one woman, and we believe that federal judges and bureaucrats should not force states to recognize other living arrangements as marriages. We rely on the home, as did the founders of the American Republic, to instill the virtues that sustain democracy itself. That belief led congress to enact the Defense of Marriage Act, which a Republican Department of Justice will energetically defend in the courts. For the same reason, we do not believe sexual preference should be given special legal protection or standing in the law (as cited in Cahill, 2004, p. 84).

Additionally, the platform stated, “We support the appointment of judges who respect traditional family values” and “We affirm traditional military culture. We affirm that homosexuality is incompatible with military service” (as cited in Cahill, 2004, p. 84).

The Democratic platform in the 2000 election included positions on gay and lesbian rights issues such as the 2000 inclusion of sexual orientation in proposed hate crime legislation, the constitutional right to privacy with regard to sodomy laws, a focus on HIV/AIDS research and treatment, and the inclusion of sexual orientation in nondiscrimination statutes including employment and family benefits (Cahill, 2004). The Democratic platform held the following statements:

We support continued efforts, like the Employment Non-Discrimination Act, to end workplace discrimination against gay men and lesbians. We support the full inclusion of gay and lesbian families in the life of the nation. This would include an equitable alignment of benefits (as cited in Cahill, 2004, p. 85).

Further, the Democratic platform stated that “all patriotic Americans [should] be allowed to serve their country without discrimination, persecution, and violence” (as cited in Cahill, 2004 p. 85).

The next major legal precedent impacting the lives of gay men and lesbians came in June 2003 when the Supreme Court ruling *Lawrence v. Texas* overturned the nation’s remaining sodomy laws, essentially decriminalizing gay identity in the eyes of the law (Cahill, 2004; Chauncey, 2004; Nussbaum, 2010). *Lawrence v. Texas* overruled the Supreme Court’s previous and controversial 1986 ruling, *Bowers v. Hardwick*, which upheld existing sodomy laws. *Lawrence v. Texas* was particularly significant in that it shifted the focus of the argument beyond the individual’s right to privacy to the individual’s right to equal protection under the Equal Protection Clause of the 14th Amendment (Nussbaum, 2010). According to Nussbaum (2010), “Instead of being treated as a class of outlaws condemned by the wisdom of the ages, gays and lesbians took their place, in the judicial mind, as equal citizens and ‘adult persons,’ with interests like those of other people ‘in deciding how to conduct their private lives in matters relating to sex’” (p. 89).

On November 18th, 2003, just a few months after the historic *Lawrence v. Texas* Supreme Court ruling, the Massachusetts Supreme Judicial Court ruled that gay and lesbian couples have the same right to civil marriage as heterosexual couples (Miller,

2006). The Court cited *Lawrence* and concluded that barring same-sex couples from civil marriage violates the state's constitution (Chauncey, 2004; Miller, 2006). The following February, the court reaffirmed its position by attesting that "only marriage, not a lesser equivalent like civil unions or domestic partnership arrangements" would satisfy its previous ruling (Miller, 2006, p. 523). Massachusetts became the first U.S. state to grant full marriage rights to same-sex couples.

The years that followed saw a flurry of activity both nationally and worldwide with regard to the extension of different types of relationship recognition afforded to same-sex couples. Additionally, following in the footsteps of DOMA, many states also passed legislation which limits or prohibits such recognition. As of this writing, a total of five states and the District of Columbia (2010) grant full statutory civil marriage rights to same-sex couples: Massachusetts (2004), Connecticut (2009), Iowa and Vermont (2009), and New Hampshire (2010) (Human Rights Campaign, 2011). Both New York (2008) and Maryland (2010) have marriage recognition for same-sex couples who were legally married in another jurisdiction (Human Rights Campaign, 2011). Additionally, states providing non-marriage status with marriage-like legal protections for same-sex couples include: California, Nevada, Oregon, Washington (broad domestic partnership) and New Jersey (civil union). Effective June 1, 2011, Illinois will recognize civil unions for both same-sex and different-sex couples (Lambda Legal, 2011d). Effective January 1, 2012, Hawaii will recognize civil unions for both same-sex and different-sex couples (Lambda Legal, 2011c). In 2011, Delaware's state legislature adopted a civil union bill. Delaware's governor is expected to sign it into law, and it will go into effect Jan. 1, 2012 (Lambda Legal, 2011b).

The fight for same-sex marriage has also made progress in some countries throughout the world. In 2003, Ontario's high court granted equal access to civil marriage for gay and lesbian couples. Soon after, British Columbia followed in Ontario's footsteps. In 2004, Quebec also granted equal access to civil marriage (Cahill, 2004). Countries which provide marriage rights to same-sex couples include: the Netherlands (2000), Belgium (2003), Canada and Spain (2005), South Africa (2006), Norway and Sweden (2009), and Argentina, Iceland and Portugal (2010). Additionally, same-sex couples have access to marriage in Mexico City. The Mexico Supreme Court mandates that married couples must be respected as such throughout the country (Lambda Legal, 2011d).

Conversely, many U.S. states followed DOMA's lead in enacting legislation which limits or prohibits the relationship recognition of same-sex couples. Between 1996 and 2004, 39 states adopted anti-gay marriage laws (Cahill, 2004). Some states have also enacted what are known as Super DOMAs. Super DOMAs prohibit any kind of legal recognition of same-sex relationships such as civil unions and domestic partnerships. States which currently have Super DOMAs on their books include: Nebraska (2000), Ohio and Virginia (2004) (Cahill, 2004). Currently, 29 states have constitutional amendments which restrict marriage and 45 states bar marriage for same-sex couples by statute or otherwise (Lambda Legal, 2011e).

During the course of this study, a historic shift occurred on the national level in February 2011, when the Obama Administration announced that the Department of Justice would no longer defend DOMA in cases which challenge its constitutionality. According to the Human Rights Campaign (n.d.):

On February 23, 2011, Attorney General Holder announced that the Department of Justice (DOJ) would no longer defend the Defense of Marriage Act (DOMA) in cases challenging its constitutionality. He also sent a letter, pursuant to a requirement under federal law, to House and Senate leaders describing the Department's reasons for ceasing its defense of DOMA and affording Congress the opportunity to step in and defend the law if it so chooses. The Justice Department also informed the several federal courts currently hearing DOMA challenges of its new position in those cases, namely that the provision of the law barring federal recognition of lawful marriages between same-sex couples (Section 3) is unconstitutional (para. 2).

However, the Attorney General also stated that the government will continue to enforce DOMA until it is deemed unconstitutional by the courts or repealed by Congress. The Respect for Marriage Act (RMA) a bill that would repeal DOMA, was introduced in the Senate by Sen. Dianne Feinstein (D-CA) and re-introduced in the House by Rep. Jerry Nadler (D-NY) on March 16, 2011 (Human Rights Campaign, n.d.).

The Extension of Marriage Rights to Same-Sex Couples in California

Relationship recognition in the form of registered domestic partnerships has been available to same-sex couples in the state of California since 2000. According to California Family Code (n.d.), domestic partners are defined as “two adults who have chosen to share one another's lives in an intimate and committed relationship of mutual caring” (297. a). Further, the two consenting adults must both file “a Declaration of Domestic Partnership with the Secretary of State” (297.b). At the time of filing, both persons must share a common residence and not be married to or in a domestic

partnership with another person. They also must be 18 years of age and not be “related by blood in a way that would prevent them from being married to each other in this state” (297. b3). Additionally, the two consenting adults must be either “members of the same sex” (297. b5A) or “One or both of the persons meet the eligibility criteria under Title II of the Social Security Act . . . for aged individuals. Notwithstanding any other provision of this section, persons of opposite sexes may not constitute a domestic partnership unless one or both of the persons are over the age of 62” (297. b5B). In 2005, domestic partnership in California was expanded to include the nearly all of the rights and responsibilities of marriage under the law (California Family Code, n.d.; Lambda Legal, 2011a). However, these rights and responsibilities are limited to the state of California and are not federally recognized because of DOMA.

On February 12, 2004, officials from the City and County of San Francisco concluded that withholding marriage licenses from same-sex couples was a violation of the California Constitution. As a result, approximately 4,000 marriage licenses were issued to same-sex couples in San Francisco between February 12th and March 13th, 2004. In March, the California Supreme Court ordered San Francisco to discontinue its issuance of marriage licenses to same-sex couples. In August, the licenses that had been issued by San Francisco were invalidated (Lambda Legal, n.d.).

In both 2005 and 2007, the California Legislature passed bills that would have given same-sex couples the freedom to marry. Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger vetoed both measures (Equality California, n.d.; Herek, 2006). On May 15, 2008, the California Supreme Court ruled that under the state constitution, same-sex couples in California had

the right to civil marriage as a means of legally recognizing their relationships (Feldblum, 2009). According to Lambda Legal (2008), the California Supreme Court stated:

In light of the fundamental nature of the substantive rights embodied in the right to marry—and their central importance to an individual’s opportunity to live a happy, meaningful and satisfying life as a full member of society—the California Constitution properly must be interpreted to guarantee this basic civil right to all couples, without regard to their sexual orientation (p. 1).

Additionally:

We conclude that the right to marry, as embodied in article 1, sections 1 and 7 of the California Constitution, guarantees same-sex couples the same substantive constitutional rights as opposite-sex couples to choose one’s life partner and enter with that person into a committed, officially recognized, and protected family relationship that enjoys all of the constitutionally-based incidents of marriage (Lambda Legal, 2008, p. 1).

Further:

Because sexual orientation, like gender, race, or religion, is a characteristic that frequently has been the basis for biased and improperly stereotypical treatment and that generally bears no relation to an individual’s ability to perform or contribute to society, it is appropriate for courts to evaluate with great care and with considerable skepticism any statute that embodies such a classification. The strict scrutiny standard therefore is applicable to statutes that impose differential treatment on the basis of sexual orientation (Lambda Legal, 2008, p. 2).

Same-sex couples were able to legally marry in California beginning June 16, 2008. The following months leading up to the November 2008 elections saw one of the most controversial political campaigns in California history, garnering the attention of the entire nation. In the midst of the 2008 economic recession, The California Marriage Protection Act or Proposition 8 proposed an amendment to the California Constitution which would eliminate the right of same-sex couples to marry in California as it designated that only marriage between a man and a woman is valid or recognized in California (California General Election Voter Information, 2008).

The argument supporting Prop 8 was summed up for California voters in the following statements taken from the California General Election Voter Information (2008):

Proposition 8 restores what 61% of voters already approved: marriage is only between a man and a woman. Four judges in San Francisco should not have overturned the people's vote. Prop. 8 fixes that mistake by reaffirming traditional marriage, but doesn't take away any rights or benefits from gay domestic partners (p. 9).

Conversely, the argument against Prop 8 was presented by the California General Election Voter Information (2008):

Equality under the law is a fundamental freedom. Regardless of how we feel about marriage, singling people out to be treated differently is wrong. Prop. 8 won't affect our schools, but it will mean loving couples are treated differently under our Constitution and denied equal protection under the law (p. 9).

Further, California voters were also directed by the California General Election Voter Information (2008) to the website ProtectMarriage.com—to Yes on Proposition 8 for more information on the arguments in support of Prop 8, and to Equality for All, No on Proposition 8 for information on the arguments against the proposition. The addresses, phone numbers, and websites of these groups were also provided for voters in the pamphlet.

Proposition 8 became the most heavily-funded and widely talked about ballot initiative in California's and likely the nation's history. The campaigns for and against Proposition 8 raised \$39.9 million and \$43.3 million, respectively. These contributions came from people in all 50 states and over 20 foreign countries. This set a new record nationally for a social policy initiative and cost more than any other race in the country with the exception of the presidential race. In the months between July and September 2008 alone, the Yes on 8 campaign raised 22 million dollars. Around 40% came from The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints (LDS) members (Schubert & Flint, 2009). Schubert and Flint (2009) also reported that the Yes on 8 fundraising relied heavily on individual donors. Some 60,000 individual donors made contributions to the Yes on 8 campaign.

The Yes on 8 campaign was successful, in part, because it reached diverse communities of voters. Khan (2009) states:

For years, the California Christian Right apparatus, long hampered by nativism and racism, had been unable to make inroads with communities of color—which now comprise over fifty percent of the state's population. With Prop 8 they finally succeeded in building a base of support in these communities (p. 24).

Campaign materials were translated into over 40 languages (Schubert & Flint, 2009).

Additionally, the campaign used tactics such as insinuating that voters' churches would be forced to perform same-sex unions or they could face losing their tax-exempt status, schools would be required to teach homosexuality, and that they would not be taking rights away from gays and lesbians if Proposition 8 were to pass (Khan, 2009).

Additionally, African-American households were specifically targeted by a flyer campaign with a copy of Obama's statement on his beliefs about same-sex marriage (Khan, 2009). In the article "Passing Prop 8," Schubert Flint Public Affairs, the management firm for the Yes on 8 campaign, outlined their strategy:

Supporting traditional marriage is not considered to be "Politically Correct." We wanted voters who supported our position to know that they were not alone and so we made sure that they saw our signs in their neighborhoods and our campaign materials at their church. And if they were part of an ethnic minority, all these were in their native language (Schubert & Flint, 2009 p. 46).

Further:

Members of the Mormon faith played an important part of the Yes on 8 coalition, but were only a part of our winning coalition. We had the support of virtually the entire faith community in California. Prop 8 didn't win because of the Mormons. It won because we created superior advertising that defined the issues on our terms; because we built a diverse coalition; and, most importantly, because we activated that coalition at the grassroots level in a way that had never before been done (Schubert & Flint, 2009 p. 47).

Proposition 8 was passed by a slim majority at the November 2008 elections. Same-sex couples were able to legally marry in California between June 16, 2008 and November 4, 2008. Within that time frame, approximately 18,000 same-sex couples were married in California. The proposition eliminated the right of same-sex couples to marry in California after it was passed, but did not apply to the 18,000 couples who had married legally between June and November (Nussbaum, 2010).

On May 26, 2009, the California Supreme Court ruled that Proposition 8 was valid. The Court upheld the marriages of those same-sex couples who wed before Proposition 8's passage. One year later, in *Perry v. Schwarzenegger*—a U.S. District court case which challenged the validity of Proposition 8—Judge Vaughan Walker of the U.S. District Court in San Francisco declared on August 4, 2010 that Proposition 8 was unconstitutional. The case is now being appealed at the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals (Equality California, n.d.).

Finally, the U.S. Internal Revenue Service (IRS) announced in May 2010 that California's community property laws would now apply to registered domestic partners in California. This change has been applied to state returns but not to federal returns. Later, the IRS confirmed that that this change will apply similarly to same-sex spouses in California and registered domestic partners in Washington and Nevada (Lambda Legal, 2011f).

The Effects of Stigma and Discrimination on the Mental Health and Well-being of Lesbians and Gay Men

The marriages of the couples who have been interviewed in this study have existed in the context of the discriminatory ballot measure Proposition 8 and the ongoing

legal battles which ensued from its passage. The following section orients the reader to the literature on the mental health effects of institutionalized stigma and discrimination on the lives of LGB individuals, couples, and families in order to draw the connection between mental and relational health and discriminatory ballot initiatives such as those which restrict the availability of legal marriage to same-sex couples.

Research suggests that due to stigma and discrimination, gay men and lesbians experience a greater prevalence of mental health concerns than heterosexual persons. According to Rostosky et al., (2009) minority stress theory accounts for the higher level of psychological distress that gay and lesbian people experience when compared to heterosexual populations. The term minority stress is used to “distinguish the excess stress to which individuals from stigmatized social categories are exposed as a result of their social, often a minority, position” (Meyer, 2003, p. 675). Further, Rostosky et al. (2009) define minority stress as “the chronic social stress that individuals with stigmatized identities experience as a direct result of prejudice and discrimination over and above the stresses of daily living” (p. 56). Minority stress is socially based and chronic, as it is constituted through relatively stable underlying social and cultural structures. Such social stressors can lead to mentally and physically harmful effects. Meyer (2003) proposes that health is compromised when a marginalized person’s information about the world is constructed in a way that is incongruent with his or her experience of the world.

The Social Effects of Discriminatory Politics and Legal Battles

Anti-gay campaigns endeavor to restrict the rights of LGB individuals, couples, and families. Russell and Richards (2003) assert that anti-gay campaigns draw from and

contribute to cultural homonegativity and undermine the humanity of LGB people. Further, they stress that anti-gay campaign materials contribute to the othering of LGB people by portraying them as repulsive, different, and threatening. They state that “an antigay electoral decision suggests to LGB people that they are not full members of the community” (p. 314). However, they also propose that anti-gay campaigns can galvanize LGBs.

Presently, 29 states have passed ballot initiatives restricting access to marriage to one man and one woman (Lambda Legal, 2011e). Bans on the extension of marriage rights to same-sex couples are an example of institutionalized discrimination (Hatzenbuehler, et al., 2010; Herek, 2006; Rostosky et al., 2010). Rostosky et al. (2010) assert that “political campaigns to deny civil marriage rights to same-sex couples serve to express, perpetuate, and institutionalize sexual stigma” (p. 302). Further, according to Herek (2006), denying same-sex couples the designation of marriage devalues and delegitimizes these relationships and conveys societal judgment that these relationships are inferior to heterosexual couplings. Additionally, marriage denial perpetuates power differentials in society because of the discrepancy in the access to many important resources that same-sex couples experience. Herek (2006) describes this as the crux of stigma which has negative effects on all people marginalized because of sexual identity. He proposes that “by denying same-sex couples the right to marry legally, the state compounds and perpetuates the stigma historically attached to homosexuality” (p. 617). It follows that marriage amendment campaigns have negative effects on the psychological health of gay men and lesbians (Herek, 2006; Rostosky et al., 2009).

The Effects of Discriminatory Politics and Legal Battles on the Mental Health and Well-being of Lesbians and Gay Men

Marriage amendments and anti-LGBT campaigns are understood as acute prejudicial events and thus constitute a minority stress factor (Rostosky et al., 2009). Herdt and Kertzner (2006) assert that the denial of marriage undermines the citizenship and compromises the well-being of gay and lesbian individuals and couples. There have only been a few studies which have specifically examined the effects of institutionalized discrimination through marriage denial on LGB individuals (Hatzenbuehler et al., 2010). This section discusses the results of these studies in order to orient the reader to what is known about the effects of institutionalized discrimination through marriage denial on LGB individuals.

One such study endeavored to explore how social justice issues such as minority rights decided by majority vote impact individual and community psychological experience. Rostosky et al. (2009) conducted an online survey of 1,552 gay, lesbian, and bisexual adults. The study took place following the 2006 elections which included nine state marriage amendment ballot initiatives. The outcomes of the study documented a statistically significant increase in minority stress and psychological distress in the sample of LBG adults following the passage of a marriage amendment in their state of residence. Further, statistically significant results included increases in negative affect, stress, and depressive symptoms in the study's sample of LGB adults.

Similarly, Hatzenbuehler et al. (2010) assert that the deprivation of rights and the public discourse surrounding institutionalized discrimination through marriage denial creates stress that is harmful to the mental health of gay, lesbian, and bisexual

individuals. In assessing the impact of institutional discrimination on psychiatric disorders in LGB populations, Hatzenbuehler et al. (2010) found statistically significant increases in mood disorders, generalized anxiety disorder, and alcohol use disorders among their LGB participant sample, which came from 16 states with constitutional amendments banning same-sex marriage in 2004 and 2005. With the exception of substance use disorders, these statistically significant increases were not observed in the sample of LGB participants from states without such amendments.

Additionally, Mathy and Lehmann (2004) propose that the Defense of Marriage Act (DOMA) has had significant public health consequences for lesbian and bisexual women in the U.S. A sample of 1,884 women (876 heterosexual, 762 bisexual, 246 lesbians) indicated that married women were significantly less likely than bisexuals or lesbians to report suicidality, to perceive that they have behavioral difficulties with alcohol, drugs, or sex, and to report the use of psychotherapy or psychotropic medications. Mathy and Lehmann (2004) concluded that “because homosexuality is not a psychopathology, the relation between sexual orientation and stress-related disorders must be explained by social rather than psychological factors” (p. 192). Further, the aforementioned studies clearly demonstrate the harmful effects that discriminatory politics which restrict the rights of LGB individuals, couples, and families have on the mental health of LGB individuals.

Stress Factors for Lesbians and Gay Men in the Context of Discriminatory Politics and Legal Battles

In order to assess the stressor and resilience factors for lesbians, gay men, and bisexuals confronting anti-gay politics, Russell and Richards (2003) conducted a study

utilizing a 130-item survey of LGB persons associated with the campaign for and passage of anti-gay referendum. Self-identified gay, lesbian, or bisexual respondents in Colorado participated in the study following Amendment 2, a state constitutional amendment which denied legal recourse to LGB people who experienced discrimination based on sexual orientation. This study revealed 5 stressor factors for LGBs:

1. The first stressor factor was participants' encounters with widespread homophobia. Participants felt shocked that their rights could be denied by majority popular vote and said that they felt judged, hated, and were viewed as sexual objects.
2. The second stressor factor was the experience of division within the LGB community based on race, gender, geographic location, degree of outness versus closetedness, and strategic disagreements about how the community navigated the campaign.
3. The third stressor factor confronted the participants to make sense of how the campaign challenged some of their deeply held notions about life such as the world being basically fair and good. LGB people reported feeling anger toward the groups who were oppressing them and an increased vigilance to perceived senses of danger or threat.
4. A fourth stress factor occurred when family members failed to express that, indeed, discrimination had been perpetrated against the LGB family member. This *failed witnessing* did not confirm the existence of the oppression that participants had experienced.

5. The fifth stress factor related to internalized homophobia. Respondents reported that they had negative feelings about being LGB at both the individual and community levels. This stressor resulted in increased alcohol and drug use and participants being less out.

Rostosky et al. (2010) also recently conducted a study aimed at understanding the psychological reactions of marginalized persons which result from macro-level discriminatory events such as ballot initiatives which restrict a marginalized group's rights. The study consisted of a total of 1,486 lesbian, gay, and bisexual participants. Three hundred participants' answers were randomly sampled from the total group of respondents, and four themes emerged from their responses:

1. Indignation about denial of their right to civil marriage which was connected to negative feelings such as distress, anger, hurt, fear, and depression and political and social isolation.
2. Exposure to negative campaign rhetoric caused them distress.
3. They expressed feelings of fear related to their uncertainties about how to protect their family in the absence of the legal protections afforded by civil marriage.
4. In order to externalize their personal reactions they sought out someone or something to place blame upon such as institutional religion or other people's fear and ignorance.

A third study also spoke to the stress factors experienced by GLBT persons facing anti-gay politics. In a qualitative study of 13 participants interviewed in the two months preceding and following the 2006 Tennessee amendment which banned gay marriage,

Levitt et al. (2009) asked the question, “What is the experience of being a GLBT person in the midst of legislative initiatives and movements that seek to limit the rights of GLBT people” (p. 71)? The researchers identified several clusters which summarized the respondents’ answers to the research question, many pertinent to this study:

1. “Initiatives lead to constant painful reminders that I’m seen as less than human by our government and public laws.”
2. “The irrationality of anti-GLBT initiatives is baffling, painful, and scary. We are not who they say we are.”
3. “Supports for my GLBT identity are even more important in the face of initiatives and movements that threaten my religious experience, family, place of residence, or workplace.”
4. “There is a personal need to manage my emotions about these legislative initiatives or movements, like anger, hurt, or guilt via engagement in and/or avoidance of these issues.”
5. “These issues have a stronger impact if these rights are actively important due to my life regarding marriage, health care, finances, and family security, and/or if I have less support than other GLBT individuals (e.g., due to a transgender or bisexual identity)” (p. 73).

The research presented earlier demonstrating the harmful effects that restrictive discriminatory politics have on the mental health of LGB individuals finds strong resonance in the literature on the stressor factors for LGBs. A context of discriminatory politics and legal battles clearly increases stress in LGB individuals, couples, and

families, illustrating the negative impacts that these experiences have on the lives of LGBs.

The Resilience Strategies of Lesbians and Gay Men in the Context of Discriminatory Politics and Legal Battles

The effects of anti-gay political amendments documented in the literature have been largely negative. However, the studies outlined above which evaluated this phenomenon also encountered resilience and coping strategies exhibited among the study participants. As mentioned previously, Russell and Richards (2003) set out to assess both the stressor and resilience factors for lesbians, gay men, and bisexuals confronting anti-gay politics. These resilience factors included the following:

1. The first resilience factor found in the study was that participants gained perspective of the process of the gay and lesbian rights movement which allowed them to situate anti-gay action in its political context. The authors proposed that “cognitively, this move suggests a shift from seeing the particular antigay action as central to seeing the action as one aspect within the more central movement for equal rights for LGB people” (p. 324). This movement perspective resulted in an enhanced sense of efficacy in the community which was situated as part of the fight for the equal rights for all people. “For LGB people, the ability to adopt a broad perspective into which to place an antigay election shifts their focus away from the election to their own efforts and efficacy” (p. 324).
2. The second resilience factor described in the study empowered participants to confront their internalized homophobia by affording them the opportunity to interrogate and reflect upon how their lives have been impacted by

homonegativity. The authors propose that “in confronting the impact of homonegativity, LGB respondents use antigay politics as the occasion for understanding and decreasing their own internalized homophobia and its effects on their lives” (p. 324). This also influenced their decision to come out to others. Further, the authors propose that although they described in the stress factors section of their research that antigay politics can increase internalized homophobia among LGB people, “here, we see that, if LGB respondents can directly confront the homonegativity, as it touches their lives, they can transform that homonegativity into the grounds for enhanced self-understanding and the courage to be more out” (p. 324).

3. The third resilience factor was related to participants’ expressions of emotional affect. For example, the authors propose that anger can be a source of resilience and can mobilize a person to action.
4. The fourth resilience factor was related to the participants’ experiences of support from relationships on both the interpersonal and political level, specifically when these interpersonal and political relationships were positioned as *successful witnesses* who acknowledged that discrimination had, in fact, taken place. This *successful witnessing* reduced isolation and feelings of powerlessness and connected participants to the larger community.
5. The fifth resilience factor documented in the study was the LGB community itself, which participants experienced as a source of both resilience and support. Further, the LGB community provided a context in which participants felt an increased sense of their ability to impact and improve their situations.

A second study conducted by Rostosky et al. (2007) endeavored to assess for minority stress experiences in committed same-sex couple relationships. The study sample consisted of 40 same-sex couples. Data analysis concluded that participants' responses were indicative of the factors of minority stress proposed by Meyers (2003). Additionally, Rostosky et al. (2007) found that participant's coping processes included the following:

1. Self-acceptance and positive views of being a sexual minority in a same-sex relationship.
2. Ignoring, compartmentalizing, or externalizing the rejecting experiences that they encountered from others.
3. Reframing negative experiences with adversity as empowering rather than damaging or diminishing of the relationship.
4. Creating support systems which consisted of one another, supportive friends and family, and other gay couples.

Finally, in addition to the four themes described earlier by Rostosky et al. (2010) in the paragraphs detailing the stress factors for lesbians and gay men in the context of discriminatory politics and legal battles, the study found that participants were also able to find ways to view the amendment as a temporary setback which allowed for experiences of optimism, hope, determination, and empowerment to emerge.

The tensions of engagement as a resiliency strategy. The tensions of engagement as a resiliency strategy are contained in this dichotomy: legislative initiatives and movements which seek to limit the rights of LGB people affect them strongly, causing both psychological pain and the need for resilience. These three studies on LGB

resilience illustrate that despite the harmful effects that discriminatory politics restricting the rights of LGB individuals, couples, and families have on the mental health of LGB individuals, and despite the literature outlining the stress factors for LGBs in the context of discriminatory politics and legal battles, the negative impacts that these experiences have on the lives of LGBs are in some measure counterbalanced by the resilience and coping processes demonstrated by LGB's in these contexts.

As mentioned previously, conceiving their experiences as a part of the larger movement for the equal rights of all people helped to promote efficacy for LGB study participants (Russell & Richards, 2003). However, through their research, Levitt et al. (2009) developed a core category which spoke to the tension created by participant's experiences of and engagement with anti-gay referendums. "The participants described experiencing tension, because engagement to fight homophobic sentiments or movements could result in increased hurt, fear, and anger, but withdrawal from engagement could result in continued invisibility and discrimination" (p. 78). For example, one participant in their study proclaimed that "my level of social activism depends upon how I balance a need for social justice versus fears that these efforts will not secure our safety" (p. 78). Additional participant statements reported by the study included "connections to others have become more dichotomized due to these issues: In most settings, I feel a stronger isolation, although in supportive ones, I feel more connected" and "Activism seems more rewarding and effective when I can present myself openly with self-acceptance and try to see others' perspectives" (p. 78). The core category described by the authors indicates that "GLBT people need to balance the dual dangers of engagement with GLBT advocacy and self-protection through withdrawal" (p. 77).

The Relationship between Marriage and Mental Health

As previously mentioned, for the majority of Western history, marriage has been an institution used for securing wealth, property rights, and power. It was not until the 19th century that it became an institution based mainly on romantic love. By the mid-20th century, the dominant model of marriage in the United States was characterized by emotional intimacy and clear gender roles (Coontz, 2005; Herek, 2006). Herek (2006) argues that “as cultural definitions of marriage have evolved in the United States and other Western countries, relationship quality and its constituent components have become increasingly central to the meaning of that institution” (p. 609).

Because of the brief existence of same-sex couples being allowed to enter into civil marriage, research on the relationship between marriage and mental health has been limited to opposite-sex couples (Kertzner, 2009). Herek, (2006) argues that research on opposite-sex couples shows that married couples have many differences from heterosexual cohabitating couples. According to the literature, Herek (2006) posits that “married men and women who are satisfied with their relationships generally experience better physical and mental health than their unmarried counterparts” (p. 614). Further, the body of literature on marriage and well-being for heterosexual adults suggests that married individuals experience less psychological distress, more psychological well-being, lower incidence of psychiatric disorders, and more emotional support than unmarried individuals (Herdt & Kertzner 2006; Kertzner, 2009). Further, for heterosexually coupled individuals, mental health is improved through the transition to marriage. Kertzner (2009) asserts that “although emotionally supportive relationships are strongly and positively related to physical health and well-being, it is striking that among

such relationships in contemporary society, marriage particularly appears to have the greatest effect on positive well-being” (p. 188).

“Social support and integration are central to the institution of marriage, and the various rituals associated with marriage can be understood as cementing the couple’s ties to the larger community” (Herek, 2006, p. 614). Further, marriage is associated with resources which enhance well-being and mental health such as spousal benefits and economic resources (Herdt & Kertzner, 2006). Civil marriage in the U.S. comes with over 1,300 legal benefits. According to Kertzner (2009) “the literature supports the conclusion that it is the effect of being married, that is, the legal, financial, psychological, and social benefits that come with marriage, which is primarily responsible for the mental health gains associated with marriage” (p. 189).

As marriage is not an option available to most same-sex couples, there are methodological constraints in comparing married heterosexual couples to same-sex couples. Despite these methodological constraints, the conclusions drawn from the existing body of behavioral science research indicate that the “psychosocial qualities of intimate relationships do not reliably differ in key respects according to whether the couple consists of two men, two women, or a man and a woman” (Herek, 2006, p. 611). For example, Herek (2006) proposes that both opposite-sex couples and same-sex couples want to form long-lasting, stable, intimate relationships and that many are successful doing this. Herek (2006) also proposes that the couples’ psychological and social dynamics are similar in that they form deep emotional attachments, face many similar challenges, and report similar levels of relational satisfaction. As marriage supports mental health, Herdt and Kertzner (2006) argue that it follows that the

realization of ability to legally marry would translate into an enhanced sense of well-being for same-sex couples.

The Effects of Legal Recognition on the Experiences of Same-Sex Couples in Legally Recognized Relationships

The American Community Survey is an annual survey of several million households which provides demographic data about the U.S. population. The survey results which were released in 2008 by the U.S. Census Bureau reported that 149,956 respondents identified their same-sex partner as their husband or wife. An additional 414,787 respondents identified their same-sex partner as their unmarried partner. According to the results of the American Community Survey, same-sex spouses and unmarried partners were most prevalent in the North East and West Coast (Gates, 2009). According to Gates (2009), the Williams Institute estimates that by the end of 2008 approximately 35,000 same-sex couples were legally married within the total 86,000 estimated to be in some form of legally-recognized relationship. Therefore, the nearly 150,000 respondents who designated their partners as husband or wife were not all in a legally-recognized marriage or other legally-recognized relationship.

A few studies have begun to document the effects of legal recognition on the experiences of same-sex couples who are in legally-recognized relationships. As mentioned previously, this legal recognition had gone by various titles including domestic partnership, civil union, marriage, and civil partnership. The body of literature which documents these couples' experiences is summarized below.

In the first study of same-sex couples in civil unions, Solomon, Rothblum, and Balsam (2004) compared gay and lesbian couples in Vermont who had civil unions, their

heterosexual married siblings, and their friends in same-sex relationships that were not formalized through civil union. A three year follow-up to this study found that non-civil union couples were more likely to break up than both couples with civil unions and heterosexual married couples (Balsam et al., 2008). In their comparison of same-sex couples who were either married in Massachusetts, had domestic partnerships in California, or had civil unions in Vermont, Rothblum, Balsam, and Solomon (2008) found that in each of these states more female couples decided to legalize their relationships than male couples. The authors found this surprising, given that there are more men than women who have legalized their relationships in the European countries who support legalized partnerships for same-sex couples. As these three studies were the product of relatively new marriage legislation, the authors explain that they were largely descriptive of who chose to have a legalized partnership rather than the effects of being in a legalized relationship.

In another study involving interviews of twelve female couples and four male couples who were granted the legal right to marry in Multnomah County, Oregon in 2004, Clark (2007) found that the couples' marriage experience influenced the couples' familial and relational identities. Contextual influences which were involved in the construction of meaning-making for the couples in relation to their marriages were personal, social, cultural, and political. For example, the social recognition of their relationships was a very important aspect of the couple's marriage experience. Participants acknowledged that the support of others or lack thereof affected their relationships with friends and family members as well as their marriage experience.

Further, this support often strengthened their belief that the social aspects of marriage and weddings were important.

Clark's research highlighted the importance of external validation for couples in legally recognized same-sex relationships. Additionally, Clark (2007) found that the marriage experience enhanced the couples' level of commitment to one another. She encountered that some interviewees struggled with tension between their feminist viewpoints about marriage and their decision to legally marry. Also, when politics were a primary motivator of their decision to marry participants described their marriages as civil rights acts. One participant even described that she felt as though she was a part of making history.

Rankins (2008) qualitatively explored the experiences related to same-sex marriage of five male couples living in the San Francisco metropolitan area who had married at San Francisco City Hall in 2004. Rankins (2008) found that many men in the study had experienced an enhanced sense of comfort, safety, societal legitimacy, and inclusion in society following their marriages. Additionally, the men reported a sense of diminished vulnerability following their marriages.

In 2005, the United Kingdom's (UK) Civil Partnership Act allowed same-sex couples over the age of 16 to formally register their relationships, thus granting them access to the same civil rights as married couples in the UK. In order to explore the meaning of civil partnership for the positioning of lesbian and gay people in society, Goodwin and Butler (2009) conducted qualitative interviews which produced several themes. Participants reported that their new position in society had created shifts in their social status and visibility as LGB individuals and as a same-sex couple. For example,

civil partnership had the effect of making their relationships more authentic to others which provided them with recognition and support, helped to communicate the seriousness of their relationships, and increased their sense of belonging in their wider family networks. Participants experienced that civil partnership provided a healthy alternative from negatively stereotyped identities and alternative role models for young people, and increased their social recognition and access to social privileges and civil rights. Simultaneously, participants expressed frustration about the language inconsistency resulting from the Civil Partnership Act. They expressed that this disconnect was not just semantic, as the language used has had the effect of shaping identity, relationships, and shared values in community. For example, “the lack of a uniformly applied social label made it harder for participants to feel a coherent sense of identity or community” (p. 242).

The Massachusetts Department of Public Health conducted a survey which found that legal marriage has played a positive role in the lives of legally married same-sex couples (Ramos, Goldberg, & Lee Badgett, 2009). Of the 1,608 completed surveys, 558 respondents reported that they were legally married to a same-sex partner. The most frequently reported reasons for marrying included love and commitment (93%) and the desire for their relationship to have legal status (85%). Seventy-two percent of participants agreed that marriage increased their commitment to their spouses, and 69 percent reported that their marriage has resulted in greater feelings of acceptance from their community. Additionally, 62 percent felt that their family was more accepting of their partner as a result of being married. Legally married respondents were more likely to be out about their sexual orientation and relationship in a variety of contexts, and over

80 percent reported that being in a same-sex marriage made them more likely to come out to coworkers, health care providers, and in situations regarding their children at school. Further, 93 percent of the legally married parents of children felt that their children were happier and better off because of their marriage. When given the opportunity to provide short descriptions of how they felt their marriage had impacted their children, positive themes emerged. These themes included their children feeling more secure and protected, an increased sense of stability, an increased sense of closeness to family members, and that marriage allowed their children to see that their families were legitimized by society and government. Additionally, parents reported that their marriage made it easier for others to understand their families.

Additionally, as a component of a larger study on same-sex marriage in Massachusetts, Schechter, Tracy, Page, and Luong (2008) investigated the impact of legalization of same-sex marriage on same-sex partners. Thirty-six couples in their total sample of fifty same-sex couples were legally married in Massachusetts. Twenty-two of these couples had a commitment ceremony prior to the legal availability of marriage for same-sex couples in Massachusetts.

The study found that couples who chose to publicly celebrate their commitments chose to do so because they felt that it was a significant way of “visibly affirming” their relationships (p. 410) for themselves and others who were important to them. They also described it as a way to gain family and community recognition and support, and as a way to serve as role models for other GLBT people. Those who had formally recognized their relationships both through commitment ceremonies and legal marriage understood the commitment ceremony to be the occasion that had “the greater impact on their sense

of commitment to the relationship and on the degree of social recognition of the relationship in their immediate social circles” (p. 411). These couples also described that their legal marriages were “largely undertaken for the legal benefits, protection, and recognition that legal marriage bestowed upon them and their families” (p. 411).

Those couples who had not formally recognized their relationship through a commitment ceremony prior to their legal marriages reported the significance of their legal marriages in similar terms to how the other couples described their commitment ceremonies. Therefore, regardless of the legality of the ceremony, the first time the couples publicly formalized their commitments became the most meaningful in their eyes.

The qualitative component of the study also illuminated the urgency some of the couples felt to marry, because of their concern that their right to marry legally would be “taken away” due to the political climate surrounding the extension of marriage rights to same-sex couples in Massachusetts (p. 411). They also described a desire to be a part of history by being among the first legally married same-sex couples in Massachusetts. However, the couples all described that they felt legal marriage was congruent with their level of commitment to one another and that they would not have chosen to marry just for the sake of legally being able to do so.

The couples also reported that legal marriage had unexpected impacts on them. For instance, they reported a deepened sense of commitment, lessened experiences of marginalization and internalized homophobia, closer relationships with family and extended family including a greater level of acceptance for their relationships from those people, and a greater sense of social entitlement to the language and benefits of marriage.

Further, they reported that they felt that legal marriage positioned them as role models for gay and lesbian couples and that the “legalization acted to counter longtime societal notions that gays and lesbians are incapable of deep and lasting relationships” (p. 415).

Finally, some of the couples expressed trepidation because although they experienced a sense of justice and equality as a result of their legal marriages, “being seen as ‘normal’ sometimes caused dismay with merging into a patriarchal institution, and concern that the gay and lesbian community may be losing its uniqueness as well as the creativity that has characterized gay and lesbian commitment ceremonies” (p. 415). This struggle also manifested in the applicability of the language choices available to the couples, with regard to how they spoke about their relationships. Some felt it desirable to claim the traditionally-recognized language of marriage such as the terms *wife* and *husband*, while others felt that these terms were “laden with patriarchal and sex-stereotyped meanings” (p. 416). This was further complicated by the lack of alternative language options.

Similar findings came from a mixed-methods study on the impact of legal marriage for the first cohort of legally married same-sex couples in Canada. Macintosh, Reissing, and Andruff (2010) utilized quantitative protocols to evaluate the relationship satisfaction and attachment of 26 legally married same-sex couples, and qualitative protocols to explore the impact of legal marriage on 15 of these couples. While the results of the quantitative portion of the study indicated that the legally married same-sex couples had “significantly higher levels of relationship satisfaction” (p. 83) and “significantly less attachment-related anxiety and avoidance” (p. 84) than married

heterosexual couples, the results of their study which directly relate to the current study were gleaned from the qualitative interview results.

The results of the qualitative portion of the study indicated that the impacts of legal marriage had social, relational, and political elements. The social elements described by participants were described in three sub-themes. The first involved the language of marriage which participants described as having a positive influence on their lives. Specifically, participants indicated that terms including “*marriage, wife, husband, and daughter-in-law*” were understood by everyone and that through this language they felt understood and known by their friends and families in a different way that created a new and deeper acceptance of their partnerships” (p. 84). A few participants indicated negative impacts of language largely related to the intolerance of their family members. Many of the female participants also discussed their struggles with the word *wife* citing the term’s patriarchal legacy. Often times, this resulted in their preference to maintain the use of the terms *spouse* or *partner*.

The second social element sub-theme described by participants was “Being Out” (p. 84). Three quarters of the participants indicated that they felt “more comfortable and entitled to be out but also a sense of responsibility about the need to be out” (p. 84). Further, participants became more aware of their own levels of internalized homophobia and the external homophobia they experienced from others. The increase in their comfort of coming out as a result of their legal marriages had the effect of decreasing their levels of internalized homophobia. Additionally, 72 percent of participants discussed that their increase in being out as well as their access to the language of marriage “had the combined impact of creating normalization for their relationships and for same-sex

couples in general and that these things led to social change” (p. 85). The couples in the study clearly affirmed the positive results of access to legal marriage:

They felt that being out, proud and having affirmed their relationships publicly through marriage showed the world more about their relationships. Further, they noted that simply living their married lives publicly and openly demonstrated that their relationships were no different than those of their heterosexual peers (p. 85).

The third sub-theme related to the rights and responsibilities of marriage that three quarters of the participants discussed as being significant in their lives:

They felt that they and their relationships were full participants in society in the sense that the ability to file taxes together as spouses and to have the immediate practical benefits of marriage, such as receiving immediate spousal health insurance benefits, had given them a newfound sense of empowerment and inclusion in a system that they had been restricted from in the past (p. 85).

As previously mentioned, the study also discussed the relational impacts that marriage had for the same-sex couples interviewed in the study. Largely, they expressed that legal marriage had not changed their level of commitment to one another and relationship. However, 92 percent said that legal marriage did impact their notions of family, and many of them described a shift in their openness or readiness to having children. They also described that their legal marriages had the effect of bringing family together, as they experienced a greater level of acceptance and inclusion from their extended families. Additionally, 86 percent of participants discussed how legal marriage increased their levels of safety and security in the relationship, often describing an increased sense of closeness.

Finally, the study described the political element of the impact of legal marriage on their lives. The participants said that the legal rights afforded to them through legal marriage had the effect of their feeling protected by society. Further, they detailed a “profound sense of safety and security in knowing that they would be able to have the right to make decisions for an ill partner, care for children together and have the benefits related to inheritance and insurance” (p. 87). Furthermore, most of the participants felt that their relationships had been legitimized through their legal marriages and were now accepted by larger society.

It is important to note when considering the results of the above-mentioned study that same-sex couples in Canada experience the rights, privileges, and responsibilities of legal marriage on a national level. As previously illustrated, DOMA prohibits federal recognition of same-sex unions in the United States and limits the rights, privileges and responsibilities of marriage to those afforded or prohibited by each state.

Lastly, in their online survey of 2,677 gay, lesbian, and bisexual individuals, Riggle et al., (2010) demonstrated that partners in legally recognized same-sex relationships had statistically significant less psychological distress and more well-being than single LGB people, dating LGB people, or committed same-sex couples.

Summary and Conclusions

The purpose of this review was to orient the reader to the historical precedents and the scholarly literature which supports the rationale for this study. First, the key historical precedents related to the extension of marriage rights to same-sex couples were presented. These precedents were indicative, in some ways, of a rapidly-evolving political landscape. In fact, the historical precedents related to relationship recognition

included in this review had to be updated a number of times over the course of the pilot and dissertation study.

Next, as the marriages of the couples who have been interviewed in this study have existed in the context of the discriminatory ballot measure Proposition 8 and the ongoing legal battles which ensued from its passage, the literature which describes the effects of stigma and discrimination on the mental health and well-being of gay men and lesbians was presented. These studies demonstrated the harmful effects that discriminatory politics which restrict the rights of LGB individuals, couples, and families have on the mental health of LGB individuals. Further, the literature on the stress factors for LGBs in the context of discriminatory politics and legal battles clearly illustrated the negative impacts that these experiences have on the lives of LGBs.

However, the impacts of discrimination are not merely negative. The literature related to the resilience strategies of lesbians and gay men in the context of discriminatory politics and legal battles also illustrated powerful resilience and coping processes demonstrated by LGBs. In the midst of anti-LGB politics, couples often found a greater sense of community, strength, pride, and a more inclusive context for their battle to simply be themselves.

The relationship between marriage and mental health was then explored. This literature clearly indicates that marriage has positive impacts on married persons' lives. It is therefore no surprise that the emerging literature on the experiences of same-sex couples in legally recognized relationships is replete with the positive effects that legal recognition has had on the lives of these couples.

CHAPTER THREE

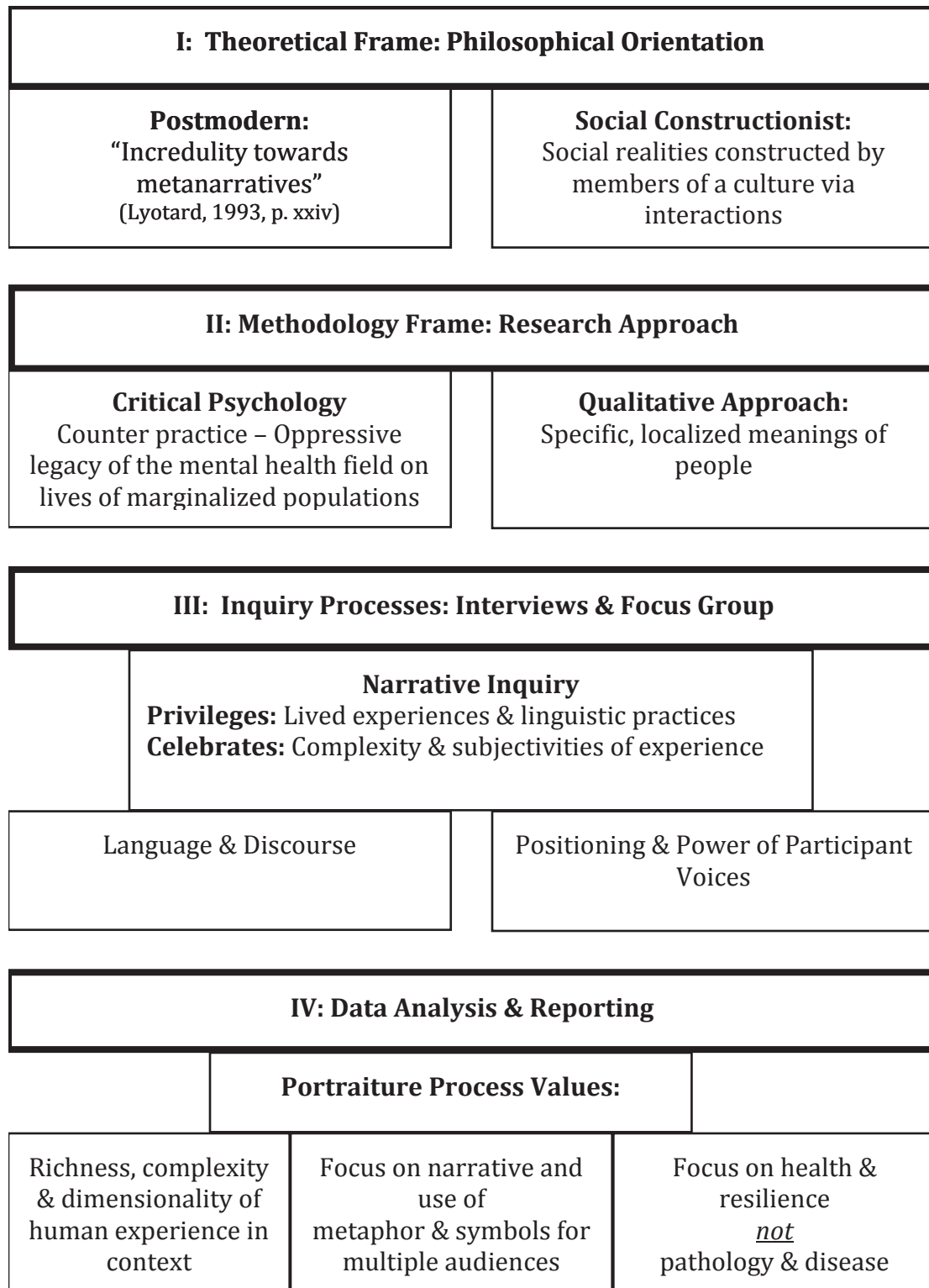
METHODOLOGY

Introduction

With the aim of increasing practitioner competence, the purpose of this dissertation is to provide marriage and family therapists and mental health service providers with insight into the experiences of legally married same-sex couples, as well as the strategies that these couples employ when navigating oppressive circumstances such as anti-gay amendment campaigns, in order to improve their knowledge of this specific population. The processes of portraiture described by Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis (1997) call for the identification of the intellectual and ideological themes which will shape the process of inquiry prior to the onset of data collection. Therefore, Figure 1 illustrates the theoretical and philosophical framework which guided the methodological processes utilized in order to ensure that the research methods, processes of inquiry and analysis, and reporting of the results worked towards the above-mentioned larger aims (Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis also advocate the researcher record her own autobiographical themes which will shape the processes of inquiry. This autobiographical information was provided in Chapter One on pages 5-8). The participants, processes of data collection, analysis, and narrative construction are then described. Finally, the reliability and validity and the assumptions and limitations of the study are provided along with a summary of the chapter.

Theoretical and Philosophical Framework Guiding Methodological Decisions

Figure 1. Theoretical and Philosophical Framework Guiding Methodological Decisions



I. Theoretical Frame: Philosophical Orientation

Figure 1 illustrates the **reflexive** framework guiding the methodology of the present study. The overarching theoretical notions guiding the methodology of this study are oriented philosophically within **postmodernism** and **social constructionism**. This is because a postmodern, social constructionist orientation is concerned with meaning making between people as well as the context within which this meaning is made. The main premise of social constructionist thought, as described by Freedom and Combs (1996), is that “the beliefs, values, institutions, customs, labels, laws, divisions of labor, and the like that make up social realities are constructed by the members of a culture as they interact with one another from generation to generation and day to day . . . that is the societies construct the ‘lenses’ through which their members interpret the world” (p. 16). Gergen and Kaye (1992) argue for a multiplicity of accounts of reality in which the historical and cultural situations of each are recognized. Becvar and Becvar (2003) similarly propose that “the claim for the status of fact can be made only relative to a set of norms or standards agreed upon within a given framework of reasoning” (p. 358). It follows that in order to understand the stories of legally married same-sex couples, we must situate their experiences within the historical, cultural, and political discourses in which they exist.

II. Methodology Frame: Research Approach

The methodology of this research project is largely informed by **critical psychology research**, in that it has been conceptualized from the beginning as a counter-practice to the oppressive legacy of the mental health field in its contributions to the experiences of and interactions with marginalized populations, as described in Chapter 1

of this dissertation. Secondly, **qualitative inquiry** from a postmodern, social constructionist worldview has been selected as the most appropriate methodology for this study because, as Reissman (1993) argues, “realist assumptions from natural science methods prove limiting for understanding social life” (p. 1). This is because from a modernist paradigm, research seeks to establish bodies of systematic and objective knowledge (Gergen & Kaye, 1992). The “objectivity of the modernist worldview, with its emphasis on facts, replicable procedures, and generally applicable rules, easily ignores the specific, localized meanings of individual people” (Freedman & Combs, 1996, p. 21). Human behavior is thus de-contextualized, and abstract formalizations are generated and deemed to be relevant to all people (Gergen & Kaye, 1992).

III. Inquiry Processes

Situated within this theoretical and philosophical framework, **narrative inquiry** is the process guiding this qualitative inquiry. The narrative mode, in contrast to the logo-scientific mode, privileges lived experience and centers around linguistic practices which celebrate the complexity and subjectivity of experience. Guided by the text analogy, the narrative metaphor proposes that in order to make sense of our lives, we story our experiences in sequences across time and create a coherent narrative account of ourselves in the world. This storying determines the meaning that we attribute to our experiences, and through it our lives and relationships evolve (White & Epston, 1990). According to White (1992), “the narrative metaphor proposes that persons live their lives by stories—that these stories are shaping of life, and that they have real, not imagined, effects—and that these stories provide the structure of life” (p. 123). It is through this storying process that persons create a dominant narrative with which they experience the world. It follows

that through this storying process, gay and lesbian individuals, couples, and families shape their accounts of their identities as family members, their relationships with one another, and the meanings that they make about their relational identities in the larger social context.

Becvar and Becvar (2003) argue that “to think in terms of stories rather than reality means that the truth, in the tradition of logical positivism, is no longer available to us” (p. 355). Consequently, White and Epston (1990) propose that it is not possible for us to have an appreciation for, or an understanding of, an objective reality. Statements which posit meaning are interpretive.

Language comprises our meanings, beliefs, relationships, lives, and our worlds (White & Epston, 1990; Freedman & Combs, 1996). Efran and Clarfield (1992) describe language as not merely a verbal exchange, but a communal activity. Freedman and Combs (1996) propose, “Every time we speak, we bring forth a reality. Each time we share words we give legitimacy to the distinctions that those words bring forth” (p. 29). It follows that language is not a neutral activity, as it is constructed through culturally available discourses which are considered contextually appropriate and relevant (White & Epston, 1990). Prilleltensky and Nelson (2002) state, “Language itself can be a source of oppression or a vehicle of solidarity” (p. 19).

Discourse can be defined as the institutionalized use of language and language-like sign systems (Davies & Harré, 1990). Discourses are produced through multi-faceted public processes which result in the dynamic and progressive achievement of meanings which are constitutive of an institution’s, group’s, or individual’s understanding of reality. Further, discourses can compete with one another or create versions of reality

which privilege a distinct set of practices or ideas while simultaneously marginalizing other practices, ideas, or understandings of reality. Foucault (1990) cautions:

We must not imagine a world of discourse divided between accepted discourse and excluded discourse, or between the dominant discourse and the dominated one; but as a multiplicity of discursive elements that can come into play in various strategies. It is in this distribution that we must reconstruct, with the things said and those concealed, the enunciations required and those forbidden, that it comprises; with the variants and different effects—according to who is speaking, his position of power, the institutional context in which he happens to be situated—that it implies; and with the shifts and reutilizations of identical formulas for contrary objectives that it also includes (p. 100).

Davies and Harré (1990) describe discursive practices as the processes through which people actively produce their social and psychological realities. Further, they go on to postulate:

An individual emerges through the processes of social interaction, not as a relatively fixed end product but as one who is constituted and reconstituted through the various discursive practices in which they participate. Accordingly, who one is is always an open question with a shifting answer depending upon the positions made available within one's own and others' discursive practices, and within those practices, the stories through which we make sense of our own and others' lives (Davies & Harré, 1990).

Positioning is a discursive practice whereby persons coherently understand themselves as subjective participants in jointly produced storylines (Davies & Harré, 1990). Davies and Harré (1990) make this clear:

Once having taken up a particular position as one's own, a person inevitably sees the world from the vantage point of that position and in terms of the particular images, metaphors, story lines, and concepts which are made relevant within the particular discursive practice in which they are positioned.

Consequently, this coherent and subjective understanding of one's positioning opens up possibilities for agency and choice in situations which may have been previously understood as fixed or beyond one's own ability to impact.

A discussion about narrative research concerned with stories of agency of marginalized groups, such as same-sex couples, could not be complete without a discussion of **power**. Researchers and practitioners of critical psychology, Prilleltensky and Nelson (2002), propose that power "refers to the capacity and opportunity to fulfill or obstruct personal, relational, or collective needs" (p. 7). Further, they posit that "power affords people multiple identities as individuals seeking well-being, engaging in oppression, or resisting domination" (p.7). In their construction of power, agency (ability and volitional activity) and structure (opportunity) are constitutive. Foucault (1980) spoke of an "insurrection of subjugated knowledges" (historical knowledges which have been buried as well as knowledges which have been deemed as inadequate, naïve, insufficiently elaborated, and unscientific) (p. 81). He argued that power and knowledge are inseparable, and proposed that it is insufficient to describe them as repressive.

It [power/knowledge] transverses and produces things, it induces pleasure, forms of knowledge, produces discourse. It needs to be considered as a productive network which runs through the whole social body, much more than as a negative instance whose function is repression (Foucault, 1980, p. 119).

In considering how power and subjectivity influence research, Prilleltensky and Nelson (2002) postulate that the topic of inquiry, the subsequent research process, and the resulting findings or outcomes, “come from an interaction of the values and assumptions of the researcher with the particular historical representation of the phenomenon under study” (p. 23). It follows that research is not neutral, value free, or objective. Research is a political activity (Prilleltensky & Nelson, 2002).

IV: Data Analysis and Reporting

Finally, the **portraiture** process described by Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis (1997) in *The Art and Science of Portraiture* was chosen as the method of data analysis and documentation because its processes and products are designed to “capture the richness, complexity, and dimensionality of human experience in social and cultural context, conveying the experiences of the people who are negotiating those experiences” (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997, p. 3). Consistent with a critical psychology approach to research, portraiture is concerned about the tendency in the social sciences of focusing inquiry on “pathology and disease rather than on health and resilience,” making it a useful tool in the description of agency (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997, p. 8). Finally, and also consistent with a critical psychology approach to research, **portraiture** emphasizes the importance of the research report being written in ways that value

narrative and symbolic language, and are thus accessible to wider, more eclectic audiences both within and outside the halls of academia.

Participants

Participants included 14 same-sex couples who are legally married in the state of California. The sample included 8 male same-sex couples and 6 female same-sex couples. Two of the couples in the sample had been interviewed previously in the pilot study and consented to have their narratives included with the interview data. All 14 couples reside in San Diego County. Length of time together as a couple ranged from 4.5 years to 35 years with an average of 12.15 years. Household income ranged from \$40,000 to \$250,000 annually. Pseudonyms were used for each participant throughout this document in order to protect his or her privacy.

A description of each couple and participant is provided in Tables 1 and 2. The demographic data was obtained both from the interviews and from the brief demographic questionnaire that each participant completed prior to his or her interview. Table 1 presents the participant's gender, age, and ethnicity, relationship length, and whether or not they also registered as domestic partners. Table 2 presents the participant's education level, employment status, job title (if provided), and annual household income. Variations in the consistency of descriptions of ethnicity and income were due to the data being gathered through self-report.

Selection criteria for participant inclusion required four standards be met: that the couples were same-sex, legally married in California, they agreed to participate in an interview together as a couple, and they agreed to review the narrative draft of their interview. No other selection criteria influenced participant inclusion. This was largely

because a data set of accurate demographic data of the 18,000 same-sex couples who are legally married in California does not exist.

Table 1

*Participant Gender, Age, Ethnicity, Relationship Length, and Registered Domestic**Partnership (RDP) Status*

Participant	Gender	Age	Ethnicity	Years Together	RDP
Couple 1	M			11	Y
Mitch		52	Mexican American		
Cameron		50	White		
Couple 2	F			11.5	Y
Karen		47	Caucasian		
Amy		51	Caucasian		
Couple 3	M			7	Y
Steven		55	White		
James		55	White		
Couple 4	M			4.5	Y
Joe		30	White		
Jason		30	White		
Couple 5	F			23	Y
Desiree		67	White		
Sue		64	White		
Couple 6	M			17	Y
Thomas		42	Caucasian		
Larry		57	Caucasian		
Couple 7	M			8	Y
Sam		37	White		
Joel		43	White		
Couple 8	F			5	Y
Leanne		46	Caucasian		
Chloe		50	Caucasian		
Couple 9	F			6.5	N
Sylvia		43	Caucasian		
Carol		46	Caucasian		

Participant	Gender	Age	Ethnicity	Years Together	RDP
Couple 10	M			14	Y
Carl		52	White		
Jerry		59	White & Native American		
Couple 11	M			35	Y
Gabe		64	Caucasian & American Indian		
Jonathan		65	Caucasian		
Couple 12	F			10	Y
Jennifer		60	Caucasian		
Courtney		62	Caucasian		
Couple 13	F			7	Y
Christine		43	White		
Kara		41	American Indian & White		
Couple 14	M			11	N
Derek		45	Filipino/Pacific Islander		
Scott		39	White		

Table 2

Participant Education Level, Employment Status, Job Title, and Annual Household

Income

Participant	Education Level	Employment Status	Job Title	Annual Income
Couple 1 Mitch Cameron	High School	Disability Employed	Real Estate Broker	\$75,000
Couple 2 Karen Amy	Masters Bachelors	Employed Employed	Nurse Practitioner Financial Planner	\$250,000
Couple 3 Steven James	B.S. 2 Years College	Employed Employed	Office Supervisor Claims Representative	\$172,000
Couple 4 Joe Jason	B.A. Some College	Employed Unemployed	Insurance Underwriter	\$55,000
Couple 5 Desiree Sue	2 Masters Doctoral Courses	Retired Retired	Educator Educator	\$214,000
Couple 6 Thomas Larry	College Some College	Employed Disability	Teacher	\$40,000
Couple 7 Sam Joel	Masters Bachelors	Employed Employed	Software Product Manager Accountant & Artist	\$170,000
Couple 8 Leanne Chloe	Masters Courses College Graduate	Employed Employed	Registered Nurse Instructional Designer	\$150,000
Couple 9 Sylvia Carol	J.D. J.D.	Employed Employed	Attorney Attorney	\$150,000

Participant	Education Level	Employment Status	Job Title	Annual Income
Couple 10				\$70,000
Carl	Bachelors	Employed		
Jerry	B.A.	Employed	Cartoonist & Art Coach	
Couple 11				\$45,000
Gabe	High School	Retired		
Jonathan	B.A.	Retired		
Couple 12				
Jennifer	B.A.	Employed	Social Worker	\$120,000
Courtney	Ph.D.	Employed	County Agency Supervisor	\$130,000
Couple 13				
Christine	B.A.	Employed	High School Teacher	\$110,000
Kara	Some College	Employed	Financial Aid Officer	\$90,000
Couple 14				\$143,000
Derek	Bachelors	Employed	Property Management	
Scott	Masters	Employed	Programmer/Analyst	

Recruitment and Initial Contact

Participants were recruited through printed and electronic advertisements which are accessed by the LGBT community. These recruitment venues were varied: an article on the study published in the online periodical the San Diego Gay and Lesbian News (SDGLN); a recruitment announcement on the Marriage Equality USA website; a recruitment announcement on the San Diego Marriage Equality Facebook wall; a recruitment announcement on the North County LGBT Pride Facebook wall; a reposting of the SDGLN article on the *Relationships in the Raw* blog; a printed recruitment announcement at the San Diego LGBT Center; and printed recruitment announcements in visible locations in the Hillcrest neighborhood in San Diego. The recruitment announcement was also posted on my MFT practice website and blog. I also contacted

via email the South Bay Pride Organization and leaders of faith-based organizations who are supportive of LGBT people and rights. Word of mouth served as an additional measure of convenience sampling. To my knowledge, this occurred via interpersonal conversation (by phone and in person), emails, an email blast by San Diego Alliance for Marriage Equality (SAME), and Facebook postings throughout the community.

I was contacted via email or phone by 30 couples who conveyed their interest in learning more about the study. At that time, I went over the study details and discussed their questions. The couples who indicated that they were interested in participating were sent a copy of the recruitment announcement, informed consent, and demographic questionnaire for their review. Sixteen couples agreed to participate in the couples interview portion of the study. Twelve couples were scheduled for interviews, and the remaining four who inquired about the study near the end of the interview process agreed to participate if any of the couples scheduled to be interviewed decided to withdraw their participation. Finally, I contacted the two couples who participated in the pilot study to provide them an opportunity to participate in the larger study. Both couples consented to the inclusion of their narrative draft and demographic information in the dissertation study and signed the study's informed consent form.

Procedures and Materials

Couples Interviews

A total of 14 couples participated in the couples interview portion of the study (including the two couples who participated in the pilot study and consented for their narrative draft and demographic information to be included in the dissertation study). To accomplish this portion of the study, I conducted semi-structured narrative interviews

with each couple, the interviews lasting one to one and one-half hours each. Previous to the 14 separate interviews, each member of each couple received an informed consent document (see Appendix A) for his or her review and approval, as well as a brief demographic form (see Appendix B) via email to be completed prior to the scheduled interview time. The two couples who participated in the pilot study were also sent a copy of the dissertation's informed consent and demographic forms for their review.

The demographic form (see appendix B) was developed and piloted by the researcher in order to gain demographic information about the couples. The form inquires about participants' gender, age, ethnicity, employment situation, education level, annual household income, and relationship. The demographic form also provided an option for participants to include any additional informational about themselves, their history, or their relationship.

The interviews occurred at my office in San Diego. At the onset of the interview, the informed consent document and demographic questionnaire were reviewed and collected. In addition to their signed consent for videotaping, the couples were asked to verbally consent to being video recorded prior to the commencement of recording. I then provided the participants with information on my professional background as a marriage and family therapist, my educational background as a doctoral student, my personal background as a lesbian, and briefly discussed the relationship of those three factors to the current study. I then gave a brief outline of the interview process and follow-up that would occur after the interview. I then discussed any questions or concerns that the participants had up to that point and reiterated to them that they could ask questions at any time, take a break, or choose to discontinue the interview.

I then conducted semi-structured interviews with the couples, utilizing a narrative interview protocol (see Appendix C). I developed and piloted this narrative interview protocol, guided by the literature on both the experiences of same-sex couples in legally-recognized relationships, and the experiences of gay and lesbian individuals during anti-LGB politics and legal battles. Content validity for the narrative interview protocol questions was evaluated by two Masters level marriage and family therapists, one Masters level MFT educator, two Doctoral level (Ph.D. and Psy.D.) MFT educators, and one Doctoral level (Ph.D.) educator and researcher of Education.

It is important to note that the interview process was influenced by my participation, due to my professional background as a therapist. I used consultation strategies which were influenced by therapeutic consultation practices: reflective listening and feedback, questions aimed at the clarification of participant's answers, listening for rich description, clarifying participant understanding of questions, and pacing of the interviews.

Following the interviews, I reiterated the follow-up information, emphasizing that the participants would be sent a draft of the narrative for their input, additions, edits, and approval. I also extended an invitation to each participant to participate in the follow-up focus group, which took place approximately five weeks after the completion of the couples interviews. The couples were told that participation in the follow-up was not a requirement of their participation in the study and that one, both, or neither of them could choose to participate. I also invited the two couples who participated in the pilot study to participate in the follow-up focus group.

Following the interviews, I transcribed the video recordings word for word.

The transcripts were then constructed into coherent, temporally-ordered narratives. The coherent narratives were then sent to the participants for their approval. Although the couples who participated in the pilot study had already reviewed their narrative drafts as a part of that study, I re-sent the narratives to them to provide them with an opportunity to make any additions or corrections. A few participants did submit clarifications and corrections, as well as give additional statements about their experiences which they recalled after their interviews had concluded. I edited the narrative drafts based upon their feedback. Once approved, the 14 narratives were analyzed for emergent themes and the relevant dimensions and areas of tension which constitute the themes, in a manner consistent with the analysis and documentation of the portraiture process described by Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis (1997) in *The Art and Science of Portraiture*. This process will be further detailed in the Data Analysis portion of this chapter.

Focus Group

In the follow-up focus group, I asked participants to discuss one of the emergent themes from the interviews, which I shared with them in order to gain their insights, opinions, and reflections (see Appendix E). Previous to the focus group, each participant received an informed consent document (see Appendix D) for his or her review and approval. This focus group was also held in my office and was two hours in duration. Sixteen of the total twenty-eight interviewees participated in the follow-up focus group. This included seven couples of the original fourteen, and two individuals (one of whom was interviewed in the pilot study).

As previously mentioned, each participant had received a copy of the narrative draft of their couples interview for their review, edits, and approval previous the date of

the focus group (one participant indicated that he had not received the draft and it was re-sent after the focus group). First, introductions were made and informed consent was reviewed. The conversation then covered the overall research agenda, with updates about the status of completion of the research progress. I introduced and summarized the theme which, at the time of the focus group, was tentatively titled *Support Shaped Lived Experiences*. I then presented the rationale I used for selecting this theme to the participants (see Appendix E). The conversation then centered around three questions. The first question was contextualized by the following statements. Both were spoken by me and provided to the participants in the form of a typed handout.

We discussed many ways that you each demonstrated support for one another within your relationships. On many occasions, you described that accessing support systems, participating in community, and providing support to others were ways that the two of you navigated the experiences of Proposition 8 and both the legal and national debate on extending marriage rights to same-sex couples together as a couple.

I then asked this question (which was also printed on the handout):

1. What are the most significant ways that the family, friends, or community showed their support that mitigated the effects of anti-LGBT politics, including the local and national debate on extending marriage rights to same sex couples?

All 16 participants discussed this question in a conversation that was approximately 53 minutes in duration. I then contextualized the second set of questions by the following

statements, which were both spoken by me and provided to the participants in the form of a typed handout.

You each spoke of some of the ways that you handled negative responses either to your marriage or to the local or national debate. You also spoke about silence. You spoke about experiences with important or influential persons or organizations who did not say or do something negative per se, but also did not show recognition or support.

I then asked the questions (which were also printed on the handout):

2. What are some of the ways that you have made sense of the “silence” or non-recognition of important or influential persons or institutions?
3. How do you navigate the “silence” of loved ones, friends, or community members?

The questions were then discussed by all 16 participants in a conversation that was approximately 57 minutes in duration. At the conclusion of the focus group, the participants were invited to contact me if they had any additional thoughts or ideas that they wanted to contribute to the topic. One participant did email a correction, and a number of the participants sent me a follow-up email to relay that they had found the meeting to be meaningful, and that they had enjoyed being a part of it. Like the couples interviews, the focus group was also video recorded and transcribed word for word.

Data Analysis

Couples Interviews

The portraiture process described by Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis (1997) in *The Art and Science of Portraiture* was the method of analysis of the couples interviews and

the follow up focus group. Data analysis commenced as I documented daily reflections after each interview and throughout the interview and transcription process. These reflections included documentation of the sentiments that participants expressed frequently, ideas or experiences that they spoke of which carried a lot of energy or emotion, and stories that they relayed of experiences that differed in significant ways from the accounts of other participants. Further, these passages were highlighted on the typed transcript so they could be easily located and situated in the contexts of the larger conversations in which they were spoken. As previously described, after the interviews were transcribed word for word, they were constructed into coherent, temporally-ordered narratives. The coherent narratives were then sent to the participants for their approval, and edits were made based on their feedback.

Following the completion of the interview data gathering, the narrative drafts and daily reflections were reviewed. Passages which reflected patterns and regularities as well as passages which were contradictory or inconsistent with the patterns and regularities were then transformed into initial categories. Because of the large amount of data collected through the couples interviews, the participants' approved narrative drafts were then weaved together into a larger narrative according to the specific event, time period, choice, or action that had been discussed. This followed the timeline from the symbolic and legal steps that the couples had taken with one another previous to their legal marriages, through the events which unfolded up to the time of the interview.

A total of five themes emerged from the initial categories, formed from the narrative drafts and daily reflections and analysis of the larger narrative utilizing the five

modes of synthesis, convergence, and contrast described by Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis (1997). The following five modes helped shape the emergent themes for this study:

1. Repetitive Refrains: Refrains “that are spoken (or appear) frequently and persistently, forming a collective expression of commonly held views” (p. 193).
2. Resonant Metaphors: “Poetic and symbolic expressions that reveal the ways actors illuminate and experience their realities” (p. 193).
3. Institutional and Cultural Rituals: Reflect both aesthetic and ceremonial expressions of institutional values and are “opportunities for building community, for celebrating roots and traditions, and for underscoring continuity and coherence” (p. 201).
4. Triangulation: Data is weaved together from different sources and points of convergence are underscored.
5. Revealing Patterns: Finding coherence in the points of convergence and dissonance.

Focus Group

As previously mentioned, the focus group discussion centered around one of the five emergent themes which at that time was tentatively titled *Support Shaped Lived Experiences*. The rich discussion that followed confirmed the importance of the selected theme. The focus group analysis also followed the above-mentioned portraiture processes.

Narrative Construction

The portraiture process described by Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis (1997) in *The Art and Science of Portraiture* was the method of narrative construction/documentation for the results of the study presented in Chapters 4 and 5. Consistent with portraiture methodology, both the social and political landscape and interview context were first described in order to further contextualize the narrative. As previously described, data analysis yielded five emergent themes. These themes were presented in the body of the narrative. Each emergent theme was comprised of relevant dimensions and areas of tension or dissonance which were evidenced by the statements made by participants regarding their lived experiences. The themes each built upon one another and were ordered accordingly. Then, a narrative of the focus group was constructed which was comprised of three sections; this narrative both reinforced the emergent theme it was designed to validate and provided insight into an area of tension described by the participants in the couples interviews.

Additional Considerations Concerning Transcription and Narrative Construction

Differing from the view that the autobiographical narrative can somehow capture or reflect a self that preexists and remains consistent across diverse contexts of telling, transcription of the participants' interviews was guided by the notion that "the act of storytelling in dialogue *constitutes* the autobiographical self, that is, how the speaker wants to be known in the interaction" (Riessman, 2008, p. 29). This positions the "self" or identity of the participants as co-constructed and dialogically produced. Therefore, an analysis and discussion of the narrative interviews is preceded by positioning myself as a researcher situated in my interrelated personal, social, and professional contexts in Chapter One. Further, a description of the broader political, social, and historical contexts

as they relate to legal recognition of same-sex couples was presented in Chapter One. Finally, the theoretical and philosophical framework which guided the methodological processes utilized in the study was described in this chapter.

In contrast to the majority of investigations within the thematic narrative tradition which, as Reissman (2008) describes, “typically pay little attention to how a story unfolds in a conversational exchange or the questioner’s role in constituting it,” the present study attends to the local context in which the narrative was produced (p. 58). Therefore, my presence in the co-construction of the narratives is included in the written representation. Speech has been edited to the extent necessary to produce a narrative that is accessible to the reader in written form.

Reliability and Validity

“Reliability and validity are conceptualized as trustworthiness, rigor and quality in qualitative paradigm” (Golafshani, 2003, p. 604). In order to construct a study which reflects the aforementioned characteristics, triangulation of the data was supported by the following processes:

1. Couples were interviewed together rather than individually, which presented the opportunity for each spouse to confirm or contrast one another’s experiences as he or she believes them to be representational of the couple’s marriage experiences.
2. As seen both in the pilot study and the present study, couples often present comparisons or contrasts of their own experiences with other individual’s or couples’ experiences in order to validate their claims.

3. Couples reviewed their written narratives and were invited to either approve them or submit corrections or clarifications.
4. Emergent themes were analyzed across narratives.
5. A follow-up focus group was held with the participants where one of the five emergent themes from the interviews was shared with the participants and discussed in order to gain their insights, opinions, and reflections.

Assumptions and Limitations

An assumption guiding this study was that a sample size of 10-12 couples was sufficient to produce a valid study characterized by rich descriptions of the themes which emerged from the narratives. Additionally, I chose to include the narratives of the two couples who participated in the pilot study both because their experiences shaped parts of the processes of this current study, and because they both added to and supported the relevant dimensions which emerged in the current study. A limitation to the generalizability of the themes which emerged from the study to all legally married same-sex couples in California is that all of the couples reside in San Diego County. Further, with a few exceptions, most of the couples reside in or near San Diego's Uptown district which is largely considered to be more supportive of LGBT people and relationships. However, as mentioned previously in the Additional Considerations Concerning Transcription and Narrative Construction section, it was assumed from the outset of the inquiry that participants' stories and their ways of making sense of them would be reflective of their political, social, and historical contexts.

As suggested from the results of the pilot study, as well the necessity of remaining consistent with a critical and participatory approach to research and the protocols

associated with portraiture, disclosure of my sexual orientation was overt. A possible limitation that this may have led to is the assumption on the part of the participants or researcher of shared cultural knowledge about the experiences of the LGBT community in California. In order to address this possible limitation, I spoke about it at the onset of the interviews and remained mindful of asking clarifying questions when statements were made which assumed shared cultural knowledge.

As mentioned previously, accurate demographic data of the 18,000 same-sex couples who are legally married in California does not exist. I made an effort to recruit a diverse sample of participants. However, there is no way to assure that the sample is representative of the total population of legally married same-sex couples in California. It is assumed that the sample which included 6 female couples and 8 male couples was balanced and did not overrepresent one gender. The sample of participants who consented to participate largely described their ethnicity as either White or Caucasian. This limits the generalizability of findings of this study to legally married same-sex ethnic minority couples. More variability was found among the demographic characteristics of age which ranged from 30 years to 67 years, years together as a couple which ranged from 4.5 years to 35 years, household income level which ranged from \$40,000 to \$250,000 annually, geographic area where they were raised, religiosity and religious background, and ability status.

It is further assumed that the interview participants responded to the interview questions honestly and to the best of their knowledge. Couples were interviewed together rather than separately and may have reported their experiences differently than they would have if they had been interviewed individually. However, due to the history of

LGBT identity being conceptualized as largely an individual identity rather than relational identity, I made the choice to privilege a relational description of the couples' marriage experiences rather than an individual description.

It could be considered a limitation that the couples were only interviewed once. In order to account for the possibility that they may recall additional details of their experiences or change their minds about something that was said when they had more time to reflect on the questions, I asked the couples to follow up with me after the interview if there was anything that they wanted to add, change, or discuss further. The couples were also invited to add, change, or remove any aspect of the narrative draft of their interviews which I sent to them for their feedback and approval.

Finally, although all of the themes that emerged from the couples' interviews were reflected in the focus group discussion, not all themes that emerged from those interviews were addressed directly in the focus group. This was intentional, and my specific rationale for the selection of the emergent theme discussed in the focus group is presented in Chapter 5.

Summary

Through portraiture, a method of narrative inquiry situated within a postmodern, social constructionist framework, the objective of this dissertation was to elicit narratives of the experiences of same-sex couples who were legally married in California before the passage of Proposition 8. Fourteen same-sex couples participated in the study. A narrative interview protocol was utilized which was developed and piloted by the researcher, and guided by the literature on both the experiences of same-sex couples in legally-recognized relationships and the experiences of gay and lesbian individuals

during anti-gay political and legal battles. The interviews were transcribed word for word and then constructed into temporally-ordered, coherent narratives by the researcher. The narratives were then sent to the participants for their approval. Once approved, the researcher analyzed the narrative drafts following the process described by Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis (1997) in *The Art and Science of Portraiture*, a process which led to the construction of five emergent themes. A follow-up focus group was held with 16 of the 28 participants, where one of the five emergent themes from the couples interviews was shared with the participants and discussed in order to gain their insights, opinions, and reflections. A narrative comprised of the five emergent themes was then constructed. The focus group was then also transcribed word for word, and the transcript was analyzed utilizing the above-mentioned portraiture processes. Finally, a narrative of the focus group was constructed which was comprised of three sections. The focus group process both reinforced the emergent theme it was designed to validate and provided insight into an area of tension described by the participants in the couples interviews.

CHAPTER FOUR

NARRATIVE

Introduction

Chapter Four presents the narrative produced by the stories of the fourteen couples who were interviewed for this dissertation. First, consistent with portraiture methodology, both the social and political landscape and interview context are described. The narrative evolves in five emergent themes. The first theme, *Our Commitments Have Rich Histories*, details the many symbolic and legal ways in which these couples tried to commemorate and bring definition to their commitments to one another, in the absence of a nationally-sanctioned and collectively-recognized state of legal marriage. Building upon theme one, the second emergent theme is *Not a Simple Matter: The Complexities of Language Choice*. This theme illuminates the couples' language choices, which are contextual and reflect the absence of representative and collectively-recognized language options for their relationships after their legal marriages. Themes three and four lead naturally from the state of California's political debate over the extension of marriage rights to same-sex couples. The fourteen couples' legal marriages occurred within this discriminatory context, described aptly in theme three's title: *The Battle Metaphor*. This fractious battle met positive opposition in the overwhelming support the couples received from friends, family, and community, which are discussed in emergent theme four: *Support Shaped Lived Experiences*. Finally, the fifth theme follows the shifts—individual, relational and social—that occurred for the couples through the experience of being legally married. This last emergent theme, *Legal Marriage Shaped Individual, Relational, and Social Identities*, brings conclusion to the narrative.

Social and Political Landscape of the Narrative

The study took place in San Diego, CA amid the fiery political context created by Proposition 8, which was described in Chapters One and Two of this dissertation. While California is known for its progressive political leanings, San Diego is generally considered to be a more conservative city. However, San Diego does have a thriving and visible LGBT community. Many LGBT establishments such as bars, clubs, bookstores, and clothing boutiques are located in San Diego's uptown district, Hillcrest, and the surrounding neighborhoods of North Park, University Heights, Mission Hills, South Park, and Normal Heights. These neighborhoods are also considered to be trendy hotspots and dining destinations because of their many diverse restaurants and stores. The annual San Diego Pride celebration is one of the largest in the country and attracts attendees from all over the world. The internet is another source of connection for the San Diego LGBT community, and social networking sites such as Facebook provide a means for communication and the dissemination of local and national news related to LGBT people and rights. San Diego's LGBT community rallied around Proposition 8, holding an enormous protest march and rally—possibly the largest in the nation—after Prop 8 passed in November of 2008, and again when it was upheld in 2009.

Interview Context

All 14 interviews took place in my private practice office, which is centrally located in the Mission Valley area of San Diego. Participants were advised of their rights as research participants before the interviews commenced. Twelve interviews took place in April 2011, amid the ongoing legal battle over the constitutionality of Proposition 8. The interviews were also timed, although unintentionally, around the 2011 tax season

which presented many complications for participants because of new and unclear state tax laws. The two interviews included from the pilot study took place in November 2010, two years after the passing of Proposition 8 and just months after Judge Walker's ruling that the denial of marriage rights to same-sex couples is unconstitutional.

Emergent Theme I: Our Commitments Have Rich Histories

Legal marriages are just one of the many ongoing steps that the study couples have taken, both symbolically and legally, in order to commemorate and bring definition to their commitments to one another. Despite the absence of a nationally-sanctioned and collectively-recognized formal designation for their relationships, most of the 14 couples who participated in the study recognized their commitment to one another many years, and in some cases decades, before their legal marriages. It is imperative, in order to make sense of their lived experiences through the overlapping circumstances of their legal marriages, Proposition 8, and the ongoing local and national debate on the extension of marriage rights to same-sex couples, to situate these lived experiences within the context of richly-storied histories of commitment. That context is the starting point, the first emergent theme of the five themes constituting this narrative.

Emergent theme I, *Our Commitments Have Rich Histories*, is comprised of six relevant dimensions:

- 1. Protecting Commitment**
- 2. Celebrating Commitment**
- 3. Convergence of Commitment Protection and Celebration**
- 4. Legal Marriage Was Viewed as an Opportunity**
- 5. The Day of Legal Marriage**

6. Ongoing Symbolism

Protecting Commitment

Protecting commitment before legal marriage. The first relevant dimension which motivated the couples to formally bring definition to their commitment to one another was a desire for protection and legitimization of their relationship in the eyes of the larger institutions which influence and impact their day-to-day lives. The actions they took often resulted in the couples' having more rights, benefits, and protections. Registering as domestic partners and obtaining legal documents such as power of attorney gave strength and credibility to their partnership bonds. For example, Mitch and Cameron, a couple for 11 years, became registered domestic partners in the state of California two years before their legal marriage. Cameron described the decision to become domestic partners as "strictly . . . a legal thing. You know, we wanted to make sure that we had some rights."

Gabe and Jonathan, who have been a couple for 35 years, also sought legal protections for their relationship. In addition to registering as domestic partners, Gabe explained, "We also created a family trust for the two of us, and we did that a few years ago. And it's been renewed a couple of times." When I asked the couple why the family trust was important to the two of them, Jonathan and Gabe both agreed that legal protection was the motivator. Jonathan explained, "At the time, that was the—before we could get married that was really the only legal protection that you had—although the domestic partnership in California provided some legal protection—the trust provided—well not only legal protection but to see that wishes were carried out, should one or both of us pass away." Gabe added, "Directives and the whole bit."

Jonathan then explained he has a very small family, and that his only living relative is his 92-year-old mother. Gabe added, “We are both only children . . . and we don’t have anyone else who could take care of our affairs—other than oversee them, like an attorney.” Gabe then explained that the two had addressed this by obtaining a will, living trust, power of attorney, and medical directive. He concluded, “And that was the reason. Protection.” These are just two of the many examples of the steps that many of the couples took to legally protect their relationships previous to their legal marriages.

Protecting commitment after legal marriage. Protection remained important to couples even after legal marriage. In fact, many couples indicated that either they already had or they intended to take additional steps to legally recognize their relationships after their legal marriages. One of the main focuses of the present inquiry is how legal status has affected couples’ relationships; it would appear that legal status has not in itself made them feel that their relationships are protected or legitimized enough in the eyes of others, so that they would not need or desire to take such additional steps.

Formal recognition of the couple’s relationships after their legal marriages often took the form of legal processes and documentation. This was certainly the case for Joe and Jason. Both 30 years of age, they have been a couple for four and one-half years. Joe said, early in their interview, “So, we got married, and then we registered [as domestic partners] after that, just because our accountant said that we should do both just in case.” Jason added, “In case we are in another state that doesn’t recognize the marriage, we’ll still be covered under our RDP.”

Joe explained that they had not registered as domestic partners before their legal marriage because, “I think it [the relationship] was too new, so to speak, to really solidify

it in any other way up to that point. I mean, a couple of years into it we got married. I think that's kind of the normal progression." Jason described that after marriage he really didn't think that they had to considerer registering as domestic partners. He explained, "We're married, you know. We shouldn't have to. And then when you look at it state by state, it's like OK, some states don't care what California says."

Although Desiree and Sue, who've been a couple for 23 years, had taken many steps to legally protect their relationship prior to their legal California marriage, they also indicated that they had taken further steps after their legal marriage. Desiree explained, "Well, we did go back in and had all of our—our will, our living trust—all of those documents were reviewed by the attorney. And, you know—that's really important even if you are married, because there's still so many loopholes in the law."

"So, for the two of you, it was important to make sure that all of that was updated?" I asked. "Oh, yes," said Sue and Desiree in unison. Sue said, "There are children and grandchildren." Desiree then explained, "Her brother, and nieces and nephews. I really trust that everyone would be respectful, but I also want to have that backup, because I don't want Sue to ever be taken advantage of by any of my children. And I don't want to be taken advantage of by her brother or family."

Desiree continued to explain, "And so we've got all of our property protected. We hope. You know, you always—you're never sure. But that was important to us, too. To make sure that—because still, federally, we're not married. So, there are some loopholes." Sue agreed and explained that the two had seen a film about a gay man who recalled that his grandmother and her female partner had been separated from one another because of one of the women's needs for medical care. Sue explained, "That [film]

caused such fear and anxiety. . . . That was our biggest fear that though we trusted our families and knew they loved us, and knew they respected our relationship, we just needed to be 100% sure that we—” “We were in control,” said Desiree. “That we would never be separated that way. To never be together again,” Sue said dropping her voice almost to a whisper.

I said, in reflection, “So, it was very important to make sure that everything that you possibly *can* do, to assure that you have done it.” Both Sue and Desiree nodded in agreement. Sue then explained, “And, we have carried around—papers on our travels for years. Never knowing what we might need if we were somewhere—even in the United States or another country and something happened to one of us. What we would need to be able to go into a hospital and get—you know, [to] be there with our loved ones.”

“So you—whenever you’ve traveled you’ve carried those documents with you?” I asked. “Oh yes,” said Desiree. Sue continued, “Yes. I think we only need to carry—now that we found out—the medical power of attorney, but still.” “We’ve got it all,” laughed Desiree. “Just to be sure,” said Sue. “It might be a little overly cautious, but it’s important,” Desiree concluded.

Thomas and Larry, a couple for 17 years, also indicated that they had taken additional steps after their legal marriage to protect their relationship legally. Thomas explained that it was because Larry receives medical care through the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA). He stated, “The federal government doesn’t recognize that I am his legal next of kin—we have a power of attorney there so that I can make medical decisions for him.” Larry laughed and joked, “Yes. He can pull the plug.” I said to the

couple, “It felt important to get the power of attorney paperwork because the VA doesn’t recognize the relationship?” Thomas and Larry agreed that this was the case.

Thomas continued to explain, “Although we’ve had positive experiences most of the time when we have been there. . . . There’s never been any problems, but I know and we both know, from the legality perspective, that in order for me to make important decisions, that paperwork has to be there. I can say I am married until the cows come home, but it doesn’t matter because the federal government won’t recognize that legal standing.”

Sam and Joel, who have been a couple for eight years, have just begun to take steps to legally formalize their relationship after their legal marriage in California. Sam explained, “We just started talking to a financial planner about wills and trusts and durable powers of attorney . . . she definitely encouraged—besides telling us that we needed more insurance—um, she really encouraged us to get wills and trusts and that sort of thing.”

Joel explained, “She is going to try and structure our finances in such a way that protects our situation specifically. . . . So even though we’re married—there is still all of this financial risk associated, right—and so that’s just kind of bizarre to me.”

Sam explained that the financial planner was trying to reduce their tax liability. She had counseled them, saying that “if one of us was to die—and even though the house is in our name—in our combined names or whatever—unlike heterosexual couples, the property doesn’t pass to the other person federally. And, um—if you did get it—then there would be like a—essentially an estate tax—and she said it was like 45 percent or 55 percent or something.” Sam went on to explain, “And so obviously we don’t want that to

happen. Um, I don't mind giving the government—you know money to the government, but that seems a little extreme. So that's one of the things that she is helping us with."

"We are in this bizarre limbo—I mean—it's really challenging—the financial aspects of it—you know. It's just ridiculous," concluded Joel.

Sam explained, "I actually grew up in the South—and so I have lived in states that will never recognize gay marriage or—certainly not in my lifetime." He then reflected further on this: "I guess living in California . . . I think it was either right before or right after we got domestically partnered . . . the law that Gray Davis [California governor] had signed essentially equating domestic partnership with marriage at the state level went into effect. And I erroneously assumed that that would handle things like, you know—estate planning and you know . . . that there wouldn't be tax differences. And [I] quickly learned that because of the Defense of Marriage Act, the federal government behaves quite differently. And so, while there may not be a California estate tax on us for that reason—whether domestically partnered or married, there definitely would be this federal—this federal thing."

Joel added, "So the other part that we haven't really even started to grasp yet—is the concept of down the road, right—like retirement and social security, and all of these benefits that are not going to be—are currently not available to each other. Right—that would otherwise be."

Similarly, many of the couples said that they felt it was important to obtain further legal documentation to formally recognize their relationships, but that they had not yet taken the steps to make it happen. For instance, Joe and Jason explained that they intend to complete both power of attorney and living wills. Jason clarified that it was important

for the two to obtain those documents because of his HIV status and to protect their future. He explained, “I mean, I am in good health and everything . . . my health has never really been an issue. But, later on in years it possibly could. You know, I could go south or whatever. And so we want things to be protected. You know, we are trying to build a good, stable retirement and stuff, too. We’re trying to protect it from all angles. Knowing that just being married might not necessarily cover it all for us.”

Additionally, when I asked Courtney and Jennifer, who have been a couple for 10 years, about formal legal recognition after the marriage, they indicated that they are planning to prepare wills and trusts. Courtney explained, “We just haven’t spent the money or taken the time.” “Those aren’t good reasons,” said Jennifer. Courtney continued, “We just, we know it’s important. So it’s not that we are not acknowledging that. It’s just that we just haven’t done it.”

“And for the two of you why does it feel important for you to do that?” I asked. Courtney replied, “Well, I think that we want to be sure that—we are each taken care of if something happens to one of us. That we don’t have problems with the family. And, although I have some support from my family, I mean I am certainly out—but I just wouldn’t want Jennifer to be put in a position of having to defend her right to stay where we live or anything.”

Jennifer continued, “Nor would I want that for you Courtney. And also, that’s why not being out to my family is just—and not having the legal documentation—there may be a protest—I don’t know, but—” “Right, could potentially,” said Courtney. “Potentially,” said Jennifer. “So, we just need to take care of it. We know that. We do know that,” said Courtney.

When I asked Kara and Christine, a couple for seven years, if they had taken any steps to legally formalize their relationship since their marriage in 2008, they each responded that there were legal documents that they needed to prepare, but that they had not yet done so. Kara explained that with “the domestic partnership in California, we are pretty well-protected medically, but if we want to go traveling, which I love New York, and we are not protected in New York in that way. So, we need to get that taken care of.”

I asked the couple if they felt like they were familiar with the logistics of accessing such protections. Kara replied, “Yes. I know it’s necessary.” And Christine added, “Yes, well, yes it’s very, but . . . I think that one of the reasons we are not in such a big hurry to do it is because both of our families support us. And it is not one of those, if something happens to us then her mom or dad or my mom or dad or my family are going to come and take everything. We know that is not going to happen. So there is not that, that urgency to get something done.” I later reflected, “So, it sounds like having the support of your families has sort of shaped and influenced what steps you felt like you need to take and how quickly or not quickly you needed to do so.” Both Kara and Christine agreed that this was true. Thus, the presence of support, which will be discussed at length later in the narrative, influenced the couple’s feelings of protection and legitimacy.

Celebrating Commitment

Ritual is the second relevant dimension which motivated the couples to formally bring definition to their commitment to one another, a desire to celebrate their unions. Such rituals were intended to privately or publicly affirm the specialness of their loving relationship and their ongoing commitment to grow and shape their lives with one

another. Rituals such as private exchanges of rings, and public occasions such as commitment and Holy Union ceremonies were imbued with significance by the couples as they privately or publicly shaped what such events meant to them in their lives.

For example, predating the availability of registered domestic partnership and most of the available legal protections available to same-sex couples today, couples such as Larry and Thomas chose to celebrate the significance of their relationship through a formal commitment ceremony, called a Holy Union. Larry and Thomas, who have been a couple for 17 years, are both Christian. They dated exclusively, or as Larry termed it “went steady,” for one year before formally committing to one another and to God in a Holy Union ceremony in 1994 at the Metropolitan Community Church (MCC). Larry and Thomas describe themselves as a monogamous Christian couple. Larry explained, “When we did get married, it was more than just the two of us committing, we were inviting also a third person into the relationship—Jesus Christ. And we are both very committed Christians so when you make a promise—when you make a promise you keep it!” Larry went on to sum up: “We felt married the first day we walked down the aisle . . . you know, we’ve got the Triple Crown—the holy commitment—the Holy Union, the domestic partnership, and marriage.” Here, Larry speaks to how the intersections of the spiritual, legal, and ceremonial commitments converged in a way that brought protection, legitimization, and celebration to their relationship.

Convergence of Commitment Protection and Celebration

Convergence of protection and celebration before legal marriage. For some couples, the relevant dimensions of celebrating commitment and legitimizing and protecting the relationship converged, creating meaning around particular steps that they

took to formalize their relationships. Sam and Joel, a couple for eight years, formalized their relationship legally through a registered domestic partnership. Family and friends were in attendance for the occasion, which took place at a mass ceremony at San Diego LGBT Pride in 2005 and was followed by a reception. Sam and Joel exchanged rings to symbolically recognize their domestic partnership.

Sam and Joel described the complicated process of navigating the different meanings that each of them held about taking formal steps to recognize the relationship, and the significance that taking these steps would hold in their lives. Describing the process involved in the couple's decision to become registered domestic partners, Sam recalled that he had "screwed up" his proposal to Joel that they enter into domestic partnership. Sam explained that they had gone out to a nice restaurant for dinner. He had downloaded the domestic partnership contract on the California Attorney General's website and enclosed it in a card. Sam explained, "I signed my half and put it inside the card. And that was kind of how I proposed to him. And he signed it—and then he goes—'Oh, by the way, you know this isn't legal.' And then he was like—'Where's my ring?' And so then we had this lengthy discussion about—it's a *wedding* ring, and gays and lesbians can't get married—and so we shouldn't have rings. And he was like, 'Well I want a ring!' and 'I want a ceremony!' and then there was just . . . so, I totally screwed that up. The whole romantic part—you know—I thought the card and the domestic partnership paper was romantic—"

"No, you didn't screw up at all," said Joel, "I mean that whole thing was kind of—our different perspectives on what that meant right? Domestic partnership—and how you saw it, and how I saw it. And then working that out for ourselves. What that meant—

right? Like, clearly in my head I said, ‘We should have a ring.’” Both Sam and Joel laughed.

Jennifer and Courtney, who have been a couple for 10 years, also described the process of becoming registered domestic partners as personally meaningful and significant. Courtney explained, “It was a way to acknowledge how serious we felt about each other. It was a way that the state gave us an option to do that, and so it felt important to take advantage and to acknowledge each other in that way. It felt important.” Jennifer agreed.

For others, the interplay of these relevant dimensions shifted as the options available to them evolved. Because the options for recognition reflected their marginalized status situated within the dominant heterosexual paradigm, this was largely reflected in how the couples made sense of the legal and symbolic steps that were available to them. Chloe and Leanne, a couple for five years, provided such an example. Chloe explained, “We sort of nicknamed the domestic partnership “married” sometimes, before the legal issue came up. I mean we would just say they [other couples] were married, when we meant they were domestically partnered. Which is what—we were just sort of claiming the word ahead of time.” “Because we thought it wasn’t an option. This is the wedding. We’re going to have the wedding. Because, the other wasn’t an option at the time,” said Leanne.

The historical evolution of the social and legal recognition available to same-sex couples also had an impact on how they chose to formally recognize their relationships. For example, after their Holy Union in 1994, Thomas explained that he and Larry later registered as domestic partners in California. However, they did not do it when it was

first offered. Thomas said, “We didn’t sign during the first registration because . . . I didn’t feel like there was anything that you got for it. It was just like a list of gay people—who were shackled up! Until Gray Davis [California governor] decided—where it became like you got legal standing—and I was like—now it’s worth something to me. It means something.”

Legal Marriage Was Viewed as an Opportunity

As the previous examples illustrate, the couples each made their own meaning from the formal steps they took to recognize, protect, celebrate and legitimize their committed relationships. The amount of thought that many of the couples put into the early recognition of their relationships likely influenced the process of how they decided to marry legally, a process which all of the interviewees described as a simple one. They used phrases like *it was a no brainer*, *it was automatic*, or it was *inevitable* or *natural*. In fact, unlike the previous motivation of protecting and legitimizing the relationship described earlier in the narrative, the decision to marry legally became more about opportunity. This was largely because the couples did not stand to gain any legal protections or benefits for their relationships on the state level that were not already afforded to them through their registered domestic partnerships, but they were gaining access to a relational status that was collectively understood and recognized.

The couples all described legal marriage as a real opportunity that they wanted to take while they had the chance. They also held that legal marriage provided them with the opportunity to have a level of partnering that they had not really ever thought possible in their lives. Further, they explained that the decision to marry legally provided them the opportunity to make history, in that they were gaining access to a level of collectively-

recognized relational status from which gay and lesbian couples have historically been and continue to be excluded. This also influenced the couples' feelings that the opportunity to marry legally brought them a greater sense of equality. These effects will also be illustrated in greater detail within the fifth and final emergent theme: *Legal Marriage Shaped Individual, Relational, and Social Identities* later in the narrative.

Finally, the couples said they saw the months leading up to the elections as a "window of opportunity" to wed legally. This shaped their decisions about when, and oftentimes how to marry. In the broader scheme of LGBT history, the reality of this "window of opportunity" for legal marriage set the stage for the third emergent theme: *The Battle Metaphor*.

The relevant dimension of opportunity could be traced throughout the couples' narratives on their decision-making process. Derek and Scott, who've been a couple for 12 years, provided such an example. When I asked them to tell me about the process that was involved in their decision to marry legally, Scott looked at Derek and replied, "I guess we kinda heard the news, right? That it was legal." Derek laughed, "Yeah, we—well, the story is that there was no romance, there was no walk along the [beach]. Because it became legal, we just started thinking, 'Well, we should do it,' and I, we kinda looked at each other like, 'Really?' Because we had never talked about it before. We didn't have the domestic [partnership] thing or anything. It just—kinda came up, and we just said, 'Sure.' And from that point on, we just kinda ran with it and planned the full-on wedding with reception."

Scott added, "Yeah, someone asked us that, and we said, 'Yeah, I texted him—' 'Will you marry me?'" Derek laughed and added, "Yeah, we just said, 'I IM'ed him, on

my computer,’ while he was sitting next to me, and [he] said, ‘Sure!’” We were all laughing at this point. “It was different than a lot of marriages where the proposal is where, you know a guy proposes to his wife, I mean. For us we have been together for so long. I mean, it’s definitely different. It suddenly became legal, so it was different than where it was already legal,” added Scott.

Derek said, “But there was no convincing. It was kinda like we both thought, ‘Well, it’s a given right now, so let’s take advantage of it,’ and, you know, ‘Do you want to do this?’ and we just went, ‘Sure.’ We know probably like what, four, five other gay couples that have all been together at least 10 years and they did the same thing.” Derek explained that they hadn’t spoken with the other couples about each of their decisions to marry at the time. “You know, as you talk to them, and you find out that they got married, too, it was like, *wow*, so you know, everybody else had the same feeling. It was like, ‘It’s legal, Let’s do it!’” And then, Derek thought a moment and said, “We went to a wedding of theirs, and we met new friends. And then through them, you know, you meet other couples who had been married. And then, the next thing you know, you know, we know like what (looks at Scott), five, six couples that are legally [married]—so we all have the same sort of stories.”

“All of the long-term gay friends who have been in long-term relationships, they all got married, pretty much,” added Scott. “We don’t know anyone who was in a long-term relationship that didn’t get married during that time.” Derek agreed, “That’s right, so it was like we waited, you know. The opportunity came and we all did it. It was like automatic.”

Like Derek and Scott, many of the other couples in the study discussed wanting to formally recognize their relationships through legal marriage early on, as it became available to them. Some couples did not make the decision to move forward with legal marriage until they considered the likelihood that the November elections would take the opportunity away from them. For example, when I asked Gabe and Jonathan, a couple in their 60s who have been together for 35 years, what was involved in their decision to marry legally, Jonathan confessed, “It was my fault.” Gabe agreed, “He took the lead.” Jonathan explained, “Yeah, we uh—it was getting up to the—close to the election, and I just said—‘Gabe,’ I said, ‘we need to take advantage of this opportunity. Because I don’t know what’s going to happen with the election.’ Because I wanted to position ourselves for legal protections—possibly for health care and other issues. And I thought, ‘Well, if it goes the other way—then we’re in.’ So, that was pretty much—the election pretty much brought it to a point where we decided, *OK, we’ll do it.*”

Gabe agreed, “Yeah, we saw an opportunity—that’s how we viewed it—an opportunity—and why not take advantage of the opportunity while it was there? And we took advantage of that opportunity just—two days—before the results came in.” Jonathan clarified, “Yeah, a couple of days before the election.” Gabe went on, “So, we timed it—and we cut it close—but we planned ahead.” “We were filing the papers the Monday before the election,” said Jonathan. Gabe agreed, “Right. Correct. We got married on Sunday and filed the papers on Monday at the County Court House.”

Window of opportunity. While opposite-sex couples often consider many factors when choosing their wedding date, for all but one couple, the November election substantially influenced both when and how to marry. Joe and Jason, the youngest couple

who participated in the study, told me just how relevant the dimension of opportunity was, in the months leading up to the elections. That “window of opportunity” to wed legally changed these 30-year-olds’ wedding plans. Jason explained, “Well, when they first announced that it was going to be legalized—because we had already discussed it and stuff, it was like, ‘Oh! OK, well let’s jump on this.’ And then—it wasn’t like we were going to rush off to Vegas or whatever right away. Um, I actually initially wanted to take a year and plan it out and have the—well not a white wedding but you know, kind of a big ordeal. And we were looking at sites and everything and then like, as we were following the news it was like—oh, this might not be around a year from now. And so we really stepped it up, and we actually ended up running down to the Court House.”

Jason continued the tale: “And then um, almost a year later—my mom and my sister were down here, and so we kind of had a ceremony with like friends and family and stuff. Down by the ocean. So, we kinda got married twice.”

Joe added, “We had the *white wedding* if you will, right on the beach, and we had a nice dinner afterwards. So we had the wedding, but we actually got married, you know—we rushed into the marriage, because we knew we would run out of time if we didn’t. Because the likelihood of Prop 8 passing was very high. At least I felt.” “We didn’t want it taken away,” Jason agreed. Joe nodded and said, “I know it was really close, but you know honestly—let’s be honest here. It’s probably not—it’s probably going to pass, and we’re not going to end up getting this. So we did. And . . . it was an easy decision. I mean, I knew he was the one right away.”

I later asked the couple, “Did anything influence the date of your marriage?” Jason replied, “Well, we were rushed into it.” “Prop 8,” said Joe. Jason explained, “And

then it was like, oh—OK, we kind of have to step this up a little bit. So as soon as we could get our appointment to get into the county clerk's office, actually, is kind of what ended up being our date."

The window of opportunity created by the November 2008 elections largely influenced the couples' decisions of when to marry legally, and yet many also chose to tie it in to a date that was meaningful or significant to them in their lives. This is exemplified in the case of Chloe and Leanne, a couple who have been together for five years. When I asked the couple to tell me more about their decision to marry legally, Chloe explained, "We heard it was legal and we thought, "Well, we're—it won't change that much, but it would be nice. It would just really be nice." Leanne agreed, "Claim it while we can." Chloe continued to explain, "Claim it while we can. I think, 'Let's be as married as we can possibly be. Let's be as married as much as they'll let us be married.' I mean, any time they are going to dangle a right in front of us, I am going to grab the right."

Earlier, Chloe explained, "So we just kind of jumped on it when it came in. And, at first we thought it would be nice to wait until one of our previous anniversaries. But the way it worked out, it was like well—it could be—the election was before that. So we'd better make a third date. Which allows us to accumulate anniversaries faster. So that we can have, you know, nine anniversaries in three years and sort of catch up for—make up for lost time. Because we didn't get together until later in life." Both Leanne and Chloe laughed.

I asked, "So, did anything influence the date of your marriage?" "Ah, yeah," said Leanne. Chloe explained, "Yeah, well—like I said, we would hope—we had hoped to use one of our previous anniversaries." "Oh well," said Leanne. Chloe continued, "But that

wasn't until the following year and we thought, you know—it [Prop 8 failing] looked pretty good at the time, but let's not take any chances. So what day would be meaningful? I wanted to tie it to something meaningful. And um, back when we first got together my grandfather had just passed. And he and my grandmother had a wonderful marriage. I think they were passionately in love until the very end. And I think that they always wanted that for me.” Chloe continued, “And I had been out to them so they knew. They knew that, and they just wanted me to find a companion and—you know, I am an agnostic when it comes to this stuff, but it sure felt like he was pulling strings or something. He passed, and then shortly after that we started really connecting and getting together. I just felt his energy in that whole time. And I thought, how cool if we could get married on his birthday.” Chloe went on to explain, “But it was a connection I'd always had with him. I'd always had a good relationship with him. And I knew he'd be happy. Him and Grandmother would be very happy about this. And so they couldn't go to our wedding, so they could kind of get honored that way, I guess.”

Larry and Thomas explained that their legal wedding date had been influenced by both the historical significance and window of opportunity. Thomas said that they would have preferred to be legally married on the same date as their anniversary in November. However, they chose to do it sooner “just to make sure—not to take a chance that maybe Prop 8 would unfortunately change things.” He elaborated: “I know that there were other couples that had the same kind of concern that, you know, we better just do it right away than take the chance that something will change, and who knows what will happen in the interim.”

Because Thomas and Larry obtained their marriage license as soon as it was available to them, I asked, “Was that the reason that you went down the first day to get your marriage license?” Thomas replied, “I think the first day was more—we just did that because it was like—well, why wait? And the other part was also, um, was like—we’ve waited all of this time. We’ve been together all of this time—why keep—what point would there be to wait? Why—might as well just do it right away. Because it wasn’t like—it’s not like we have to think about it—do we want to be married to each other? That was a no brainer. So, it was like there is no point in waiting.” Larry exclaimed, “For me it was like MARRIED!! NOW!! YES!!! GO!! We’re going to be there the first day,” and he stamped his cane enthusiastically.

Thomas recalled, “In fact, I think when he kept calling—the lady [at the County Administration Building] said, ‘Well—do you want to be the very first?’ Like six o’clock in the morning or eight o’clock in the morning when they open up? And I remember telling him—like, ‘I don’t need to be the *first* first! We don’t have to get up that early!’” Larry concluded by saying, “And I think they picked the right people to be the first. You know, it was a lesbian couple that have been together for over like 40 to 50 years or something. You know, so it was the right choice. You know, that represented something. You know, we are just happy to be—you know *among* the first. You know, on the first day.”

The Day of Legal Marriage

Although, as previously mentioned, the decision to marry was an easy one for all of the couples who participated in the study, the November 2008 elections imposed a window of opportunity in which they could do so. Some of the couples also chose to

celebrate their legal marriage in a historic way by obtaining their marriage licenses on the first day they became available to same-sex couples in San Diego. These couples included Kara and Christine, Larry and Thomas, and Desiree and Sue. Kara and Christine provided an account of how their day was shaped by historical opportunity and support. Kara described the day of their legal marriage as joyous, and Christine agreed. Kara then described that morning. She said, “Oh yeah, are you kidding? That was awesome. We went down to the county building that day with members of our church, because they were expecting a protest. Which of course didn’t happen, because they were, unfortunately the other side was, is often times incredibly intelligent. And that would have looked really bad, for them. And their *Yes on 8* campaign for them to show up down there with their hate-filled signs and, they were smart and stayed away. So it was nice, it was just *us* down there, and cheering as people walked out.”

Christine added, “And it was pretty cool. One of our friends—John—was in three weddings that day.” Christine elaborated that John had been the best man at one of the weddings, served as a witness for theirs, and attended a third. Kara added, “And the guy that married us, did 17 that day. He . . . put his collar on that day and was out there doing a lot of marriages. It was cool.” “It was a good day,” said Christine.

Kara then explained, “Well, we were down at the county building like I said. We had gotten our license and everything, and there was no protest going on—and I had the time off from work, I had taken that morning off because I needed to be there if there was . . . protesting.” Kara then described that rather than having lunch downtown near the County Administration Building, the two wanted to make their way to the *Gayborhood* [Hillcrest] with the man who married them. She recalled, “We got into the car, and we

drove up to Mo's [restaurant in Hillcrest] and had lunch, and then drove back and went back to the county building. Cheered and applauded some more people, and then went and had cake at my job. And then I stayed and I finished up my day."

Kara said, "Some friends at work had a cake for us. We went over to my office afterwards and got all of the papers legally signed. And, it was awesome. . . . The coworkers, they knew what we were going to do, and I had some good friends at work, and they were very excited about this. They had all attended, and a couple of them had been in the wedding in 2007. So they were like, totally thrilled. . . . One of the attorneys went and had a cake and [he] like broke the bride and groom thing and put the two brides and glued them together and put them on the cake (laughing). I mean and you know, it was really nice."

Kara went on to explain, "That night at Universal [nightclub in Hillcrest], a couple that had gotten married that had been together forever had an open invitation to couples who had gotten married, and so we went there. And that was funny because people were coming up saying we've been, you know, together for 25 years and 30 years. Kara recalled with a laugh that the two were a bit shy about announcing that they had been together for five years in the midst of all of these couples who were announcing their marriages after 10, 20, even 30 years. Christine laughed and said, "It was like 20 years, 25, 30, 15, 12, 10—and we were like (in unison with Kara) five!" Kara, still laughing reported that "everyone was like 'That's fine, you're gonna get there!' You know it was just, like I said, it was just this incredible day of happiness. That we never thought we were going to lose again." Here Kara alludes to the polarization the couples

experienced, which will be discussed further later in the narrative through the third emergent theme, *The Battle Metaphor*.

Christine then said, “Hillcrest just had one of those vibes. And it was like a *pride* vibe.” Kara agreed, “It was alive, it was alive. It had a pulse.” Christine said, “It was just energy all over the place, and it was just positive. It was really, really—I mean, it was just fun to be out and about and feel that happiness and energy and just excitement.” Kara described how she experienced “all ages mixing. Women, men mixing—without the usual issues that go on with that. It was just really—it was great. Good—positive.” “Yes, it was a good day,” said Christine.

Because they had each celebrated their relationships symbolically with a ceremony attended by friends and family, Chloe and Leanne and Carl and Jerry chose to wed legally at the County Administration Building. Leanne and Chloe told stories of support and historical opportunity as they spoke about their experiences of being legally married there. Chloe recalled that the two had worn HRC [Human Rights Campaign] *Love is Real* t-shirts, which were the same shirts they had worn for their domestic partnership ceremony. Leanne said, “We wore the same outfit . . . and that sort of reminded us of that [domestic partnership] ceremony, and what we were doing.” Explaining that the two were environmentally minded, Chloe said, “We took the bus down to Broadway, then walked over to the County Administration Building, and it had all of that great energy with everybody else there.”

Leanne described the scene at the County Administration Building. She said, “There were all of these couples. Older couples, gay couples, straight couples.” Chloe added, “That was really fun.” Leanne continued, “You know, Hispanic families filling the

whole room. And it was sort of nice to have that sense of camaraderie. Where they—they have all of the white silk flowers everywhere. And everybody's treated the same way while they tried to—you know—sell you the photograph or the bumper sticker." Chloe agreed, "It was fun. It was really fun." "It was fun. And that was just the two of us," added Leanne.

Leanne later said, "That was kind of nice. Because everybody was happy for everybody else. And there were similarities in our stories—like the older couple . . . they had been living together a long time and—" "A heterosexual couple," said Chloe. "They just finally decided—you know—let's go get married. And it was the same feeling. It was. So that sense of similarity." Chloe agreed, "Yeah, the same feeling for all. It made me feel more connected with other people. Instead of so—so separated. Like, here's the gay version, and here's the straight version. Now it's everybody's doing the same thing. And it's all just as meaningful and just as valid for everybody. That felt good."

Carl and Jerry, who've been a couple for 14 years, described their experience similarly. One of the first experiences that Carl recalled when asked about his legal marriage was the couple's time at the county building. Carl explained, "It was great going down to the County Administration Building. Everybody was so excited. All of the clerks and everything. You know, it was a great reception by the people there. So that was actually a fun experience."

Jerry agreed, but then remembered how the support of those at the County Administration Building was in some ways negated by the tension they experienced when they realized that they would have to dissolve their domestic partnership before proceeding. As mentioned earlier, seeking protection and legitimization for the

relationship is a relevant dimension of the commitment theme, which surrounded the majority of the couples' decisions to obtain domestic partnership in the first place. Jerry recalled, "There was that moment when we had that split second when we had to dissolve our domestic partnership."

Carl explained, "It was weird because one of the things that the paperwork says is you have to dissolve [domestic partnership]—as you sign for the marriage license. So, just for that split second, we were not domestic partners anymore. It was weird. It didn't feel good."

"I held on to his hand real tight, goin', 'You're gonna sign that!'" Jerry laughed, "And, there was that split second where we weren't [domestic partners]—that in between period. We weren't married—and still we weren't legally married. We had the certificate. But within 90 days you had to have a ceremony. So there was that period. Because we went out and had our ceremony right after we signed the paperwork. So, that document was signed and filed. And, just knowing that Prop 8 was on the horizon, we just wanted to make sure that we got it in there. In September. But it was a great day. It was a great day. I love it. Who knew I was the marrying kind? Hey, you know—I found the guy."

Jerry continued, "And I didn't know—it didn't occur to me that we would have to dissolve it [the domestic partnership]. I mean just think about it logically." Carl added, "Because you know, there is always that question about is marriage really legal? You still—even though it's been passed, you're still sorta—is it really there? And . . . he's on my insurance, and I didn't want—if we are dissolving the domestic partnership—hopefully that's going to carry over, and this is going to be recognized—there's not going

to be any issues with my company or anything else. You know, so there's always a little doubt about this. Is it really happening? Is it really? Will it be acknowledged?"

For reasons of wanting to make it as legal as possible, Steven and James, a couple for seven years, chose to both marry at the County Administration Building and to have a formal ceremony attended by friends and family. Their decision also harkened back to the previously described relevant dimension of legitimization and protection for the relationship. However, Steven and James also spoke to how their perceptions of the support of others shaped the meaning that they made about their experiences. Steven explained: "We spent a lot of time putting together a wedding ceremony. We wanted, we were so intent on making it legal that when we went to get our license down at the courthouse—you know they said you are able to get married here if you'd like. And we were getting married at Dignity by a Catholic priest and we thought—ugh, I wouldn't want that to come back and bite me somewhere down the road—so we said, 'Let's make it as legal as we can.' So we got married there, just off the cuff. You know, so we had, we'd gone there by ourselves, so they had to provide witnesses. So, we did that off the cuff, and then we went through with the formal ceremony."

Steven then recalled, "And it was, for me anyway, it was very emotional. And that really surprised me more than anything. When we actually went through the little ceremony in the little chapel down at the courthouse. I was amazed at how overwhelmed I was. Yeah, I couldn't believe it. Because, you know—there were other couples getting married, you know—and some of them were, you know—kinda crying and stuff. And then some of them were just really proud because they, you know—had waited so many years. So, it was a cool experience."

James added, “It was kind of sad. Some of these couples had been together for *years and years and years*. And they finally had this little bitty window to do it. It’s just kinda sad when you think about it. Because they had been together all of these years and couldn’t get married before, and they had like a three-month window or whatever it was to do it—and they rushed and did it. It’s kinda sad that we have to be pushed in that corner in that way. But, that’s the way it was.”

Steven added, “I thought the people at the courthouse were very—they were really . . . helpful. And they were. You could tell they had our backs. They were very, very supportive, and they were glad to do all that they could for us. It was really cool. “So that stood out to you, that they were very supportive,” I said. Steven replied, “Yeah, yeah. It really did . . . I was—it made me very happy. . . . And then when the results came out from the voting. . . . Actually, we garnered—the gay population garnered many more votes than I anticipated. So, I was amazed. I mean—almost half the state voted against it. So I thought that was really cool. So, anyway—it was a very positive experience.”

“So, tell me about the ceremony and the reception,” I said. Steven said, “You know, the most overwhelming feeling I had all day was one of joy. I mean, you know how people get nervous making sure that [at their wedding], OK, this is going to happen and this is going to go right—you know, we just—I didn’t care about any of that. We just went in, and we had fun. And, everything went down as planned, I thought.” “It did,” said James nodding and smiling.

Steven explained, “And we had made it a relatively small wedding—there were what—30 people around? It was about 30 of us. . . . We had our best friends—another gay couple stood up for us. And I led my mom down the aisle—you know—88-year-old

woman. And he actually led, you [James] led your mom down the aisle, too.” “I did,” James agreed.

Steven then said, “So we, you know—everybody participated, we had the flowers—we had the nice music—it was a very nice affair. . . . My nephew came down from LA—his [James’s] folks—family came from Orange County. We had friends come in from Denver—a straight couple that are really good friends of ours. Um, I think they came the farthest—right?”

“Some people from church were there—” James offered. “That’s right,” said Steven. “Yeah—It was a fun time.” Steven explained that they had their reception at a San Diego restaurant that had “a gorgeous view of the whole downtown skyline. . . . We didn’t even get a . . . separate private room. We did it in the restaurant because there was a fairly small group of people—we had two long tables and we had the whole reception out there. And it was cool because it was like we were telling the world, ‘You know what, we’re here, we’re queer, we’re married—you know what—get used to it!’ And we had such a—we had a great cake from Babycakes [coffee shop and bakery in Hillcrest] and we had so much of it left over—there were obviously people in the restaurant that were very supportive of us—there were some that were not but I just ignored them—but we gave pieces of cake to people that were at other tables and stuff, so. It was a fun time—we had a really good reception.” “It was fun and it was a memorable occasion,” James concluded.

Because of the small timeframe in which they had to prepare, some couples chose to marry legally at the County Administration Building, and then have a larger celebration at a later date. These couples included Joe and Jason, Mitch and Cameron,

and Joel and Sam. I asked Mitch and Cameron, a couple who have been together for 11 years, to tell me about the ways in which they marked the occasion of their legal marriage. The two described their experience at the County Administration Building with a story of support similar to those of Leanne and Chloe, Carl and Jerry, and James and Steven.

Mitch and Cameron had already planned a large wedding ceremony to coincide with Mitch's fiftieth birthday in December. Because of the urgency that Proposition 8 created for the couple, they had a legal wedding ceremony, and they had the larger celebration a few months later. I asked them to tell me more about how they had celebrated the occasion. Mitch explained, "We planned the wedding because everybody was going to be here. But also on that same note, I am—this has to do with my religion—I am Catholic. Always been and always will be. And of course I couldn't go to my priest and say, 'Would you marry us?' Although I would have loved that. But we, I kinda wanted a spiritual wedding as well. Not just, we went to the courthouse and—here we are married. So we got married through the Free Catholic Church. [We were] able to do that as well."

I asked the couple to tell me more about the celebration. Mitch explained, "That was beautiful. Had to be at the [City] Country Club, which was available, so I was glad about that. They did a wonderful job with the decorations. Of course it was decorated for Christmas already—and—I love Christmas so that was great. It was big. We had—how many guests?" "150," said Cameron.

Mitch continued his description: "150 guests. Friends, and of course all of our family. His side, our side. His father, my father-in-law is—if you see him, he's Santa

Claus. He's got a long white beard, and he plays Santa Claus back home in Wisconsin. So, he did a little cocktail hour. He dressed as Santa Claus and took pictures with people by the tree. Which was nice. Because when was the last time that you sat on Santa's lap? So they took a picture, and you got to take away a picture with Santa. It was nice. We had a DJ, danced. It was really nice. It was a beautiful, beautiful time. We had a really good time. A bunch of family was here . . . and friends. And—it was good."

"Like a regular, grown-up wedding," said Cameron. Mitch agreed, saying, "And the Country Club, they did a beautiful job with everything. You know, that was one of the first things that I had asked them—you know. Are we going to have a problem with this? You know, *conservative* Rancho Bernardo. But, no—they were, they did a good job." "We were the only ones there you know. At night," Cameron interjected. "That's kind of the way that it always is. It's not like it was an exception, because it was us. That's just the way it always is at a venue like that. So, it was. It turned out good."

Mitch explained, "It turned out to be something that—and we started planning this like August, because that's when we kinda thought about it. So we had a very short time to [plan the wedding]. Everybody was already planning to be here anyways. Some, just for my fiftieth, you know. To celebrate my fiftieth. But then we turned it around and said, 'We are going to get married.' So, there is going to be a wedding instead. So, it all turned out really well. Did a good job on such short notice. Short time, but it was great. First time for many. You know."

"Oh yeah, the first for a lot of people," said Cameron, "I think—most of our guests probably got a kick out of it. Just as much as we did."

Mitch laughed, saying, “And our two little doggies were dressed in tuxes, too. . . . My twin nieces—they were like our little flower girls—and they walked the dogs up the aisle to bring us our rings. It was cute, they are a part—they are our family. They’re our kids.”

Mitch then explained that the occasion introduced many of the guests to the Free Catholic Church for the first time. He said, “They were amazed that we were able to get married by a priest.” Mitch then said that Cameron’s brother was their best man, and both his brother and Mitch’s brother were their witnesses. He said, “So we [are] a very close family, we have a very good family—that supports us a lot.” Cameron concluded, “It was nice, it was—there again—something that I never thought that I would experience. Ever. In a million years. So, it was . . . it was good.”

Other couples chose to celebrate their legal marriage through ceremonies attended by supportive family, friends, and community members. Some of these occasions were small and informal while others were much larger in scale. These couples included Sylvia and Carol, Courtney and Jennifer, Karen and Amy, Desiree and Sue, Derek and Scott, and Gabe and Jonathan. Desiree and Sue, who have been a couple for 23 years, were very active in the *No on 8* campaign. Their involvement with the campaign influenced the date they obtained their marriage license, as well as how they celebrated the occasion of their legal marriage. For the two of them, both historical opportunity and support were threaded throughout their marriage-day stories. Sue explained, “We were media spokespersons all up through that date. . . . We were asked to be there in the first day. Marriage licenses were given, and we were one of the first . . . maybe we were the first couple, I can’t remember. The first day.” “I think that we were the first couple,” said

Desiree. “And, even though by getting our license that day, we couldn’t—we had to get a second license,” said Sue. Desiree laughed, “We had to get two licenses! Because it expired.” Sue explained, “Because they expire in 90 days. And we weren’t having our wedding until October fourth. So that was outside of that 90 days. So we had to go back and do it again.”

Desiree explained that because the two had been active in their church since their 1992 commitment ceremony, the couple received an enormous amount of support from their church community for their legal marriage. She recalled, “People kept coming up and saying, ‘Oh, we’re so excited about your wedding! We’re going to get an invitation aren’t we?’ And so it grew from 200 to 300 [attendees]. And that was heartwarming. And that was wonderful, because we have all of the support systems.”

Desiree and Sue then described how they prepared for their legal wedding day. “We went cake tasting,” said Desiree. “For the second [time]—we did it before for the commitment ceremony,” Sue added. “For the second time,” Desiree laughed, “But we didn’t want to miss that. . . . And we went shopping for dresses. And we were just going to have something really simple and short—and just not too formal. And well, that didn’t work. So we got two beautiful long dresses. Which was so much fun.”

Desiree then explained, “And then when we had our commitment ceremony, we had written our vows, and spent a lot of time at the beach just talking about what we really wanted our relationship to be, so that we had a really good foundation of what we believed we wanted to say to each other. And it wasn’t just, oh, a vow that would come out of a book, it was really carefully thought out—carefully written.”

“Well actually, we wrote the entire ceremony. Not just the vows,” added Sue. “We wrote the whole thing. We were in control.” Desiree smiled and exhaled. “You might be getting a control issue theme going on here,” she laughed. “But when we were going to get married, we looked at those [vows], and looked at the ceremony that we’d written to make sure that we were pretty much still on the same page. And so, I think that we changed very little.”

Sue explained that one change that did occur was that they now had, as Desiree described earlier, a “large group of hundreds of church family” that they did not have at their commitment ceremony in 1992. Sue then said, “Our commitment ceremony was at First UU Church of San Diego, because we stumbled upon it, and it was welcoming and safe.” The church had said they would allow the two to be married there, but they would need to talk with a minister about it. The couple recalled that they had been hesitant to do so, but Sue said, “Once we talked with her, we knew that we wanted her to help us through the thing. So, after that, we joined the church.”

Sue then described that her brother, who would not attend their commitment ceremony, did attend their legal wedding. Desiree recalled that it had been “really painful” that he did not come to their ceremony. Sue explained that he did not come because “he didn’t want to talk to his young daughters about what was going on. . . . There was no way that I could get him to come.”

Sue continued, “So he and his family came [to the wedding]. And his granddaughter was in the wedding.” Sue said that he gave a toast at the reception, and that their best friends who “stood up” with them at their commitment ceremony and San

Diego's *No on Prop 8* coordinator also gave toasts. Sue explained that they had cake and hors d'oeuvres and champagne at church, and then went to a smaller family dinner.

Desiree added, "And then you know, I am never really too sure how people are going to react, so we went to this photographer, and—was that the first one she'd ever done? That was the first lesbian wedding—first gay or lesbian wedding she'd ever done. She was so excited about it. She was just thrilled. And she and her husband were there doing pictures. And she did the most wonderful job. So, you know—this whole thing was very exciting. And gay people and straight people were very, very, very, very supportive."

Ongoing Symbolism

Building upon the previously described relevant dimension of celebrating commitment, the couples also described many ongoing symbolic actions that they have taken to formally recognize their relationships both before and after their legal marriages. Sue and Desiree, a couple for 23 years, first celebrated their commitment to one another in a commitment ceremony in 1992. They have a particularly meaningful way they continue to recommit to each other, by providing flowers for their church to recognize special occasions. Sue explained, "We continue to provide flowers for Sunday services. . . . You know, thanking the church for being supportive of us back in 1992. That allowed us to have a ceremony. So . . . that's another way that we reconfirm our relationship and the marriage."

Desiree and Sue also spoke to the ways that the ongoing formal and symbolic celebration of their commitment to one another intersects with the shifting sociopolitical context, and the geographic discrepancies of formal legal recognition for same-sex

couples. Olivia Cruises [a cruise company that caters to lesbian clientele] offers commitment ceremonies as part of their package, and Desiree and Sue have participated in the ceremonies on all of their cruise vacations. This continues to be meaningful to each of them. Desiree explained that they had done one particular commitment ceremony when they were on a cruise in Boston; this had been particularly important because “some of the people who had been fighting for marriage in Massachusetts were there.” Sue added, “And they did get married. And then those of us who weren’t getting married did a commitment ceremony.”

Desiree explained that they participate in the commitment ceremonies “just because we like each other. And we want to do it as much as we can.” Sue then recalled, “Well, and it was really precious. Because on those cruises, there’d be this big room and all of these couples and—young to in their eighties—and maybe more. So, it was real interesting. They would go around, and they’d say how many years they’d been together. And it was just so amazing to hear women who have been together 35, 40 years.” “And that one couple were together 60 years, weren’t they?” added Desiree. Desiree then explained that it was wonderful to be a part of a commitment ceremony in a group of women like that because, “You have women from parts of the country that it would be dangerous to do that. That’s the only place they had that wonderful freedom to do that. And the joy and the fun—and the lightness that you would see with those women was just—it was worth going through another commitment ceremony just to see—”

Chloe and Leanne provided another example of symbolic recognition for their relationship that took place after their legal marriage. Chloe explained that their legal wedding had taken place roughly a week before the San Diego Pride Parade. She said,

“We had our little matching outfits at Pride. Actually we came up with these *Just Married* you know, in rainbow letters on these white little dresses. For the parade. We were the lead riders for the Pride Run, and then we were on the parade route.” Leanne motioned to her outfit, remembering: “So it said *Just—Married* and then on the back *Just Married—side by side*.” Chloe added, “So we were just always side by side. It was great. We got all kinds of cheers and stuff, so it was a way of almost marking it a week later. That—we are one of the ones that just got married and everyone cheered. And so it was really. It was like everyone was celebrating it a week later, what we had done.”

Leanne described a unique symbolic feature in their home. “You know, at the top of our stairwell, like many couples do, we have a picture of us on a mountain, and we have the certificate, you know. I am Quaker. That’s a big tradition. You have your wedding thing on the wall. And,” she laughed, “it’s funny because we have several certificates in the same frame, and we rotate them sometimes. One is the day we signed our domestic partnership. Which is not—the day it was filed in Sacramento is not the day that we had the ceremony. So those are two different dates, and the date on the certificate means nothing to us. Because we did it on the fifth, and they filed it on the ninth or something. And then we have the certificate that’s like the souvenir certificate—” Chloe said, “It’s a pretty one. With pretty much just our names, and where we were born, and how we are, you know, married now. And then there’s the legal document with all of the signatures and the small print and all of that stuff.” “That says you are married,” said Leanne. “So we kind of rotate those around,” said Chloe. “We rotate them. So that is kind of cool to have that,” said Leanne.

Sylvia and Carol, a couple for six and one-half years, also chose symbolic steps to recognize their relationship formally, after the occasion of their legal marriage. Sylvia provided an example of formal recognition for the relationship that was particularly meaningful to her. She said, “I put an announcement in my undergrad alumni magazine. And part of it was because a couple years ago—I was going to the University of Virginia—and there was a huge, huge uproar—as there always was with anything gay-related—about having any kind of announcement about same-sex couples—and this was before the marriage thing. So by the time when I phoned and talked to the woman in charge of it, she was like, ‘Of course’—you know, like the tides had turned or changed. That was—I don’t know—kinda for me—that was a big thing, because I’d experienced a lot of homophobia in that environment, so it was like—huh! Things have changed.” “So it was meaningful to be able to post that?” I asked. “Especially in that exact—in that periodical,” replied Sylvia.

Other couples chose not to recognize their legal marriages symbolically after the occasion. This was largely because they recognized other dates as more symbolic or meaningful to their relationship. For example, Thomas explained that as far as their legal anniversary, “We only marked the occasion once—as far as significant—the first year—like in 2009 we did something for that legal anniversary but—it’s not really something that I—” Larry interjected, “It doesn’t feel like the day we were married.” Thomas agreed, “Yeah, it’s not something that I consciously think about. I really always think of our anniversary is the day that we had our Holy Union 17 years ago. To us, that is the day when we really got married. This is more like a legal thing, and I remember this—in 2010, we sort of like—sort of forgot until the day sort of popped up, and I remember

turning to him like, ‘I —yeah this is our anniver—our legal anniversary.’ But it wasn’t really—I mean it was special in that it’s there, but it wasn’t really— ”

Larry explained, “I think to recognize it would be like all of the years that we’d been married before are invalidated.” Thomas agreed, “Right, like those don’t count.” “And to me it was a spiritual event, you know—our first—our Holy Union. Whereas, the marriage was more like a legal event. You know,” explained Larry. Thomas agreed, “Right, and it’s still special.” “It still holds—is special, but on a government level. And I wish they would make it a federal, and that would be extra special.”

Referencing the influence of Proposition 8 on their decision to wed the day after obtaining their marriage license, Thomas then explained, “I remember thinking we sort of—sort of played around with the idea of well, maybe we should get the license, and then we have so much time to use it, and we could—and I remember thinking, ‘Well—we don’t know what’s going to happen with Prop 8, so let’s just go ahead and do it right away.’ Because our anniversary is in November, which would have been after. And so, I remember thinking to myself—‘Damn it—I would prefer that it just be one.’ We’d just have one date—and not to have—but.’” “We have three,” Larry laughed.

Thomas continued, “But in the end it was like—well, it really doesn’t matter because—you know by the time—except for that first year—you know, since then it’s like—ehh, it’s just a legal date. It’s not really—for us it doesn’t really mean as much as the day that we really stood before God and company and really said *this is what we say* and *this is what we believe*—and *this is who we are to each other*.” Larry concluded, “Yes, it’s the day we became one,” and Thomas agreed.

Conclusion

The aforementioned relevant dimensions, and the examples which constitute them, illustrate the rich histories of commitment each of the 14 couples who participated in the study have with one another. The narrative's first emergent theme, *Our Commitments Have Rich Histories*, entailed the many symbolic and legal ways that the couples endeavored to bring definition to and commemorate their commitments to one another, showing that legal marriages are just one of the many ongoing steps that the study couples have taken in order to do so. This description of their rich histories of commitment provides us with a foundation with which to understand their lived experiences through the overlapping circumstances of their legal marriages, Proposition 8, and the ongoing local and national debate on the extension of marriage rights to same-sex couples. This strong sense of commitment in the face of controversy evolves through the next four emergent themes, which constitute the narrative. The variety of the couples' commitment endeavors, outlined in the first emergent theme, lead quite naturally to the second emergent theme: *Not a Simple Matter: The Complexities of Language Choice*. As with their multifaceted responses to defining and commemorating their unions, the 14 interview couples also had complex responses when describing their choices around and use of matrimonial nomenclature, which fit their individual and shared preferences and circumstances.

Emergent Theme II: Not a Simple Matter: The Complexities of Language Choice

Building upon the previously described theme, *Our Commitments Have Rich Histories*—which illuminated the many symbolic and legal ways that the couples commemorated and brought definition to their commitments to one another—couples' language choices also reflected the absence of representative and collectively-recognized

language options for their relationships after their legal marriages. The 14 couples all had different ways of referring to one another and their relationships. The most common terms included *husbands*, *wives*, *partners*, and *spouses*.

Not a Simple Matter: The Complexities of Language Choice emerged as a theme from a discussion of language choices. Connected to one of the main focuses of the present inquiry—how legal status has affected the couples’ relationships—language choices were, for some couples, impacted by their legally married status. The couples described their language choices as intentional and contextually based. The language choices that each of the couples made when referring to their relationships depended heavily on the context in which they were speaking and therefore tended to vary according to the context. These choices often reflected the heterocentrist or homophobic contexts with which the couples interact day to day. They often described the process of making preferred language choices as an evolution, as the terms *husband* and *wife* did not feel like the natural way to refer to one another. Further, generational influences were described which impacted preferred language choices.

Some couples expressed a limitation with the language choices that were available to them because the terms *husband* or *wife* were understood as outside of the context of gay and lesbian lives. This was sometimes approached with terms that the couples themselves created which felt more representational of their relational identities. For example, the terms *husbutch*, *my person*, and *spice* were created. These terms were more often used within the private realm of the couples’ relationships and were seldom transferred into larger social contexts due to limits the couples felt would occur as others made sense of those terms.

Emergent theme II, *Not a Simple Matter: The Complexities of Language Choice*, is comprised of three interrelated relevant dimensions:

- 1. Language Choices Are Intentional and Contextually Based**
- 2. Language Choices Are Evolving**
- 3. Language Options Are Not Always Representational of Our Lives**

Language Choices Are Intentional and Contextually Based

Context was a powerful determinant of the couples' chosen matrimonial nomenclature. Derek and Scott provided one such example of how their language use is contextually based. "*Husband* has been hard to adjust to," said Scott. Derek added, "It's interesting." "We talk about that sometimes. I still say *partner*. It just—when you are, like, out in public, and it is such— a bomb-dropper to say *husband*, my *husband*. Because it really—people don't expect to hear that. Especially if they don't realize that you are gay at first, it hasn't come up. So sometimes I will use *partner*. But we call each other *husband*," said Scott as he reached over to put his hand on Derek's leg.

Derek offered, "I say *husband*." He continued, "If we introduce people or something, um, yeah. *Husband*. I guess it's just hard to say that." Scott added, "If we are around our friends we say *husband*." Derek agreed. Scott stated, "We try to say *husband* more frequently now when we are around straight people. But you kinda just make a quick judgment, like 'How is this going to go over?' You know."

Derek then explained that he had recently visited his doctor and the nurse was making conversation with him by talking about and making assumptions about his wife. Derek recalled, "So I finally had to say, 'You know, Sarah, I have a husband.' This is a lady I have been goin' to, and she was shocked. And of course she was jumping for joy

because she just thought that was great. But, there are plenty of instances where they just assume that, you know, you have a wife or something. So then you just kinda have to feel it out. . . . We just kinda laugh. We always tell stories like, ‘Oh, I had to drop the bomb today.’ Because there is always, you know, you’re at the store and they’re like, ‘Oh, your wife will love that.’ You know, do you say something? Or?”

I later asked, “So you said that in some contexts you will sort of evaluate before saying *husband* but are there other contexts where it wouldn’t bother you to say it at all or you wouldn’t make that quick evaluation?” Scott offered, “If we are around gay people.” Derek added, “If we are around other gay couples or at a gay party. It’s just—there is no, you know, you don’t have to [evaluate]. You just assume that they know what we are talking about. But it’s for, say we go to a Christmas party or something, like I got invited to one. . . . But I am sure that time, we are going to probably be confronted with a lot of, you know, they will see the ring and ask ‘Where’s your wife?’”

Joe and Jason provided an example of a couple who stated that their preference is always to use the term *husband*. In this instance, legal status did affect the couple’s relationship with regard to their preferred language choices. They had not used the term *husband* prior to their legal marriage because, as Joe explained, “That seems when it is most appropriate.” However, the context was often a more powerful influence over what language Joe and Jason actually chose. Joe explained that he usually uses the term *husband*, but sometimes he will use *partner*. I asked, “And does that vary by context? Or across the board would you refer to one another as *husband*?” Joe asked me to clarify what I meant by that, and Jason offered, “Do you like to soften the blow so to speak? To someone else—would you say ‘my partner?’ So they don’t fly off of the handle.”

Joe explained, “Oh, if it’s someone I do not know, I would probably use *partner*. And if it’s someone that I know or I am comfortable with, I will definitely say *husband*.” Joe explained that he had used the word *husband* to refer to Jason once when speaking with his mother. He recalled, “And she looked at me funny, like, ‘That’s what you call him?’ [Joe responded to his mother] Like, ‘Yeaah—well what would you call him?’ She wasn’t ready for that. But *partner* of course, she was.”

Joe then explained, “It’s sort of like if you are OK with it, it’s just fine. This is what it is [marriage], and this [*husband*] is what you call it. And if you are not so OK with it, or you are kind of uncomfortable with it—it’s sort of like, oh, it’s the *partner* word. It’s not the *husband* word. You know what I mean.”

Jason explained that he uses the term *husband*. “But if it is someone that I don’t know, when I say *husband*, I am like (makes concerned face) I kinda tense up a little bit. You know. Like, how are they going to react to this? But I use it anyway.” Joe offered, “It shouldn’t be like that. But it is. And that’s kind of the way—you know, society I think has to still catch up a little bit.”

Reflecting on Joe and Jason’s words, I said, “So, there is sort of a knowledge that you have before you choose—with your word choice—before you choose your word. Do I know this person? What’s the context of how I am saying this? And that sort of influences your choice of whether to use *partner* or *husband*?” I asked. Jason and Joe both agreed.

Jason explained, “I mean, for him—yeah. I mean, I still use *husband*. I definitely kind [of] tense up like—Oh god, how are they going to react to this? (makes a tense face). Am I going to get into a confrontation with this person? Over my word usage?” Joe

added, “Right. Right. It’s sort of um. It’s almost a gray area. You don’t know if you should say this. You should be comfortable saying it. Or, or it’s more about making the other person not be uncomfortable. If that makes sense. And again, I think as society changes and becomes more accepting, I think that will change. It’s just, it’s just going to take a little more time. I know I am not the only one. People, I think—in general have to second guess.”

Jason then explained, “I have to say, when we were [traveling] in Wyoming, we weren’t married. But he was very aware—because I mean, all of Wyoming is rural. And he was very aware of it—I guess. And I think if we were to go back, being married—in Wyoming—and having had friends who knew Matthew Shephard and stuff. That’s probably one state that I would be really cautious about my word usage in. I think being in California, I feel more empowered I guess to be maybe more confrontational than I would in the deep South or Wyoming or something.” “Oh, yeah, really all over the Bible Belt is really—I would be uncomfortable with that. And it shouldn’t be that way. But I would be,” Joe agreed.

Kara and Christine also explained how the context shaped their language choices. When I asked Kara and Christine about the language that they use to refer to one another, they each responded that they call one another *wife*. They started using the word *wife* as a result of their ceremony, and acknowledged that the adjustment to the word *wife* had taken some getting used to. Kara stated, “Yeah, it did. Cause I would say, this is my girlfriend, or my fiancé. . . . No, that’s my wife, she is my wife, now.” Christine elaborated further on this: “It did, it took a little getting used to. Not the fact of using it, just the fact that you were now . . . wife, you know. It’s almost when you get married any

time you know, I think you have that transition process. Of going from boyfriend to fiancé, to husband and/or wife or whatever. So, you know it does take a little bit.”

I was curious if this remained consistent all of the time, or if it varied by context. Kara responded that it did vary by context. She stated, “There may be times that if I am not comfortable I will say *partner*, still. If I feel like it is going to put me in a danger situation, which do still exist unfortunately.” Christine agreed and added, “Or you are just not comfortable. The people you are talking with aren’t—you don’t think have resp[ect] . . . [You don’t know how] receptive they are going to be to that . . . so you will change to *partner*.” Kara then provided an example: “When we bought our car, the guy, the salesman said, don’t put that [*spouse*] on there (shaking her head), he [his supervisor] won’t approve your application.”

Christine added, “In a situation where I am at work [Christine is a teacher], and I am talking to people, not like they don’t know, but you are just not sure how they are going to react, and you just don’t want to deal with that . . . you don’t know if it is going to be a positive or a negative, and you just don’t want to deal with it. I will just use *partner*. You know, just because, you just don’t want to get into the drama.” I asked her to elaborate about this a little more, and Christine said, “With parents, I don’t even bring my personal life in with parents. And with students, they generally (shaking head), I don’t talk about it. So, but if a kid asks me, I will be honest with them. Most of my athletes know. Because they ask, but . . . generally (shaking head), I don’t talk about what I did with my wife over the weekend with my students. Even if I was married to a man, I wouldn’t do it because it’s just not appropriate to do, you just don’t do that kind of stuff. But mostly it’s with coworkers—if I am just not sure.” Kara concluded, “The

uncomfortableness doesn't really bother me. But a danger situation or something like that, absolutely."

Leanne and Chloe also spoke to how the context influences their language choices. Chloe explained, "Depends on the context. If I am in a situation where I am trying to diminish shock value, I'll just say *partner*. But, a lot of times I say *wife*."

Leanne responded, "So it is easier now. It depends on context for me, too. If I have a patient who asks me if I am married, and it is not going to be beneficial to them to know to whom, I am going to probably say *yes* and avoid it. If they push, I may use the word *spouse*."

"I've used *spouse* before," said Chloe. Leanne continued, "I use *spouse* because, you know—I want to minimize. Minimizing the fact that I am in a same-sex relationship. . . . I'll correct them if it's not going to hurt them. Like I had a patient who was really struggling in her relationship—and she said, 'Are you married?' and I said 'Yes,' and she said, 'Does he . . .' So rather than lie, I said, 'Well, actually I am married to a woman, but—yes, she does do that.' Sometimes I will correct."

She went on to explain, "I'll use *partner* if it's like, my boss who I know is uncomfortable with *spouse*. She's very Catholic, but is trying to be supportive. I'll use *partner*. I'll use *wife* if I am just introducing you like we're out somewhere. 'Have you met my wife Chloe?'" Chloe added, "Yeah, clearly it's female so the shock value is there regardless, so you might as well use the word *wife*."

I asked, "So, are there contexts where you would be more likely to use *wife*?" Leanne replied, "Say we are at a fundraiser, and there are a lot of gay people. I am more likely to say, 'Have you met my wife Chloe?'" "Or progressively-minded people," added

Chloe. “Or if it’s at work and they all know that I am married, and we go to say—a Christmas party,” said Leanne.

Contrary to the majority of couples who said that the context shapes their language choices, Mitch explained, “I am more concerned with my own feelings. It feels good for me to say *husband*. I don’t worry about anyone else’s feelings. If you are not used to it, you don’t welcome it, you are not comfortable with it—that’s your problem. Not mine. And I am not going to make your problem mine.” He noted that Cameron did not feel the same way about it and added, “I am just saying that for me—I am very comfortable with calling him my husband—in any setting, anywhere. And that’s just what it is. He is my husband. We are legally married. It took forever to get that right. And I am going to use it. I am going to respect it.” Here Mitch speaks to a strategy which will be more fully described later in the narrative, in the third emergent theme.

Language Choices Are Evolving

Scott and Derek also described their language choices as evolving. Scott provided an example: “When I was at East Village Tavern and Bowl, I think the day after we got married? Or was it that night? I forget. Um, [the waitress] she was like, ‘How was your day?’ and I was like, ‘Oh, I got married.’ And she was like, ‘Oh, that’s great! Who’s the lucky girl?’ or something like that. And I am like, ‘Actually, it’s a guy.’ And she was just like, ‘Uhhhhhh’ (drawing back in horror). You know, ‘I said, It’s my *husband*.’ And she was just like ‘Ohh’ (uncomfortable, drawing back in horror). ‘Get me out of here.’” He continued, “It’s kinda funny when you just, I mean. I don’t care what her reac[tion]—I don’t care what she thinks.” Derek agreed, “I don’t care.” Scott continued, “So, you know. I am past that now. For a long time I did really care what other people thought, but

it's our life and you know, we need to be caring about ourselves first, then about the reactions of other people to our relationship."

When I asked Scott and Derek if they preferred the term *husband*, Scott replied, "With each other we call each other *husband*." "That's a good question," said Derek. He added, "You are going to make us start using it after this (smiling and nodding)."

Scott offered, "I think that I did use *partner* last time I said it." Derek agreed, "I think I might have said that, too. But I think *husband*, we are entitled to that so, you know." Scott added, "But, we are workin' on it." "I think we just have to put it in the mainstream more. Just so, yeah we should probably start using it more. But you are right, we do kinda say *partner*," said Derek. Scott agreed, "We have said *partner* for so long too, so there is kind of an adjustment, too." "Yeah, it's [*partner*] kind of automatic," said Derek.

"But it has been two years now," said Scott. "Alright, *husband* it is," said Derek. I clarified, "So you hadn't used *husband* at all previous to the marriage?" Scott and Derek agreed that they hadn't. "Because we weren't married," said Derek. "We weren't *husbands*," said Scott. Derek added, "That's why it is so new, you know how, I think it's similar to—married couples, the woman changing her name when she gets married. It's kinda that used, getting used to—it's kinda catching yourself going, 'Oh, yea, I guess, I am married. I can say *husband*.'"

Scott made a proposition: "Let's just say *husband* from now on. What do you think (looks to Derek)?" Derek replied, "Yeah, that's good. Deal (shakes Scott's hand)." Scott concluded, "Alright, deal. We are saying *husband* from now on." Derek agreed, "No more *partner*, we got it on film." Scott agreed. Derek added, "So, you know, so

we'll be doin' that. There's parties, [where everyone is] all straight." "Alright," said Scott. "So, here we go, gonna use this," Derek concluded.

Leanne and Chloe also explained how their language usage has evolved, both for them and for their family. Early in the interview, when speaking about the transitions that had occurred in her life as a result of her formal commitment to Leanne, Chloe had explained, "Well, I became a stepparent which wasn't what I had in mind for my life. I thought I had dodged that bullet by not having the desire to have children—I didn't have to deal with that whole realm of the universe. And I became a stepmother. And I had, before I knew it was happening, I had a teenager living in my condo. So that was interesting."

Leanne continued, "Actually, us being *married* made things easier for Melanie [Leanne's younger daughter]." She explained that Melanie lives with them and that on one occasion, her boyfriend had inquired about Chloe's whereabouts. Leanne recalled, "I guess you'd never been there when he was there, coincidentally—and he was like, 'I thought your mom was married? How come her wife is never here?' And so it gave her [Melanie] the ability to say, 'My parents are divorced. My mother is remarried.' And have that normalcy." "So, it gave her language to talk about it?" I asked. Leanne replied, "It gave her language. . . . Yeah, it—that language is helpful."

Leanne later said that she did not use the term *wife* before they were married. She went on to explain: "I am not even sure if we used *spouse* before we legally got married." Chloe responded, "I definitely used the word *partner* after our domestic [partnership]." Leanne agreed, "Yeah, we used *partner*. We were funny about it. 'Have you met my

domesticated partner?’—or something. I don’t think I used *spouse* before the legal marriage, and I know that I didn’t use *wife*.”

Chloe explained, “Yeah, so that kind of changed. It was definitely almost always *partner* before, and now it might be *partner*, might be *spouse*, might be *wife*. But it was fun to introduce her to people as ‘This is my wife Leanne.’” “That was great,” she said, smiling. Leanne agreed, “Yeah, it makes it easy. Again, it’s that whole concept [marriage]. You don’t have to explain anything. They get that. It’s pretty clear.”

Leanne added, “Melanie uses it now. She used to call you my *whatever*. My *whatever*. *Girlfriend*, *partner*, *wife*, *I don’t know*. I am a teenager, I hate your guts, right. My *whatever*. And now there are times—and now it’s better. But even a year ago, after we were legally married, she’d say, ‘Well, she’s your wife!’ So that made a difference in that context, too. Yeah. It really changes. It changes depending on whose perspective we’re concerned about. Do you think?” Chloe nodded and agreed.

“The labels are hard,” said Leanne. Chloe agreed. Leanne shook her head, “When you are in a straight marriage it’s not.” Chloe continued, “That’s why I don’t—I just say, *I am seeing a woman named Leanne*—or, you know—*I am falling in love with someone named Leanne*. And sort of describe it rather than label you. But the *wife* thing is—now that we’re married—” “That’s what we use now. We never used that before.” Leanne concluded.

Reflexive relationship between intentionality, contextual influences, and the evolution of language choices. As the previous examples illustrate, the couples described their language choices as intentional, contextual, and evolving. For some couples, the reflexive relationship between these factors was illustrated as they discussed

their language choices. Gabe and Jonathan, both men in their 60s, provided an example of how contextual factors such as perceptions of support and safety and generational influences have shaped their language usage. One of the first things that came to mind for Jonathan, when I started to interview the couple, was that he often tended to be generic when using language referring to his relationship. He explained, “I guess a general experience is that—and I don’t know about straight married people—but, it’s not the kind of thing that I mention readily and forthwith. Just off the cuff—I mean—I just—I filled out the Medigap paper—so you know, put down name of spouse, so I put *spouse* instead of *husband*. I just—so there are certain things that I do that. I’ll tend to be more generic and not just right out there. But that’s me.”

Later in their interview, I asked Gabe and Jonathan to say more about their language choices related to their relationship. Gabe explained, “It will vary in context when we are in public. Depending upon the crowd that we are around. And it’s something that is evolving for me, where I am getting more and more comfortable referring to Jonathan sometimes—it depends on the situation. Um, if it calls for it—like if it calls for the relationship—then I will sometimes refer to Jonathan as maybe my spouse—and in some instances I am starting to refer to him as *husband*. Just depends on the context though. How I feel comfortable with the people that I am with. And how I think that they are going to react.”

Jonathan gave an example of how he had handled a recent situation. “Once when I was in the doctor’s office, he said something about “your wife”—and so I didn’t correct him—I just let it roll. Because it, they may have noticed I checked married on the box, you know. And so they just automatically assumed *married*—*wife*. And so, it’s like well,

I just let it roll. It's like, that's not why I was here—I am here in the doctor's office for a purpose. So, just—move on.”

Gabe then added, “It's interesting that I am also noticing that as time goes on and since we have been married—I am starting to notice—without . . . without any preparation in advance, some people will ask—I can recall this happening once, and I can't remember who it was. But somebody just casually said, ‘And how's your husband?’ And it was kind of like—gee, I hadn't heard that before. You know, so—it's refreshing.”

I asked the couple whether their usage of the terms *spouse* and *husband* occurred as a result of their legal marriage, or if they were terms the couple had used previous to their marriage. Gabe responded, “Oh, it definitely was the legal marriage. Beforehand, I'd always referred to Jonathan as my partner.” Jonathan agreed that this was the case. Gabe continued, “That [partner] was the common term that I always used. You [Gabe] did too, I think. We just referred to each other as partners. Sometimes I would use the word *life partner*.”

Jonathan explained, “If it had to do with business things, I'd just say *associate*. But, it depended upon the situation, the environment, the topic at hand, the person—” “Which brings up another issue, is that Jonathan was in more of a conservative environment—work wise—than I was. So he had to be a little bit more in the closet,” said Gabe. “A little bit more—” Jonathan interjected. “And I was totally out,” Gabe continued. I clarified, “Is this at the time when the two of you got married?” Jonathan responded, “No, before—only about the 33 years before that (laughing). No, I had a job with the Department of Defense, secret security clearance and executive vice president of the company—and level of trust—and the whole package—and a sphincter boss who

owned the company. So, I was just like living two lives. The whole time. I had to work hard at it. It was not easy.” Gabe said, “He succeeded very well. I was his silent partner.”

I then asked the couple, “So, is there a preference that the two of you have as far as using the word *spouse* or *husband* or *partner*? Like if you felt like you were in a context that was supporting?” Gabe replied, “I don’t have a preference, I think—like I said, for me it’s evolving. The terminology is evolving. So I don’t know what I am most comfortable with yet.” Jonathan added, “I haven’t used it that much, but I would alter what I use depending upon the environment. And I think a lot of that is that it takes a long time to get over 30—actually a lifetime of living a dual personality. So, I would customize whatever I say, so that it didn’t detract from the purpose of why we were there.”

Because Gabe described it as something that was evolving for him, I asked him if his language choices were evolving in a way that he liked. Gabe replied, “Oh yeah. Oh yeah, I mean. Yeah. I am not at all uncomfortable with the terminology, I am just not sure which terminology I prefer. Or if I do prefer. I mean, again—it depends on the context. I mean—but no—I am not uncomfortable with the terminology.”

I asked the couple, “Can you think of a person or context that you’d be around where *husbands* or *spouse* would be what you would prefer to say?” Jonathan replied, “Well, easily around people I *knew* who are straight or gay—I mean I wouldn’t even probably think about it. But usually, I think usually I just use *Gabe*. I mean I describe the person by their name rather than just a title. And probably because it’s still relatively new. I mean we have only been married for a couple of years so—not really used to using the term compared to the past 30-something years.” Gabe added, “Yeah, most of the

people—like Jonathan said, that we know—are people who are comfortable with us. So, using those terms doesn't make them uncomfortable, either."

Jonathan then shared a story of another recent experience. "I just came from a doctor's appointment. You know, and I am going to have to have another skin cancer thing removed. And that's the kind of thing where I tend to be generic with physicians who are going to have a knife near my face. I don't know who they are or where they are coming from. So, I try to just be really subtle, in the background. Just tell the minimum amount of information—unless I get—something comes up and I get—and I learn that they are going to be comfortable with it. But otherwise—it's like I just put a wall up—I am not going to go there."

Curious to know more about this, I asked Jonathan, "Are there ways that you would be able to learn—in that context for example—that someone was going to be comfortable with it—where you'd be more open to disclosing?" Jonathan replied, "I don't really seek it out . . . I just assume they won't be." Gabe described, "Yeah—you know, we learn quickly from conversation—where somebody's going or what their mental thoughts might be."

Language Options Are Not Always Representational of Our Lives

While the abovementioned relevant dimension of context applied to the ways they spoke about their language choices, Sylvia and Carol provided an example of how the language available to them felt limiting or not representational of their relationship. Carol stated, "I hate *spouse*." "And I hate *wife*," said Sylvia. "And you hate *wife*," Carol concurred. "You know, it's weird—we still end up using *partner* a lot. At least I do. It's just easier."

“Yeah, I’ll use *spouse*. Sometimes, with some people,” said Sylvia. Carol explained, “I just hate that word. I just don’t like *spouse*, it sounds so clinical.”

“And I think *wife* sounds goofy,” said Sylvia. “But then *wife* sounds unusual, too. And it’s hard,” said Carol. “That is weird. Yeah—it doesn’t—nothing feels right,” said Sylvia.

Sylvia explained, “It does vary by context. Well, one thing I can think of when we’ve flown out of California and gone somewhere, I’ve always said (laughing), ‘You know, we’re not married. You’re just my girlfriend.’ And I am like, ‘Hey, girlfriend!’”

Carol recalled, “Oh, that’s right—and when we are in Virginia, she’ll go like, ‘Oh, it’s illegal again. We’re illegal.’” Sylvia agreed, “Yeah, because it’s still illegal there. . . . We were just in England, and I am like, ‘I think we’re married here.’ Or you know, it’s—sort of odd—and amusing at the same time. And then the context—I am a lawyer, and I don’t really come out to my clients—I don’t talk about my personal life. And so, I am sort of—I don’t know, I don’t really—maybe if it comes up I might say *spouse* or something that keeps it—keeps what’s to me my privacy about being gay—you know.”

Carol explained further. “That’s part of the problem that I have, I think, with using the term *wife*. Even though I like it better than *spouse*. Is, I always feel like—that—the people that I am using it with will think it’s a very loaded term.” Sylvia agreed, “It’s like, ‘Oh!’” Carol continued, “Yeah, or they’ll be like, ‘Oh,’ you know, ‘*She’s saying her wife.*’ Somehow, I just feel like other people will react to that more than I want them to. Um, when I would like it just to be a term. And that’s why *partner* seems easier. People don’t have that reaction. Because I know that’s what I got . . . when we refinanced the house. . . . Because everyone’s initial reaction when you, you know. Because they ask,

‘Are you single or married?’ You know, ‘Whose name is going to be on the loan or the title?’ So she’s [the woman assisting with their refinance] like, ‘Are you married?’ And I said *yes*. And so, of course the first question is, ‘Oh, well what does your husband do?’ And I was like, well, actually—‘My wife is an attorney, also.’”

She shook her head disbelievingly and continued to explain, “And there’s just like this—this reaction. You always get this momentary pause. This—you know—recalibration. As they kind of think about how they want to respond to it. And I don’t like that. I mean, I like using the word, I mean, I am fine with it—but, it just seems to be such a loaded term—for others. In my experience.” Sylvia agreed.

I asked, “Are there contexts where *wife* feels like it really fits?” Sylvia replied, “Sometimes at home when we’re—I don’t know . . .” Carol added, “Or for me it always fits when I think about our life together. I mean that’s the term that I think of. It just works.”

“Like 95 percent of the time it just like—*eww*—I don’t like it—when you say it. It sounds goofy and old fashioned.” Sylvia explained shaking her head, “I can’t think of an example but—you know—where I don’t get that feeling. You know where—it might be more of a lighthearted thing.”

In addition to reflecting on the contextual variables and the process of evolution which influence their language choices, Karen and Amy also spoke about the complexities they experienced because the language choices available to them were not always representative of how they understood one another or their relationship. When referring to Karen, Amy explained that her preferred term is *wife*. “Where are we?” asked Amy. “Depends who we are with,” said Karen. “Out in public? Depends who we are

with,” said Amy. To contextualize the question, I then asked the couple if their language choices came as a result of their marriage, or if they were words they had used before. I also asked them to tell me about how their language choices had evolved and whether or not their choices varied by context. Karen nodded and said, “Yeah, it definitely varies by context . . . Amy has always called me her wife. And that didn’t change. I think initially, I mean early on in the relationship you [Amy] would say *partner* more.” Amy agreed, “*Partner*, yeah. Or *girlfriend*.” Karen continued, “Or *girlfriend*. But then I think, even before we got married you would say *wife* wouldn’t you?” Amy agreed that she had.

Karen then said, “Yeah. And I tend to use the word *partner* more . . . and that’s been consistent, I think, from the beginning of the relationship. Or, not the very beginning but from fairly soon into the relationship.” “I am more butch-identified rather than woman-identified,” Amy explained. “Amy doesn’t identify as my wife. So for me it is a little bit uncomfortable to identify her to somebody else as my wife, even though that’s more specific than *partner*. You know, when I say *partner* then people go, ‘Hmmm does she mean business partner, or does she mean law firm partner?’” said Karen.

Amy then said, “She uses *wife*. When you are out amongst people you use *wife*.” “When I am talking to people who know you, I will use the term *wife*. When I am talking to people I don’t know so much, I use *partner*,” said Karen. Amy said, “Well, that’s your comfort level. That’s not about me being butch.” Karen said, “Well, it’s about me not being comfortable calling you my wife because I know that’s not how you identify.” Amy disagreed. “No, because if that were true, that would be with people that we knew—you would call me . . . I don’t mind the term *husbutch*.”

“But nobody knows what that means,” said Karen. Amy laughed, “Nobody knows what that means.” “Except us,” laughed Karen. Amy said, “Privately, *husbutch*. With our friends *wife*. Out in the world . . .” “*Partner*,” Karen concluded. “That’s on you, that’s not on me,” said Amy. “OK, yeah. That is probably true,” said Karen. “That is your comfort level of calling me your wife. Which is fine, it is whatever you are comfortable with,” said Amy.

Karen offered, “So, it is definitely contextual.” Amy agreed. “But I don’t think that it has changed since we got married,” said Karen. “No,” said Amy. “That didn’t make a difference to us,” added Karen.

“So Amy, you do refer to Karen pretty much across the board as *wife*?” I asked. “Across the board as *wife*,” she replied. “And then, Karen for you it’s more varying by context?” I asked. “Definitely,” agreed Karen.

“And then, when it is someone that you don’t know, what are some of the things that influence that choice to refer to Amy as your partner?” I asked Karen. Karen replied. “Um, I don’t know. I think that, because I think that’s just what I have always called you.”

Amy offered, “Maybe it’s that you are not yet . . . people are not yet sensitive, especially if you talk about two gay men that are married. And you know, if one refers to the other as his husband out in the world, the community at large has not yet adapted a mindset, you know. That these words are now ours—as well. You know, as a heterosexual husband and wife. So maybe it’s being sensitive to that.” Karen responded, “Yes—but . . . I think that also it depends on who it is that I am talking to. If I am talking to a patient . . . then it’s really—I mean for me it’s not about—my relationship with the

patient is not about who I live with or who I am in a relationship with. And so, so I think to use the word *wife*, for me, with a patient, is going to all of a sudden change the focus to what's going on with my relationship. And you (looks to Amy) actually do that with your clients."

"I don't say *partner* though, I say *spouse*," said Amy. "Oh, OK, *spouse*," said Karen. Amy continued, "My spouse. Which is weird by itself. 'Cause if I were married to a man it would be my husband." Karen agreed, "Yeah, and you wouldn't think about it." Amy added, "I am sure that they kinda go '*Spouse*, why did she use that?' But then they just go on. They just move on." Karen offered, "Whereas if, if you said—and I think that's what happens with *partner*, too. It's—I let them draw their own conclusions . . . and it's not. It doesn't all of a sudden switch the attention to 'Oh, so she is clearly in a same-sex relationship.' It, you know—if they want to dwell on it, that's their thing." "We haven't claimed the words yet out in the world," said Amy. "No, I guess not," said Karen. "Probably in the process of—" said Amy. I offered, "We are talking about it as an evolution. It has been transforming in some ways." "Yeah, I think so," concluded Karen.

Conclusion

Finding language to express their committed relationships, the 14 couples who participated in the study spoke about the complexities that surround the choices they make when using terms to describe one another and their married status. As the aforementioned relevant dimensions and the examples which constitute them illustrate, these choices reflect the heterosexist context that the couples exist within, which is characterized by an absence of representative and collectively-recognized language options for their relationships after their legal marriages. This description of the

complexities surrounding their language choices provides us with insight into an ongoing dynamic that these couples navigate from day to day as they find themselves in contexts that call for them to give language to their relationships. Of course, like the rich histories of commitment described in the previous emergent theme, complexities of language choice also have complex histories in the lives of the couples. However, their entrance into the collectively-understood institution of marriage added additional layers to this complexity. Therefore, as the narrative continues to unfold, the couples' stories provide us with an understanding of their complex interaction with language as it relates to using terms to describe one another and their relationships, further providing us with a foundation with which to understand their lived experiences through the overlapping circumstances of their legal marriages, Proposition 8, and the ongoing local and national debate on the extension of marriage rights to same-sex couples. An even clearer view of the interview couples' lives, and the strategies they enlist in navigating the challenges they face, evolves through the next three emergent themes which constitute the narrative.

Emergent Theme III: The Battle Metaphor

In the months leading up to the 2008 elections, Prop 8 became a highly visible battlefield for individual, relational, and social definition of gay and lesbian lives, situated within in the larger struggle for equality and human rights. For many gay men and lesbians, the battle was familiar, as they had been waging it throughout their lives. For others, the visible sea of yellow and blue signs and stickers raised a palpable awareness that their lives were being defined in the public realm, often in ways that were incongruent with their lived individual, relational, and social identities. On the evening of November 4th, 2008, many of the couples who participated in the study rejoiced as they

witnessed history in the making with the election of the first African American president of the United States. The couples awoke on the morning of November 5th to the reality that Prop 8 was the *law of the land*. In the nearly three years that have followed, the battle has continued to wage.

Prop 8 brought visibility to the ongoing battle by gay men and lesbians to claim definition of their individual, relational, and social identities. For many of the couples interviewed for this study, claiming definition predated Prop 8's emergence on the political scene. This was evidenced through the actions the couples took both to protect and legitimize their relationships and to celebrate their commitments to one another before legal marriage was a realistic possibility in any of their eyes, the actions taken to mark the occasions of their legal marriages, and the steps they have continued to take to formally recognize their relationships which were all described in emergent theme I: *Our Commitments Have Rich Histories*. Further, the battle to claim definition was also evidenced through the complexities of their language choices which were described in emergent theme II: *Not a Simple Matter: The Complexities of Language Choice*.

The theme of battle emerged in every interview, richly threaded throughout the previous two emergent themes, which detailed the couples' efforts to protect their commitments legally and to make language choices within the context of their daily lives. *The Battle Metaphor* speaks directly to the areas of focus guiding the dissertation which ask:

- How do anti-gay amendment campaigns affect same-sex couples?
- How has the local and national debate about extending marriage rights to same-sex couples impacted the couples' experiences of marriage?

- How have these participants navigated the experiences and challenges of the discriminatory ballot measure Proposition 8, and all of the ongoing legal battles connected to its passing, together as a couple?

More specifically, the reality of “battle” as a metaphor for their lived experiences became obvious in interviews through their polarized use of language and the visible symbols the couples described to illuminate their experiences of inequality. Sides were drawn, and the demarcation between “us” and “them” shaped relationships with people and social institutions. The couples described their lived experiences of inequality under the law. Often, those experiences mobilized them politically. Finally, *The Battle Metaphor* was storied through the strategies that the couples have enlisted in navigating anti-LGBT social and political contexts, and their ongoing commitments to be engaged in the larger struggle for equality and human rights.

Emergent theme III, *The Battle Metaphor*, is comprised of five relevant dimensions:

- 1. Polarization**
- 2. Us and Them**
- 3. Inequality Under the Law**
- 4. Mobilized: Going to Battle**
- 5. Strategies for Navigating the Legal and National Debate on the Extension of Marriage Rights to Same-Sex Couples**
 - a. Engagement**
 - b. Support**
 - c. Perspective**

Polarization

Woven throughout the dialogue on Prop 8, the couples frequently described their experiences in terms of polarities. Scott and Derek described their experiences of how the local and national debate shaped their lives in terms of validation and invalidation. Scott described the experience as “a bit hurtful.” He explained, “You know, you kinda say, ‘Well, our marriage is valid.’ Right. In our eyes. But you see all of these other people saying it’s not valid . . .” “What are we doing differently than you are?” Derek asked. “Yeah, why aren’t we valid?” Scott added.

Thomas also spoke in terms of a polarizing metaphor of movement forwards, and movement backwards when recalling his experiences after Prop 8 passed. He said, “I remember there was . . . after it passed there was a real sort of malaise. And kind of just—sort of a sad feeling—like it’s kind of like we’re going backwards. And it just didn’t make any sense. So it was like *why would we go backwards?* Particularly, I mean it was sort of disheartening to see that here we’ve done this amazing thing because it was also the national election and you have the first African American president so we’re moving forward, but then on a local level we’re taking like all of these steps backward. So, it was kind of like—just didn’t make sense.”

Carl and Jerry shared similar sentiments. Carl recalled, “Wow, I remember when Prop 8 passed, ooh boy.” “I was very upset. Very upset,” said Jerry. “Yeah, he cried for a long time,” said Carl. Jerry recalled, “He held me. We were in bed just waiting. Because you know the—we had to sleep on it. You know, Obama won the election. So it was bittersweet because Prop 8 was so close. And then finding out the next morning, so. It just took the air—it was very upsetting. Very upsetting. It was lethal—lethal.” Carl then

explained, “And we got robbed on two accounts. One was the marriage, and two, the ability to celebrate. You know, the first Black president. No, let me rephrase that: the first strongly articulate person in office in a while. But you know, that—that was momentous. And that got robbed from us because of the other item [Prop 8].”

The ongoing experiences of the local and national debate were also storied in terms of ups and downs. For example, Derek stated, “But I will say, remember when they did the last [Prop 8] hearing. When they overturned it. We were watching it. I was watching it from work like glued to the live coverage. And when they announced it, I mean that was a great, that was a great moment.” Scott agreed, “When we thought they were going to make it legal and people could start getting married again.” “We were just like, ‘That’s so cool,’” said Derek. “And it wasn’t,” said Scott shaking his head. “And then, you know. It stopped,” said Derek. “It was really disappointing.”

Derek then said, “So that was part of the ups and downs. We were like, ‘Oh, cool!’ But it wasn’t as hard, as gut-wrenching as like, I don’t know—” “As the night of the election,” offered Scott. Derek said, “I guess we knew what was expected. OK, you’re not surprised but you’re hoping for the best. So then, ‘Oh, great!’ and then, ‘Oh, well.’”

Joe and Jason also spoke in terms of polarizing metaphors of backward and forward movement, and ups and downs. Jason said, “Even though it’s been ruled unconstitutional here in California they still won’t lift the ban. Even though it is going to take probably years in court for it to—” “The Supreme Court might not even want to see the case. It’s two steps forward, one step back—no! It’s one step forward, two steps back. Whatever the saying is . . . that’s what it feels like. Because every time that we get

something, then something happens and we go back here. And we gotta keep going forward and coming back,” said Joe. “It’s like playing Chutes and Ladders,” Jason explained. Joe agreed, “Yeah, it’s a lot like politics in America. But, we’re definitely lucky to live in a country where we can have this debate. Where we can fight for these rights and this equality.”

The couples also spoke in polarizing terms when they described the tension they experienced due to local and national debates making such a big deal around an issue that “doesn’t affect other people.” For example, Carol explained, “The national debate—I guess—I don’t know—I guess I wish—to me it’s just, it’s just . . . How do I put this? It saddens me that we are having to fight so hard for something that um—it doesn’t affect other people. . . . And it just continually reminds me—like you [Sylvia] said—yes, we are like the freed blacks of the 1800s—you know. We have our papers but—wow! OK, we are never moving out of California!—Basically. And even where you think you have certain rights—like in Iowa—you see the huge backlash that comes from that. And it just makes me grateful that we have what we have—but—(shakes her head) it shouldn’t be such a big deal.”

Us and Them

Participants expanded upon the relevant dimension of polarity as they discussed the marked division they saw between “us” and “them:” those who supported Prop 8 (and were against the extension of marriage rights to same-sex couples) and those who opposed Prop 8 (who were in support of extending legal marriage to same-sex couples). Cameron storied his experiences in a polarized way by showing his frustration with the distinction between “us” and “them.” “The whole campaign—for it, against it—is

ridiculous in my mind,” Cameron said, shaking his head. “The fact that there’s debates on it is just beyond my concept. Because this—Protect Marriage Campaign, or Sanctity of Marriage something—whatever it is called . . . the rights—*our rights*—create no infringement on other people’s rights. So, I just have no concept on what the problem is—period.”

Scott and Derek also spoke of the divide between “us” and “them.” Scott said, “There’s no rational approach to it on the other side. It seems like it is just, ‘My way, and that’s it. My beliefs, that’s it.’ And I think the particularly frustrating thing is to hear that we are enforcing our beliefs on other people when it was sort of like: *Well, you are taking your religious beliefs and overturning a court decision that looked out for the rights of the minority.* So really, you’re the one who is enforcing your personal beliefs to take away a state-established right from us.”

Derek added, “But then, it’s separation of church and state. Don’t talk about your God. And, you know. Let’s talk about government and equal rights for people. So that’s where I get so (shakes head) you know, when I hear people just talk about the *Bible* it just drives me crazy. I am not saying, they’re wrong or I am right. You just got to keep things separate.” Scott added, “We are not taking their rights away. We are not saying, you know, ‘Close down the churches.’ We are not saying, ‘Force the churches to marry us. Uh, that ‘you can’t read the *Bible*’ or any of that stuff. We are not telling them to do anything. But they are the ones who are taking away our right. Again, that was granted . . . through a legitimate court process.”

Jerry and Carl also spoke about the polarization they experience between “us” and “them.” Jerry said, “And then when you have countries like Argentina, and Spain, and

Belgium.” “Iowa,” said Carl. Jerry explained, “You know, it’s no big deal. Politically, and patriotically. I go, here we go around the world telling the world that we’re a free country—liberty and justice for all. And I go, *Bullshit*. Not when it applies to us.” “That was on my poster, *Liberty and Justice for All*,” said Carl. Jerry then explained, “I refuse to stand for the *Pledge of Allegiance*. I refuse to sing the *National Anthem* until it’s true. Otherwise, it’s just a fantasy. It’s a theory. Because it doesn’t apply to everyone. I won’t stand for the *Pledge of Allegiance* until that applies for me. To us. That’s just. I would not feel authentic. I would feel like a hypocrite if I stood up, looked at a piece of cloth and said those words. I am not one that talks to cloth anyway.”

Larry also spoke to his experience in terms of the polarity between “us” and “them.” He explained, “A lot of it was feeling like, you know—it would have been like the South won the war. You know, we were once again second-class citizens. Without the same privileges as noble heterosexuals.” He continued, “You know, and it colored us. It made us—especially since we knew that the reason that it was—that they won was because of money. Money that was poured in by the Mormon Church. I’ve watched the *Proposition 8: The Mormon Connection* and I just got angrier and angrier. His sister is Mormon, and I love her. She is a sweet person you know. And she’s got four wonderful children. And her husband is just a hoot. And I don’t get angry at them. I get angry at the fact that they would pour so much money, you know—just to make themselves feel better than us. They can still maintain a superiority.”

“Us.” When I asked the couples about what the responses of friends, family, and their communities have been like through the experiences of Proposition 8 and all of the ongoing legal battles connected to its passing, many of them replied that those responses

have been supportive and affirming. This strong outpouring of support and affirmation positioned certain friends, coworkers, family and community members in the “us” camp of the “us vs. them” divide. It should be noted that because the couples’ descriptions of support were so prevalent and had such a profound impact on their lives, the examples below which establish a localized description of who comprises the “us” camp will be explored in more detail later in the narrative—expanding on the powerful effects of support the couples received—in the fourth emergent theme, *Support Shaped Lived Experiences*.

As previously defined, the “us” contingent of the “us vs. them” divide stood in opposition to Prop 8 and were in support of extending legal marriage to same-sex couples. Participants were noticeably aware of which of their family, friends and communities belonged to the group described as “us.” For example, Cameron explained, “I—am happy to say that I believe that most of our friends and family were probably opposed to that Prop 8. That’s bottom line.” “Totally,” Mitch agreed. In response to the same question, Sylvia explained, “Most people that we know are—” “They are on our side,” said Carol. “They are on our side. Yeah,” Sylvia agreed.

Courtney and Jennifer explained that their community has been very affirming throughout their experiences of Proposition 8. Courtney expressed, “We’ve been in a community that has been really supportive of us and so we’ve felt a lot of support even after it was upheld and we lost. So that’s been wonderful. Yeah, we’ve really been with people that shared that [Prop 8 should not have passed] opinion.”

Steven and Michael said that their community was outraged. Steven explained, “I would say for the most part the [Hillcrest] community was very, very supportive of the

gays. . . . I think the gay and lesbian community in our area was fully supported. I can't say that outside of Hillcrest as much, I mean I saw a lot of terrible bumper stickers at the time. But—and I heard stories from my friends that lived in the outer regions that they saw tons of um—like the day of voting—people standing over the freeway, you know, *Vote Yes on 8*. And all that stuff—so. That was disheartening—but it is what it is.”

“What was your sense of what the response was in Hillcrest when it passed?” I asked. “There was outrage. A lot of outrage. That’s the reason for all of the rallies. And I mean, word would come through the grapevine, ‘Meet in Balboa Park by the big oak tree tonight at six o’clock. You know, we are going to fight this thing.’ And you know, we went to two or three different rallies,” Steven said, remembering. James said, later, “There was outrage and there was disappointment and rallies and so on and so forth. To fight against it.”

Shifting social attitudes. Some couples understood the supportive responses of others, which situated them in the “us” camp, in terms of the larger social shifts that are occurring in attitudes towards gay and lesbian people. For example, Jonathan and Gabe described their experiences this way. Gabe said, “I guess our community, if we define our community for example as our friends downtown—you know, they’ve been generally supportive. I mean—based on the polls that we are always hearing coming out—attitudes are changing. And I think that the attitudes are changing partly because people are—because the gay community is now much more visible than it used to be decades ago. That helps. That makes a difference. So now, people realize that they’re actually associating with gay members of the community whereas they may not have known that before . . . because it never came up.”

Jonathan added, “TV shows, it’s in the news a lot. People are saying the words—it was hard for some people to say the word *gay*, and heaven forbid they’d have to say homosexual—I mean ahhhh (gagging) *I don’t want to say that word!* But it’s more out in the open and unfortunately and sadly it was brought out more in the open because of some suicides—” “Right, because of the suicides,” said Gabe. Jonathan continued, “So that’s bringing it out a little more in the news—so people are paying—are more aware. And more aware of some of the harm that some of these laws are causing that they weren’t aware of before. So, I think in the community, people who didn’t think about it at all—really one way or the other—” “Now they’re forced to think about it,” said Gabe. Jonathan concluded, “Now they’re—and now when they see us, it just kind of brings it back to light. Like, hmm, you know—real people, real world. It’s not just up there in the Netherlands or something.”

Tension: Lethargy, complacency, and ineffective action within the LGBT community. Tension occurred for some couples who felt they had witnessed lethargic, complacent, or ineffective responses from the LGBT community, a community clearly forming an important component of the “us” contingent. Their experiences also illustrate some of the effects of the polarizing metaphors described earlier, such as the experiences of going backwards and forward and up and down. For instance, Kara recalled that “there wasn’t any reaction in the community” after Judge Vaughan Walker’s recent ruling that Proposition 8 is unconstitutional. Christine agreed. Kara confirmed, “Uh huh, they are just like, ‘Ehh, here we go again.’” Christine agreed, “Yes, just once again. ‘Tell us when it is all over.’” Christine described the community as being “tired of the ups and downs.” Kara added, “Yeah, you know. They had the celebration march (shaking head). OK. For

two days, celebrate for two days again. I think people are just, you know what, they are tired of getting their hopes built up and then getting them dashed.” Christine agreed, “Yeah, they are tired of making that appointment at the county building to get married and then (shakes head).”

Kara continued, “So they have gone back, it has gone back to the lethargy that has created the problem with the community moving forward anyway.” I asked her to say more about what she meant by that. She replied, “Well, one of the things that I noticed, like, right around the whole Prop 8 thing was that the community came together. OK, well it didn’t take long for that to completely fracture again.” Kara then described the infighting and division she experiences within the LGBT community. She went on to state, “We have enough problems in this community without fracturing ourselves even more.”

Christine added, “During Prop 8 it was (gestures with hands together).” Kara elaborated: “Everyone came together and you didn’t see that [division]. And it’s, it’s fallen apart again. And, when you are not in a cohesive unit you tend to get lethargic and not focused because you are just doing your own. You are more worried about what is going on with your little group and you lose focus of the big picture. . . . And I see a lot of that.”

I asked, “And so are you attributing that to the ups and the downs?” Kara replied, “I think part of it. Yeah. Because I think that had it not fallen apart, I think that the cohesiveness might have stayed together because we can win. And it turns out that when we come together we still can’t win. So why bother? I have heard that from people I have

talked to, even people I have worked with on the campaign, that were very involved in it. But yeah, what's the use?"

I asked, "So, but do you both feel that something about Proposition 8 galvanized people?" Christine and Kara agreed. Kara said, "Absolutely, oh, absolutely. I had never seen so much good will and cooperation amongst all of the groups in our community 'cause usually they are so busy trying to destroy each other." Christine added, "And it lasted for quite a while after Prop 8. But people start losing interest, too."

Like Kara and Christine, Larry also discussed tension he experienced due to what he considered "bad organization on our part." In speaking about the marches and rallies that followed the passing of Prop 8, Larry said, "I was rather upset by the fact that more people showed up at the Gay Pride Parade than did for that. You know. It was like, *come on!* You know. Responsible adult time. This is time for us to really SHOW our numbers. A lot of people were afraid about being photographed by the news. And I thought, 'Wow! Why aren't they being bussed in? When they're bussing Mormons in to stand on street corners.' We should have been out there with more effective numbers. I think—then that was—that was part of bad organization on our part as a community."

Jerry and Carl also described their experiences in being disappointed with how the Prop 8 campaign was run, and the complacency in the LGBT community. "My real issue at the time has been somewhat dissipated. Just how poorly run the *No on 8* campaign was. And I thought that they screwed it up big time. They didn't challenge what needed to be challenged. That whole campaign I thought was very ineffective. So, and then just the complacency within the community at times. Because a lot of people didn't think—Oh, that's not going to pass. . . . Anything can happen in America. You know, Prop 8

passed folks. We didn't think it was going to pass either. So, yeah—there was some anger. And some of my cartoons really just went after those that just ran a very ineffective campaign. Because we could have won. We could have won.”

“Can you say more about the complacency you experienced?” I asked. Jerry replied, “In the community. Well—you know you—I think there is a certain level of arrested development in our community. You know, if we had someone along the lines of a Harvey Milk still around, that would really rally the people in realizing that yeah—we have a ways to go. And it was a wake up call. And I think it woke up those who felt that they would rather party than protest. Or, they would rather party than get involved in a political campaign. Where you see everyone over at Urban Mo's—you know—drinkin' it up, havin' a good time. And then right across the street at the *No on 8* campaign headquarters, it's empty by comparison. Where are the priorities? What are your real concerns? So, there was that.”

“So, you said there was a wake up call. Did you experience a shift after that?” I asked. Jerry replied, “Oh, just in conversation. Like, wow. The community was stunned. And they are still a bit. All of us were a bit stunned. You were probably stunned, too. And, yes—oh—well maybe our rights aren't as secure as we—and it told me that . . . those who really are against us are much more prevalent and influential—close—but influential than I would like to admit. But the reality is, Prop 8 passed. So that tells us something.”

Tension: Prop 8 created a sense of separation from the LGBT community.

Couples also spoke about how the passing of Prop 8 caused them to feel a sense of separation from others in the LGBT community. Carl said, “Yeah, but you know—

there's still the friends that were not married. You know, they may be gay or lesbian—but they are not married. And they are not going to know that feeling that we had.” “Ah, good point,” said Jerry. Carl continued to explain, “You know, either they might have been single, or they may have been partnered and maybe considering marriage. But they hadn't gotten married. And, when Prop 8 passed, I don't imagine that they would have felt that pain that we felt. That day.” “Yeah,” Jerry agreed.

“So there was maybe a sense of separation that these people are here and they are upset, so they are supporting us. And they are supporting the community. But at the same time, they don't quite get it,” I said. Carl explained, “Well, I think that they kind of get it. But it wasn't quite the level that we got it.” Jerry added, “It was much more personal. I would never fault them because it's just not their life experience.” “No, no,” said Carl.

Joe also recalled this sense of separation. He said, “I remember when I was running to a rally. I was going to a rally and they were starting to march. And I was running to catch up—I think you [Jason] didn't go to that one—but I remember this group of gays were standing there and there was a lot of bitterness like, ‘Oh, there is this special class of people now.’ And as I heard this, I was running by and I stopped, and I turned around, and I said, ‘I am one of them.’ And they looked at me and they kinda smirked you know, and then I turned around and I kept running. And I ran to the rally. And I think that moment was when it really hit me that this is a big deal. You know, yes—we're married. They're not. They can't—” As these examples illustrate, tensions did indeed exist for participants within the “us” camp.

Tension: When “they” are friends, family, or community. In addition to experiencing tensions within the LGBT community, many participants also experienced

tension when the opposition they experienced occurred close to home in other ways. Many participants described the negative responses they experienced connected to Proposition 8, and the ongoing legal battles connected to its passing, which came in the form of visible signs and symbols such as yellow signs and bumper stickers supporting Proposition 8 in their own communities. Christine, who is a teacher, said, “It was weird because during the whole election process I saw a couple *Yes on 8* stickers at school on kid’s backpacks and skateboards and things like that. And I am like . . . wow? I didn’t think they thought like that.”

Carol said, “Oh, I know a way it [the debate] impacted my experience—is when I am driving in my own neighborhood and um—we live in Talmadge, which is pretty gay-friendly—” “It’s Obama country,” Sylvia explained. Carol said, “Yeah, it’s Obama country. But, but even still—you know—I will be out jogging—or you know—walking or whatever—and you see certain neighbors that you don’t know—and now you are pretty sure that you don’t ever want to know them because they’ve got the big—” “*Yes on 8*,” said Sylvia.

Carol continued, “*Yes on 8* signs in their yards. Most of them have taken them down but—I know one neighbor just across the alley from us—we don’t know him, but he always leaves his garage door open—and he saved all of the signs in his garage. And then one—one house that I jog past. There’s a truck always parked in front of it with all of the stickers—you know, ‘One man and one woman—’”

Carol continued, “You know, ‘Pray to Marry.’ You know, it’s all of this religious stuff. And it’s just—um—it—it just makes me angry to see that—and it makes me feel—

um—I guess mostly anger because I know these people have to know that, you know—we live in the same neighborhood as them. And it’s very alienating on their part.”

Derek and Scott shared a similar story. Scott explained, “We are good friends with a lot of people in our neighborhood, on our street. One of the assistant pastors for The Rock Church lived across the street, and there were four *Yes on 8* signs on our street. The most of anywhere in Kensington. And its like, they knew we’re gay and we live together. It’s like, I don’t know, it was like what if you had an interracial couple living across the street and there was a proposition to ban interracial marriage? And you had the nerve to put a sign on your thing saying, ‘Your marriage is invalid.’ It’s like the whole thing of like love thy neighbor, sorry (looks at Derek).”

Derek replied, “Yeah, no. He’s right. They are hypocrites, they’re hypocrites. It was very hypocritical. It was almost like everybody—our street was unusual in that there were as many for Prop 8 signs as against. So everybody prominently put them out. And Kensington is a very, is a liberal area. But these were the only ones we could see in our whole neighborhood. And it happened to be four of them on our street—within eyeshot. You know you can just walk, stand in front of our yard and there are four there. So it is like a big battle.”

Thomas and Larry also had a similar story. Although Thomas explained that the majority of the signs displayed in their neighborhood endorsed the *No on 8* campaign, Larry described a different experience. He said, “Walking around the neighborhood and seeing the opposing signs—you know, I mean the *for* signs rather—you know, not too many but just enough to know that they want to advertise that they don’t like gays—you know—getting married. And to see that visual. You know, is like—those signs being

posted all over—it was like—it was like a revelation. You know—it’s like—you know—
[San Diego] Padre flags out in front—you know—that many people like football
(laughing)! They are a football game right?” “Baseball,” Thomas corrected.

Larry continued, “Baseball. That many people like baseball? That avidly? And then to see people who felt so charged up about it that they put that kind of—it was like hate mail in front of their houses. Shocked me. In contrast to how many had the blue up. You know—I think—that’s where I saw my community in a different way. We live in a very gay-friendly community. And to see those yellow banners out there—just made me like—it made me very upset—my heterophobia kicked in about that. So, I think that was the biggest effect within community is to see people actually putting signs out that *they* hate you.”

Earlier in the interview, Larry told a story about an experience he had near his home. “There was one time I came back angry—near the Prop 8 point there were some protesters that were standing on all four corners of University and Fairmont which is fairly close to where we live. And I got into an argument with one of them. And I don’t lose my temper that often but I started quoting the *Bible* to her. And I started telling her—and she says, ‘Look, look, we’re not trying to take your rights away. You’ll still have all of the same rights you have now.’ And I said, ‘That’s still not being married!’ You know. And then I said, ‘Do you know any—many gay people?’ And she says, ‘Oh we have people that come to our church all of the time who are trying—who the Lord is changing!’ Oh! I went, ‘YOU’RE PREJUDICED!’ And she got violent. She says, ‘I AM NOT PREJUDICED! DON’T CALL ME PREJUDICED!’ And I could see—she’s having those issues. He went on to explain, “Oh, boy was I angry. Because it was like

meeting the beast face to face. You know, and she was trying to be nice and polite. But, you know—I called her on what it really was.”

Participants also experienced hurtful responses to Proposition 8 when people that they knew and cared about voted *yes* on Prop 8. For example, Scott explained, “You know, we kinda made some requests [to friends and family] like, ‘Please vote *no* on Prop 8.’ We were gonna have a *No on Prop 8* thing at the wedding but then we decided not to do that. And then, you know. I heard later that like certain people who were there [at the wedding] still voted *yes* on Prop 8 and I was just like, ‘That’s kinda lame.’” Derek added, “So you almost kinda want to nix them.” Scott continued, “I know, but it’s hard because we like them. What are you gonna do?” Derek asked. “They went [to the wedding], so. Maybe it just opened up their eyes. So, hopefully all it takes is—even if you get one.” “Not going to change their vote though,” Scott interjected. “Yeah, but you know, if you can affect someone. Then, that’s a start,” replied Derek.

“I guess that was difficult on a personal level though. . . . It was like, ‘You came to my wedding, and you witnessed this whole thing. And you saw that, you know how much we care about each other, and yet you still went and voted for Prop 8,’” said Scott. “And we didn’t verify it, but we heard it through the grapevine,” added Derek. Scott agreed, “We heard the deal.” Derek added, “But it’s enough even to *hear* that. . . .”

“Maybe we’re putting ourselves at the center of their universe right, but, when you know someone, you kinda care about their best interest. So you know, you care about them, you want them to be happy. Isn’t that what we would do if the shoes were reversed? But they’re probably looking at other things like, you know, they’re concerned

about their kids being taught it's OK to be gay in school, and that's a big taboo," Scott explained.

Like Derek and Scott, other participants chose to navigate around their perceptions that important persons had voted *yes* on Prop 8 by not engaging or confirming their suspicions. Steven described, "Everyone in my family voted against it. So, except probably my brother. And he—I never asked him but I'll be you he did vote—he voted for it probably."

Cameron also shared a story about the impact of having a person who was important to him vote *yes* on Prop 8. He explained, "I did [have a negative experience] at work with a friend that I've known for 20 years. And, she was—this was during—in the middle of the whole Prop 8 thing. . ."

"She was at the wedding," Mitch interjected. Cameron continued to explain, "I have known her forever and she's—she was with me—I had a partner that died, years ago—and I was working with her and a group of people at the time. And—I mean—she came over to my house, and you know. Would invite me to her house for dinner and stuff. And, I mean, just kinda made it a point to make sure that I was OK. And then, to find out that she was opposed to me getting married was devastating. To be honest with you—was devastating. I was, I was—I couldn't believe it."

Cameron continued to explain, "I go, 'You've got you be kidding me.' You know—I just truly couldn't believe that she was actually—I go, 'You know me, you know Mitch. How can you not think that—that we don't deserve to be married? Like you and your husband? That's all we are wanting.' 'Well, the *Bible* this, and the *Bible* that

and . . .’ and I am just going, ‘No, that is . . .’ And there was no reasoning with her.

That’s what I meant when I said—these people have just as strong of feelings as I do.”

Karen described a situation where a community member’s response did not reflect the gravity of the harm that she had experienced as a result of the passing of Prop 8. She explained, “One of the things that happened after Prop 8 was that I went in—‘cause I was still at [former workplace] then. And I went in and was really upset and felt very much like—like a lot of people did. That you know, basically these people who voted against our marriage were voting against *us*. And they were, and I felt that it was a personal attack, and it was demeaning, and it meant that we were second-class citizens. I mean, all of that rhetoric.”

“And um, and the response I got was, ‘Well, you know, *that’s not what it means*.

You know, your marriage still has value and I don’t really think that that’s what the people who voted *yes* on Prop 8 were meaning.’ And I thought, you know—*really?*”

Karen said shaking her head. “‘How can you?’ and this was from a straight person—and I thought, ‘You know, you have no idea. You have *no idea* what that vote did—to the thousands, and thousands, and thousands of people in our community.’”

Carol and Sylvia shared another story about an interaction when someone didn’t quite get the impact. Sylvia said, “My dad sent me an email that was like, you know—people should—” “Mind their own business?” offered Carol. “Kind of, yeah. Like—um, kinda. *Government shouldn’t get involved in your private life—*” said Sylvia. “Although I am like—I don’t know—I’m like—*your church was like really for this—*” She failed to understand her father’s logic.

Tension: When “they” are the heterosexual majority—“they” don’t have to think about it. The couples also described that many people’s responses reflected their perceptions that Prop 8 “didn’t really affect heterosexuals.” Jonathan explained, “I don’t know how they [the couple’s friends] all voted. So, I don’t know if they—but, I wouldn’t say I have run across anybody who we knew—know who thinks it should stand. I don’t think—there’s various levels of involvement as far as emphasis on it being repealed. I mean, some people are just like—well it’s kind of like a non-event to them.”

Jerry explained that although he experienced people as supportive, that he also felt that it was a non-issue for them. He explained, “Yeah—I mean it’s no longer discussed really. Because it’s not an issue for them, it’s an issue for us. Unless it just happens to come up in the course of conversation. It’s not a hot topic.” Jerry then explained, “Well, initially it was discussed. There’s only so much that those who are not directly affected are going to give it. You know, I mean sometimes you get a little, ‘Well—the election’s over. It’s a done deal. What are you going to do?’ ‘I’ll fight it,’ I say, “and I am not going to get over it. So don’t think that I will. It’s my marriage. You don’t fight for yours, I’ll fight for mine.’ So I’ve made my point.”

Sam also explained, “For the most part, at work . . . it was kind of a non-issue. I mean, nobody really said anything. I mean, you know—again—because it doesn’t really affect heterosexuals—right. So they just went, ‘Ehh—another proposition passed. Move on.’”

Inequality under the Law

Building upon the dimension of polarity and the subsequent demarcation between “us” and “them,” the third relevant dimension of *The Battle Metaphor* treats the

inequality gay and lesbian couples experience under the law. All of the couples spoke about how the local and the national debates make them very aware of how their relationships are not treated equally under the law. Inequality was described with regard to a number of scenarios. For example, Jerry described how the national debate on extending marriage rights to same-sex couples has impacted him and Carl both personally and financially, illustrating how DOMA affects the couple at tax time.

In the state of California, the two are recognized as a couple so they file jointly. However, as Jerry explained, “When it comes to the Feds, we have to file separately. Because of DOMA. And we found this out last time—last year—that we are taxed differently. And we are taxed because we are gay. I call it the gay tax. I am on Carl’s health plan. That’s considered income. So we are taxed on that. Which is unfair taxation. That most people don’t realize. So, it comes out of his paycheck directly. Whether we’ll ever see that, that all depends upon DOMA. Most people don’t realize. And when I explain that, in the process, they are like—that’s really unfair. They can see the difference in taxation . . . it costs a lot to be fabulous. There’s really a price tag to all of this . . . and you see that it costs us an extra \$1,400 a year just to be gay. Just to be a couple because of DOMA. Now, depending on how that plays out, that’s yet to be seen. So, our marriage plays out both at a state and a national level.”

Jonathan and Gabe have also experienced the discrepancies between local and national recognition of their relationship. Jonathan explained that the IRS has changed some of its positions on same-sex couples, which he described as a good thing that he liked. Jonathan then explained that due to the recent California tax changes, “If I die first it [Jonathan’s IRA] goes to him [Gabe] and the tax board can no longer say that you have

to pay an inheritance tax on this.” Gabe then countered that the federal government would not recognize their relationship. Further, Gabe explained, that because he was a federal employee, Jonathan would not benefit from his federal pension. “So there are still things that we are denied even though we are married,” added Jonathan. Gabe concluded, “Right, exactly—so. Yeah, that’s why I want to be part of that debate and help push it in the right direction. As frustrating as it is.”

Jonathan later explained, “And that we don’t have the federal rights has cost me a ton of money—if you want to look at money as an issue.” Gabe agreed, “Yes, that’s very frustrating.” Jonathan said, “It’s cost me a lot of money because I couldn’t go on his health care plan. So I mean, my medical insurance costs me about \$10,000 a year with a high deductible and a high co-pay. And I’ll go on Medicare in August and so that will help significantly. So financially, it has been harmful to me—and to us—because we had to change our lifestyle. So, I get a little emotional over that.” “Yeah, so we wish we could do something about it,” said Gabe. “Water under the bridge now. They’re not going to pay me back,” concluded Jonathan.

When I asked Joe and Jason how the debate has impacted their experience of marriage, Jason replied, “Well, just knowing that if we’re in a state that doesn’t recognize it—you know, knowing that we have to basically travel with a whole, you know, folio of legal paperwork just so he can make legal—medical decisions for one another.” Joe added, “Yeah, it’s hard. It’s hard to know that I could go in to a hospital and not be allowed to see him if something happened. And for them to not look at that and be like, OK, let’s say I am a woman, ‘What if my husband was hurt in another state and I couldn’t go and see him? Do you think I would—that they would be able to stop me from

going in there and seeing him? Really?’ You know, and so that’s a really difficult thing to think about. Because they don’t ever have to. They take every thing for granted. And it’s scary to realize that they don’t ever—they would never consider that.”

Jason then said, “Yeah, I think we’ve been more sensitive to a lot of the legal things we don’t get.” Joe added, “Well, we have to be. We have to be. Look at my benefits. Health benefits, he’s covered. But, it’s because Kaiser is a California state health company. They accept it. . . . My dental and my vision plans, they are Nationwide plans. So, because they don’t have to recognize our marriage, they don’t have to cover him. So they don’t.”

Jason explained, “We tried to get me on the dental/vision, and he got the paperwork back from his HR company saying that you know, only he was covered. He’s like, ‘No, I elected family coverage.’ And then come to find out—no, they won’t cover [me].” “But, I know companies don’t have to cover spouses at all. I understand that. It’s just that our company does—heterosexual couples—[it] covers,” Joe said shaking his head.

Jason then explained, “And what goes on in other states, too, also kind of dictates where we’re willing to travel. I think. Because when that thing went down with Hawaii, it’s like—darn, I was so looking forward to traveling to Hawaii, and now there’s like a bigot for a governor. I don’t want to go there and give my tourism dollars to him—you know. Same with Arizona, too. Or places where we would even want to live . . . we kind of look at that, too. Would we have to end up renouncing our marriage if we were to move? Or what kind of legal things are there for us?” Joe added, “Yeah, because we wouldn’t be married. We’d just be domestic partners there. Yeah, I don’t want to say that

we are restricted as to where we could go or live, but in a way we are. You know, in a way.”

Kara and Christine had similar views on how the inequality they experienced because of the lack of recognition of their relationship on a national level influenced their decisions. Kara commented, “The futility of the national debate has an impact, too, because it’s like you know this is where you are gonna stay, at the state level. . . . That, you know, you are limited, if you want to be married, to what state you can live in. So that’s an impact. I mean, I don’t want to leave California, or San Diego anyway. But what if I did? What if I wanted to go live in—Utah? So that’s an impact, I mean, that’s an impact on your relationship because it impacts where you have to live. Because—it’s not something that you can just take anywhere.”

Christine described a couple that they knew from church who recently moved to Colorado. Christine said, “You know, they had a ceremony.” Kara added, “They are certainly not married in Colorado.” Christine elaborated, “And they moved to Colorado. And what kind of rights are they going to have there now? I don’t even know if they have domestic partnerships in Colorado. They had to move back there but then, what’s their relationship like now? I mean, it is the same relationship but, with the law and everything? Do they even acknowledge it? The partnership, or anything? But you know we are never leaving California or San Diego.”

Sam and Joel had similar views. Joel explained that the inequality they experience impacts them “directly—and on a regular basis.” Sam explained, “Yeah, thinking about where we are going to move—buying property together—ensuring our financial future together.”

Sam later explained, “I think I feel more besieged by the political, you know—process like having DOMA in place I think is completely unfair. I think that the passage of Proposition 8 and then the weakness of the California Supreme Court to overturn it, um, is—makes me feel kind of besieged in a way . . .” Joel later explained, “Before or without being married, you don’t necessarily comprehend the impact that it has to you until you are in . . . I mean—in our situation—right. All of those things that a normal—that a heterosexual couple would get married for—we’re still dealing with. You know? So—they become forefront to you. . . . Whereas . . . maybe before we entered it, we didn’t necessarily comprehend all of these things we were going to have to deal with.”

Sam explained, “And I think it was more—for me at least it was more academic, before. You know, it was like—Oh, OK, it’s a loss in the battle toward equality. Move on and go to the next one. And, it became more personal when I got married, and the right was removed. And then the whole marriage debate became more personal. It wasn’t just about . . . ‘Oh yeah, we lost this battle, but we’ll move on.’ It was like, now they are trying to take my right away, you know.” “This is my life. Now you are messing with *my life* and *my rights*. You know?” said Joel.

Sam and Joel also discussed the possibility of losing rights in terms of the national debate. Sam explained, “Being married or domestically partnered also impacts where we could live. So, if we decided to move out of California—” “Oh, sure,” Joel agreed. Sam continued, “Like—was it like five or four years ago? Joel’s company at the time wanted to relocate us to Georgia. And at that time I think we had been domestically partnered . . . two years—and—that would go away.”

Sam continued to explain, “And then I started thinking about well—where can we move that either our domestic partnership or now our marriage would be recognized? And even in the few states where it is legal—our marriage may not be recognized. Like Iowa doesn’t recognize marriages performed outside of the state of Iowa. Um, but then oddly—Washington state does, even though they don’t have legal gay marriage in Washington state. So then we start thinking about well, you know—I would love to move back to North Carolina; Joel would kind of like to move back to Oregon or Washington . . . and we have to take these things into account—you know—figuring out where we are going to move.”

Joel nodded and laughed, “It’s complicated. Well, you don’t think about any of this until you get to it. Right?” Sam continued, “And what’s so annoying about it is that heterosexuals don’t have this problem. Like, wherever they move—in the entire world they’re still married. They don’t have to re-file the marriage license if they want to move to Britain or Russia. You know, they’re still married. And, you know—there are countries in the world that we could move to that we would still be—married. And it’s really kind of annoying—you know—if you think about it.”

Chloe and Leanne also had a lot to say on their experiences of inequality under the law. When I asked them to describe their understanding of how the local and the national debate about extending marriage rights to same-sex couples has impacted their experience of marriage, Leanne inhaled and said, “Take a deep breath.” “Thinking of the taxes?” asked Chloe. “Oh my god, the taxes,” said Leanne. Chloe explained, “You know, you are forced to file as married in California and forced to file as single at the federal level so between the two of you have to complete five tax returns. And then they added

that new rule this year about your income splitting, so our tax preparer—and, yes, we have a professional (rolls eyes in frustration)—was pulling her hair out.”

Chloe continued, “You know, everyone was trying to figure out—they knew what the rules were but what does this look like? How do we do it? So everyone sort of—you know, IRS is trying to figure it out the same time the tax preparers are.” Leanne explained, “If we were just married and it were civil marriage, it would just be so much easier. I never had this problem married to a man. I never had this problem. And the poor tax preparer who is very supportive of our relationship—is very liberal—was so fried by the time she saw me because I’m really bad, and I didn’t go until mid-march or something. She was like, ‘Well, *you people* wanted this.’ And I thought, ‘I cannot believe that this is coming out of this woman’s mouth!’” “She was so frustrated,” said Chloe. “She was so exhausted and fried from having to do five times the amount of work she should have to do,” said Leanne.

Chloe then explained, “Yeah—well—OK, here’s something else—when we went to Mexico—you know, we are on the plane and I am thinking, *we don’t have any paperwork with us*. If something happens . . . you know, I don’t know how they would treat us. I mean if she’s—will they ask if I am next of kin? Will they acknowledge me—will they block me? It just sort of occurred to me—it’s like I didn’t even think about that. I was so busy packing sunscreen, and you know—my Spanish American dictionary—I forgot about that stuff. You know, I have all of these documents—I paid a lot of money [to have them prepared].”

Leanne added, “So, that’s probably an international debate.” Chloe then explained that she had struggled with the tourist visa and customs forms she had to fill out on the

plane. She said, “Should I say I am single? Because if they try to double check it at the federal government level they’ll be like ‘No, they’re lying.’ And if they checked California they’d be like, ‘Yes, they are married—they’re lying.’” “So, it doesn’t match,” said Leanne. Chloe explained, “It’s not universal. It’s not like—a straight couple gets married—they’re married everywhere. And so you go to a different state, you go to a different country. And somebody says, ‘Are you married?’ It’s like, Well, in California I am, but outside of California, I guess I am just single.”

Leanne offered, “Well, we’re going to my sister’s. We’re not married [there].” “Yeah, so I gotta remember to bring documentation,” said Chloe. Leanne nodded, “We gotta bring documentation. It’s a big deal. And um, that’s the biggest thing is just—” “No acknowledgement outside of California,” said Chloe.

Leanne went on to say, “Or, you [Chloe] are getting close to retirement. Things like social security.” Chloe added, “If something happened to me, I—you know—for just me I’d have a decent social security coming in. But she’s not going to see a dime of it if something happens to me, and if we were a straight couple she would.”

Leanne explained, “And there’s other—there are other things like that at a federal level that it’s like, we really have to save more, do more, carry extra paperwork. It’s all more, more, more.” “Pay more—pay a lawyer more money to set all of this stuff up that would be automatic if you just got married,” said Chloe.

Leanne continued, “And it’s a worry—you know we have friends that live in Northern California—even in California we have friends who were married and domestically partnered and have been together 27 years and one of them became terminally ill. And they wouldn’t let the other partner in the—they let the brother who

had had no anything come in and make decisions for this dying woman who'd been a hospice nurse. Who knew the law. And wouldn't let her partner in to make decisions. And that was recent. In California. So, it's a little unnerving."

Tension: Our rights could be taken away. The relevant dimension of inequality continued as many of the couples spoke about being unsettled because they have felt or continue to feel that their rights are up in the air. For example, Scott asked, "What if we hadn't gotten grandfathered in? I mean, wasn't there still one judge who voted to" "Oh, yeah, they were going to talk about taking it away," said Derek. "They wanted to take it away," said Scott. Derek explained, "We were pissed about that. I was really, I told him. I was like, 'If they take it away then we are going back and demanding a refund on our fifty dollar license . . . ' You know, so that was an emotional part." "That was stressful," added Scott. Derek explained, "Because we were still like going, 'Are they going to take this away?' . . . We got pissed."

Scott explained, "And part of, when people voted on Prop 8, I think, in their mind, was to take it away. I mean, our neighbor across the street, basically that [*Yes on Prop 8*] sign said, 'We want to take away your marriage'. . . . On a certain level you just couldn't think about it that much because it was really infuriating." "Yeah, but then when they said that we were safe. It was like a huge relief," explained Derek. Scott agreed that it was a relief.

Jerry and Carl also described the ongoing feeling that their rights could be taken away. "It's still, you know it's still in a holding pattern. It doesn't affect our marriage, now that our marriage is intact. So we are fortunate. But, for what we would like to be in society, and how I would like to see us play and participate, we have a long way to go.

So, our marriage is intact. I can take—I am sure that we both can take a lot of comfort in that, yeah, we got in. You know, we are a part of the 18,000 in the state of California,” Jerry explained.

I asked the couple, “What was that day like when you found out it was going to—the marriage was going to remain intact?” Jerry replied, “Um, a sigh of relief. But it doesn’t—” “It didn’t make sense,” said Carl. “It still doesn’t make sense,” said Jerry. “Because they stated that OK, you guys are in, everybody behind you is out. And that’s where my logic is. That doesn’t make any sense. So that means that we are in a fragile situation that potentially could go away. Because it doesn’t make sense that you can discriminate,” Carl explained, shaking his head.

Tension: Having something that others don’t have. The majority of the couples interviewed also described the tension that they experience knowing that they have something to which other same-sex couples do not have access. For example, Kara recalled, “I just remember sitting there the day after the elections, we were sitting there having lunch and it was just (hand gesture in front of her face) . . . NUMB. Then anger, the whole grief process pretty much.” She went on to describe that “it actually made us feel worse when we got to, we get to stay married and our friends can’t get married. So it was actually almost a guilt added on top of everything else, now I feel like I am a part of the tyranny of the majority.”

James and Steven also felt strongly. James explained, “I think that there is a part of me that’s kind of—it saddens me that not everybody has—has the opportunity to get married. You know, that not everybody has the opportunity that we had. Even though it was a little window of time, and I just think, ‘Gee, when is this going to change?’ You

know, when is it going to be equal rights across the board? You know, and until that happens, all this debate is going on nationally, and it's sad that it even has to take place."

Tensions incited action. Kara and Christine explained that the possibility of their marriage being taken away positioned them in a defensive way. Describing that she was really involved in Prop 8, Kara said, "Maybe we had even more at stake. You know, because we already have this. And really, you know, how are you and your church gonna take that away?"

Christine added, "Yeah, 'cause when we were talking about taking it all away from us—that was a little, a little stressful, nerve-wracking time." Further, Christine said, "You know, now you have it, now you are going to take it all away? And now what? Are you going to take our domestic partnership, too? I mean, what's next? So, are we going to have to [go] back into the closet? Because it would be kinda hard to put a lot of us back in the closet (laughing). And so it, it was almost an ownership. Like, this is mine. You can't take it from me. You know, this is—I am not going to give this back to you. I am going to fight to keep it, I am going to fight to keep, to let everybody else that I know—experience this same joy."

Sylvia and Carol also spoke about that time period. Sylvia explained, "That period of time where we weren't sure if they were going to invalidate our marriages. [It] was very stressful and very like—you [Carol] were ready, you were like, 'That's it man—I'm—we're leaving.'" Sylvia explained that she is also a citizen of another country that does recognize same-sex relationships.

Sylvia recalled, "You were like, 'That's it—we're going! They can't take away my—' You know—you were just *radicalized*." "I was—yeah," Carol agreed. "And it was

nice for me to see because . . . I have been trying to tell you! Just that—you know—the world is unfair. All that kind of stuff,” explained Sylvia. Carol added, “Oh, you were like, ‘You finally get it! You finally see it!’”

Sylvia continued, “Yeah. It was such an insult—you know. No, just—the insult of it. Just—how can?—and just to feel like—you know, we felt like we had made it under the wire—which was a strange feeling because we felt sort—sort of lucky—and felt kind of sorry for people who weren’t able to—and then—to be like, to have it stripped away—it was such an offense.” Carol added, “To think they were going to take it away—it was so offensive. And it was so blatantly wrong.” “It was just gross,” said Sylvia.

Carol concluded with, “And as they pointed out—it’s bad enough to deny someone rights—but to actually have them granted by the state and then to have it taken back—I was—oh, I was so angry and upset about that.” Sylvia said, “Stripped. Crazy—yeah, you were—”

Mobilized: Going to Battle

Like Kara and Christine and Sylvia and Carol, many of the couples explained the local debate around Prop 8 mobilized them politically. In some cases, participation in the LGBT rights movement had already been a consistent part of participants’ lives, and in others, Prop 8 provided the impetus for their involvement. In situations where there were discrepancies about how much political involvement each member of the couple exercised, participating in the fight against Prop 8 often mobilized the less politically-involved partner, and even led to experiences where the couple felt closer because of their shared involvement.

Karen and Amy spoke about their involvement with Prop 8, and the fight for marriage equality. Amy said, “I have always been politically involved. I serve on boards. I have always been, I mean, since the early to mid-‘80s, I have been politically active in the LGBT community. One of the things that it has done is to get Karen active and involved in various organizations. . . . Sometimes she initiates it. It’s mostly me who initiates it. She definitely picks up the momentum, once I do. And so, we do work with The Victory Fund as much as we can. I mean, we are just table captains. But you know, at any event we get 10 or 20 people to an event, to donate, to listen, to hear. To participate. I think it helps these organizations.”

Amy continued to explain, “And so, that’s one thing that I think we have done, is, not only have I maintained my political activism, but Karen has gotten involved. And that’s one way that we can feel, I think, stronger—” “Like we are doing something—” added Karen. Amy continued, “Stronger, within the local and the national debate. And one way where we don’t feel like, you know—I could never not do community work, but it is just one way that I think we both feel good about the work that we do.” “Yes,” Karen agreed.

Carl and Jerry provided another example of their shared participation in Proposition 8 and the fight for marriage equality. “Oh, we did a lot of protesting,” said Carl. “Well, yeah we did,” said Jerry. “Something we hadn’t really done before,” said Carl. Jerry agreed, “Yeah, I was surprised that he wanted to go out in the streets. It brought me back to the ‘70s and the ‘80s when we went out in the street a lot. . . . OK, so you can see that I have a political edge about me. And marriage equality is one of my drums that I bang constantly. That’s a major focus of my work. And until it’s across the

board, it will be an issue that I will continually stand strong in. You know, personally and professionally. Because one, I am in a marriage. I demand that it be respected. And, whether you agree with it or not, at least respect it. And it's not up for your approval. And it's the matter of fact that it is. And that's just the way it is," said Jerry.

He continued to explain, "And it fuels my personal life as well as my professional life. So, I can have fun with the issue, and I can also be in your face and down your throat with the issue. Depending on what line you cross. Now, I prefer the word *gay* as opposed to *homosexual*. Because *homosexual*, to me, is much more clinical. The word sex in there tends to focus in on the sex part. That's what I think people have a problem with, is the actual sex. But being gay is much more than just a sex act to me. It's the way that I eat, breathe and sleep. It's the way that I see the world."

"You said that the two of you participated in rallies?" I asked. Carl explained, "Yeah—we um, there was quite a few marches, and there was what—these two young— young gals that put together a march very quickly—within the first couple days. And it was one of the largest marches. All the way down University Avenue." Jerry asked, "When was it? It was after one of the—was it the initial ruling? I think it was right after Prop 8 passed." Carl continued, "But to march down University . . . I always like looking—when you are in a march—looking backwards and just seeing the sea of people behind you. Or, if you are on a hill and you can see them in front of you. Yeah. It was really good."

"So, this wasn't something that the two of you had been so—had participated so much in before?" I asked, to clarify. Carl explained, "Well, we found that when they first started announcing them, we wanted to go to them. So the march that went downtown to

the County Administration Building, we were in that.” “Yes. A couple times,” said Jerry. Carl then recalled, “And then we were actually at the protest at the Mormon church. Which was an eye-opener to me because I had never been that close to the church. It’s a fortress. So my thoughts are, ‘Well what kind of church is it if it requires a fortress to keep people out?’ So I learned something there about that.”

Jonathan and Gabe also participated in rallies together. Jonathan offered, “Well, when they had the . . . protest down at the county building . . . it went through downtown and wound up at the County Administration Building. That was the first rally I ever participated in.” “For you, yeah, I have been in several rallies before,” Gabe added. I asked if they had attended the rally that occurred soon after the 2008 election. Gabe replied, “There was one that was even bigger, after that—that was the one we participated in. And it was thrilling—we walked the whole route—all the way to the County Administration Building. Were you a part of it?” I told them that I had been. Gabe continued, “That was cool, it was a good feeling.”

In addition to the sentiment already expressed, Carol and Sylvia spoke about how meaningful their participation was in the rallies and marches after Prop 8 passed. I asked Carol why the march in which the two participated stood out to her as significant. She replied, “I think just that it was so big. That there were so many people there, and it was so visible. And everyone was so angry about what happened. Yeah! And felt very righteous—very righteous anger. And just seeing the support of so many other people who were there.”

Sylvia then explained, “And for me it meant a lot that—well—you also had a sign that was like, ‘*Just married—November 1st*.’ And people were so responsive to that and it

was really sweet. You know, the strangers—and then for me—you know—I have been more involved in the past in more activism, and you know—been on plenty of marches and rallies and things like that. And Carol has always been like—straight and narrow—followed all of the rules—”

“So you know, I was just like, *Yeah!*” Sylvia said, clapping and laughing. “I am like finally, like you get [it]—I guess I always felt like maybe you didn’t get—not get but—I mean you just—we had such different experiences,” Sylvia continued.

Carol agreed, “Right, right. She was like the rebel, and I was Alex P. Keaton. Basically.” “Yeah! Totally! Totally! So it was just funny that we came together,” Sylvia exclaimed.

“This is like your issue man—where you’ve gotten fired up,” said Sylvia. “Right,” Carol agreed. “It was the first time that you have really been discriminated against—that you felt,” said Sylvia. “Right. That’s true. That’s true,” agreed Carol. “And I was just like, that’s the way the world is,” Sylvia sighed.

Carol continued, “Well, it wasn’t the first time that I had been discriminated against. But it was even more—” “Well, I mean—as far as being gay—” said Sylvia. “Yes, yeah,” said Carol. “That you felt it,” concluded Sylvia.

Jason and Joe also described the effects of Prop 8 on their participation in the fight for marriage equality. Jason explained, “I’d say—I’ve always been kind of politically-minded, but I think I’ve probably become maybe even more so. . . . I wouldn’t say militant per se—but maybe more radicalized. I guess.” Joe added, “We definitely go to marches—and I had never done that.” Jason explained, “Oh yeah, I went to all of those marches—and lost my voice—you know yelling in the streets of downtown and stuff,

too.” “It was kind of fun—but I—you know, I hadn’t really done that before him. So, we have definitely been a little bit more involved that way,” added Joe.

“Oh, we won’t shop at Target,” offered Jason. “Yeah, we don’t shop at Target,” Joe agreed. “Or Best Buy,” said Jason. “Any companies that come out against it—it’s easier—I was going to say boycott—but it is easier to just not shop there. We used to shop at Target a lot—and now we haven’t shopped at Target for a long time . . . but it’s surprising what we can find elsewhere, and not have to shop at a place where we always shopped,” explained Joe.

Tension of political mobilization. Desiree and Sue played a particularly active and visible roll in the campaign against Prop 8. They described the multiple ways that they came together throughout that process, and how that involvement impacted them individually and relationally. They also described a tension of political mobilization, in that their involvement, at times, took a tremendous toll on them emotionally.

Desiree explained that Sue’s involvement had become a catalyst for the different ways that she herself became involved in the campaign. Desiree said, “Sue is much more *out* and much more *active* than I am. I am much more comfortable to quietly be with her or to support her at home by doing whatever I need to do at home. I am not—I was never as comfortable—though I did speak [for the *No on 8* campaign]. . . . She’s always been the impetus for us doing that. And I am really pleased that she is that way, because I would not do that on my own.”

Desiree went on to explain, “It upsets me. It distresses me. It makes me angry. It makes me sad. So, I have such a roiling of emotional experiences with that whole fight, that it was better that I not be as involved as Sue is. Was. . . . And the other side of that

was that I really wanted to be supportive, because I believed it was the right and just thing to do. And so if you don't stand up for the right and just thing, who's going to do it? And so we have slightly different takes on that. Emotionally."

Desiree then said, "There were times, too, that we found ourselves snippy with each other. And we had to examine what the underlying feelings were. And sometimes if we'd been in a really difficult interview—like we were on television with a priest and two of his parishioners, and then our minister and us. And, it's really hard to hear some of that stuff that people who don't agree with us have [to say about us]."

"Like, 'We love our dogs and cats but we don't allow them to get married,'" Sue interjected. Desiree continued, "So we would find ourselves really kind of angry with each other. And snippy, and we would have to extricate ourselves from the feelings that were coming from the outside so that the inside of our marriage could be solid. . . . When you have the waves of negativity—it's really hard for me to stand firm. So probably, if I couldn't stand beside Sue, I would just—it would be really hard for me."

She went on to say, "And then Sue was at the *No on 8* headquarters all of the time. Well, maybe not all of the time. It just seemed like all of the time." Sue explained, "Well, I was there, or I was out on the street. Or I was visiting at churches on Sundays." Desiree explained, "So, it was like more than a full-time job. And so, um, I occasionally would feel really resentful that she was gone all of the time working. Or I would feel—" "So how would we navigate that?" asked Sue. Desiree replied, "Well, I don't know, I don't know how we navigated it. Except out of just deep respect for what you were doing. And so I was able to let go of some of that, knowing that I respect my strengths,

and I respect your strengths. And, you can do things that I can't do, and I can do things that you can't do."

Desiree later explained, "So I went to Jaime [her therapist] to just kind of process that. Because Sue is so strong, and so committed, and so determined—that it's going to happen for people. So for me, that whole debate was just in my face, and in my house, and in my space constantly. So, it was hard . . . sometimes it felt like it was harder having all of that in my space than it would have been to just leave it alone. But, we have very different experiences."

Sue recalled, "And I found after Prop 8 passed, I was—people would ask me things—or they would, you know why this happened. Or they'd be angry because the *No on Prop 8* campaign. [They would ask,] 'Why didn't you do this or this?' And then there were people that were grieving because they—you know, they no longer had the right. And so, I was trying to take care of and respond to everybody, and I didn't realize how depressed I became as a result of that. And you know—"

"She really withdrew," Desiree explained, "And that's not her style to ever withdraw. I think that you—that whole debate and that whole outcome really affected our relationship in that she went in to this really major funk after the election."

Sue added, "And I didn't realize what it was—I didn't care whatever we did, you know—we went to a friend's place outside of Santa Fe. You want to go—I don't care. Just take me. And I just couldn't listen to it. And I find that I do get angry now still, when people [ask] 'Well, why didn't they?' or you know, as if we didn't give our hearts, and our time, and our money. 'And—*and what did you do?* Oh! You are just complaining

now. OK.’ And so there are times when I still can’t deal with that. Although they’re much less now than it was right after Prop 8 passed.”

“So, right after, it took a pretty heavy emotional toll on you,” I said. Sue replied, “Yeah, I was defending the *No on Prop 8* campaign, I was defending—I mean, people still say, ‘Well, the churches should have gotten involved.’ I was like, I was the faith subcommittee chair. We had hundreds of people at many churches here in San Diego involved. And if you didn’t know about it, where is your church? So but, yeah—that was really very emotionally crushing.”

Strategies for Navigating the Legal and National Debate on the Extension of Marriage Rights to Same-Sex Couples

The couples all reported that although they experience ongoing challenges related to the legal and national debate on extending marriage rights to same-sex couples, their actual connection to one another has not been negatively impacted. When I inquired about the different ways that the couples had navigated those experiences, their responses fell into three separate yet interrelated domains. These domains were: **engagement**, **support**, and **perspective**. Each domain had several dimensions which consisted of intentional practices and strategies on the part of the participants. Further, these practices and strategies took different shapes based upon the ecological level (individual, couple, relational, community, societal, historical) in which they occurred. Some of these practices and strategies have already been described previously in this chapter within the contexts in which they were utilized.

This relevant dimension of the emergent theme *The Battle Metaphor* speaks directly to a key question which focuses and guides the dissertation: How have these

couples navigated the experiences and challenges of the discriminatory ballot measure Proposition 8 and all of the ongoing legal battles connected to its passing together as a couple? It also sets the stage to respond to the third area of focus guiding the dissertation: What are the implications, from this inquiry, for gay and lesbian affirmative therapeutic practice?

Engagement. Engagement, within the context of this study, can be understood as active, intentional strategies and practices for navigating anti-LGBT or non-affirming contexts. The relevant dimensions of the engagement domain include: **being educated, dialogue, humanizing the debate, visibility, and participation in the LGBT rights movement.** Finally, most of the engagement strategies described by the couples were aimed at transforming the social context. However, **silence** was used as an intentional strategy of non-engagement, when engagement in the above-mentioned ways would result in harm to the individual or couple.

Being educated. Many participants said that they actively sought information related to the local and national debate on the extension of marriage rights for same-sex couples, and this education had had the effect of helping participants feel informed and up to date with the current legal processes, and the attitudes and arguments on each side of the issue. Couples often reported that they shared this information with one another in order to apprise each other of what they had learned.

For example, Carl explained, “He’s [Jerry] plugged in socially . . . he’s very plugged in to the [LGBT] community . . . and I like to read online news and read the articles and really get in deep, and so I’ll do a lot of research on that side.” Carl later explained, “I think that we both know that we have kind of a responsibility to read the

stories, watch the news, really make sure that we understand what—what’s the new hurdle or whatever it is.” Jerry agreed. “Where is it coming from? Who is involved? Just try to be educated about it. And we both engage in that,” explained Carl.

Kara and Christine explained that they talk about the information that they learn about with one another as well as others. Kara described that with her legal background she can also fill others in on the meaning and strategy behind some of what they learn about in the news. Kara said she believed that her ability to debunk the confusing legal jargon had the effect of comforting Christine. Christine agreed with a laugh and exclaimed, “EXPLAIN IT TO ME!”

Kara then recalled an example which illustrated this strategy. She explained how initially, a specific event in the Prop 8 trial had filled Christine with rage. However, Kara used her legal expertise to point out to Christine that the event could potentially produce an even more favorable outcome in the trial than if it had not happened. Christine agreed with Kara’s insight, saying, “Yeah, and that helped a lot, you know, cause I know nothing about the law, and having her to be able to say, ‘Calm down sweetie, let me explain this to you,’ and then go through it. You know, it helped. OK, maybe we will have to wait a little bit longer, but— ”

I reflected, “So, one of the ways that you have navigated all of this is to get information about what all of this means, and to stay close to what the actual information is and what the possible ramifications of that are?” Kara agreed, “Absolutely, absolutely.” “As opposed to just getting really upset about it?” I asked. Christine agreed, and Kara offered, “Well you have to, you have to do that. You would lose your mind. Or you know, you don’t want to believe all of the wrong information that is out there either.”

Derek and Scott also understood that being educated was a community engagement strategy. When I asked Derek and Scott about the gay and lesbian community's responses to Prop 8, Derek replied, "They are all aware of it. We are all in the same boat. We are all educated, too . . ." Scott agreed, "Everyone is on top of it." Derek continued, "Knowledgeable about it, so we are ready. It's funny, its kind of a given, too. I don't think any of our gay friends are unaware of what's going on." Scott added, "Yes, and there is a lot of stuff on Facebook. You know, someone will post an update on a news item about it, and there will be a lot of supportive messages. Yeah, and that feels good. To see those things." Derek added, "Most gay people, we're just, we're on top of it because it involves us, you know. So I can't say—I have never met anyone who is like, 'What's goin' on?'"

Education extended beyond updates on the processes of the local and national debates; it also involved accessing information which challenged the arguments of the other side. For example, Carl explained, "You know—I found it comforting that um—I have been following this one religious track, and one of the priests mentioned that—his response to the *Bible* and homosexuality was that when the people were writing the *Bible*, it was just assumed everybody was heterosexual. It was just—that was it. There was no concept of what homosexuality was. *For to lie with another man as you would with a woman*—absolutely, if you are straight. You know, if you are straight, you shouldn't be with men. But, it was the concept that homosexuals weren't there. Just assumed that everybody was heterosexual. But, so that's how he described that part of it. So it doesn't really apply to us." As these examples illustrate, participants used the engagement strategy of being educated, describing it as a great tool for helping them to feel informed

and up to date with the current legal processes, and the attitudes and arguments on each side of the issue.

Dialogue. As illustrated in the examples above, dialogue also became an important engagement strategy. The examples demonstrated how the couples engaged one another and friends in dialogue in order to share information and educate one another on the local and national debate. Dialogue as an engagement strategy also came in the form of participants engaging others in conversation as a strategy to create social change. For example, Sam described that they had recently visited a tax professional. He recalled that she “just kept referring to us as domestic partners, domestic partners, domestic partners.” He went on to explain, “I got so annoyed at the end. I was like, ‘OK, let me tell you the difference.’ And then, you know, I explained *legally married*—you know, ‘We aren’t domestic partners, we are a married couple. And you know mostly—cause I was annoyed—but partly to sort of help educate her, so hopefully she didn’t do that to the next couple that came in.’”

Throughout Sam and Joel’s interview, Sam provided many examples about how he engaged people in dialogue in order to educate them on the disparities that he and Joel experience as a same-sex couple with regard to the rights, benefits, and resources which are available to heterosexual couples through marriage. Sam also explained that this education component through dialogue often included clearing up inaccurate information that others had learned about through various sources. Sam explained, “A young coworker of mine . . . after Prop 8 passed, said, ‘Well, I don’t really see the big deal—you’ve got domestic partnership. It’s equal to marriage.’ And shortly thereafter, um—I think it was Lambda Legal—published this *1,100 Different Legal or Tax Ramifications of*

Not Having Your Marriage Recognized by the Federal Government, and I forwarded it to him, and I said, ‘Just in case you don’t want to read the whole 1,100, here are the top 10 that I think really, deeply impact my life.’ And then I sat down with him, and I said, ‘You know, and I move to Colorado, or Arizona, or whatever—and suddenly I am not married anymore. Or, I even move to New York State . . . I am not married there, either. You know, and I can’t go anyplace in the world and still be married.’”

Sam continued, “And so, for me it has also been kinda the education component—when people say dumb things. One of my best friends at work—former best friends at work—because he moved on to another company—was an Evangelical Christian—um, odd how we got to be really good friends, but one of the things that his pastor had told the congregation was that they would be required to perform gay marriages. And so I lit into him about—‘That is absolutely not true!’” Sam went on to say, “I never really thought about [educating people] before. I mean even when the Defense of Marriage Act passed under Clinton, it never even occurred to me, and I just thought, ‘Ehh, well, we couldn’t get married anyway so who cares.’ Um, and now—I find myself, when someone says something dumb around me—and I have a relationship with them—that I will go ahead and inform them without arguing with them. Because I don’t think arguing with them really does any good.”

Jonathan and Gabe described how they engage in similar dialogue practices. In reference to my question about how they had navigated the experiences and challenges of Prop 8 as a couple, Jonathan said, “Well. Of course, we talked to people on a periodic—regular basis about the inequality of Prop 8.” Gabe agreed, “Yeah, ‘cause there are opportunities, and there are moments when we will be in a situation—like say at the

coffee shop which is a place that we like to hang out at . . . we'll get into discussions—and sometimes things like that will come up, and we'll talk about it—because there will be some people who don't have the same perspective or appreciation as we do. And they won't fully understand the magnitude of the situation. So we try to explain it to them.”

Jonathan provided an example of how he had recently informed a friend about the tax issues the couple faces, even as a married couple. “She said, ‘Really?’ I mean—they don't know. They don't know that you don't have full rights. Because that's not their lifestyle.” “They just assume,” Gabe added. Jonathan continued, “They don't hang around gay people, they don't know [married] gay people. . . . A lot of people don't even—they are not opposed to it. They just don't know. So, sometimes when you talk about things, you wind up coincidentally educating them.”

Also building upon the education dimension, many participants described that they educated themselves, and then engaged those on the other side in dialogue. For example, Derek explained that the local and national debate has made him more “aware and knowledgeable.” He expressed that this is because “you have to kind of know your enemy, and see why, why they feel [the way that they do]—”

Derek continued to explain that when the two encounter protesters at festivals and such, Scott tends to walk away. Derek continued, “But I want to talk to them, without yelling. And try to be as intelligent—and I just want to see and break them down. And I can't accept—‘The *Bible* says,’ isn't good enough for me. And I tell them, you know, I grew up Catholic, but I tell them, ‘OK, so if I don't believe in your *Bible*, or God or whatever, so how are you going to tell me that I am not like you? Or you know, as equal

as you.’ But I want to—I want to make them see how ridiculous it sounds for them to say that you can’t have this.”

Jonathan also explained that he and Gabe use dialogue as an engagement strategy for impacting social change by contacting government officials. Jonathan said, “I have written emails—through the channels and whatnot—emails to senators, our senators, itemizing the fact that because we are married I can’t get health benefits through his [Gabe’s] health care. Because it’s a federal health program. So, because we are married—if we were not same sex—I could get the health benefits. So, the debate is going on about this and that—so I am telling them that you need to get rid of DOMA and other things because here I am. I am cheated. I am being treated unequally—in an unequal way. And so that would be some things that I’ve done in particular. After we got married.” Gabe added, “Yeah, we both have started taking it on in conversations. When it seems right. You know, if we are engaged in a debate for example, we will talk about it and defend it.”

Gabe agreed, “Yeah, I mean—the debate locally and nationally has contributed to the fact that we still have a long ways to go, in my opinion. And um, if you are not part of the solution you are a part of the problem . . . and I truly believe that. I mean, silence gets us nowhere.” Jonathan then said, “And if we weren’t married, I couldn’t speak from the same perspective. So, being married—I mean it’s not like I am broadcasting it to the world, but I go to the people that I think can have influence with the laws and with the government—or have lobbyists or something like that—and so I can use the fact that, yes—I am married and I am being treated in an unequal way.”

The visibility of Proposition 8 afforded the couples opportunities to engage around questions posed by important people in their lives, in ways which led to positive or more supportive outcomes. For example, Desiree explained, “Because we’ve been in some of these circles for a long time, straight people feel comfortable coming up to us and saying things like, you know, ‘Tell me about—you know, what do we call you?’ Or they’ll say, ‘Now, what do I say to my boss when my boss says this?’ And of course, Sue and I have had all of this training, so it’s been wonderful to be able to say to people that are concerned. Are they saying the right thing? Are their responses appropriate? How do they navigate it, being in these very conservative workspaces and still stay true to themselves? And so, that’s—I don’t think we’ve really ever had a negative. It’s more of a ‘Tell me about this. How do I navigate that?’”

In another example, the opportunity to engage through dialogue by answering the questions of younger family members became a source of generative tension for Derek and Scott. Scott said, “Derek’s niece and nephew have definitely kinda asked us about our marriage.” Derek added, “Yeah, they are six and ten. So right at that age where—so, they are like, ‘Why do you guys have the same rings?’” Derek explained that he felt somewhat uncomfortable with the questions, and that he felt that it was the children’s parents’ role to provide those answers. He said, “Who’d have thought that a six-year-old would make me shaky? I can talk to anyone else, but when he starts asking, I just go—”

Derek continued, “I have heard them ask. I have heard my nephew ask my brother if we were married, and my brother has said *yes*, and then he [Derek’s nephew] will just kind of laugh.” “Hehehehehe,” Scott demonstrated. “Hehehehehe,” Derek echoed. “*Yes*,

and he said it to me,” Scott offered. Derek sighed. “You know, at six years old they don’t really [understand]—so maybe as they get older.”

Scott stated, “I don’t know, he, it didn’t seem like that good of a thing to him, when he brought it [their marriage] up with me. So, maybe I was misunderstanding or too sensitive about it.” “He is six,” said Derek. Scott replied, “I know, but he is probably, at school he probably hears it’s not a good thing. He is in Orange County, it is a conservative area.”

I asked the couple, “And then Kerry is your 10-year-old niece? Is that right?” Scott and Derek confirmed that this was right. I continued, “And has she asked questions too?” Scott replied, “Yes. We had the sign in the window for *No on Prop 8*. And she said, ‘Is this so you can get married to Uncle?’ or something like that.” Scott continued, “‘So two guys can get married?’ And I was like, ‘Yep.’ I am not going to lie.” Derek responded, “No, I am glad you didn’t. You don’t lie to kids right?” These examples illustrate that beyond educating themselves on the local and national debate, the couples utilized dialogue as an engagement strategy, engaging others in conversation in order to educate them and create change on local/relational levels and on larger social levels.

Humanizing the debate. A third engagement strategy, which also utilizes the above-mentioned dimensions of education and dialogue, is humanizing the debate. Participants often accomplished this by framing the inequalities they experience in terms to which others can more readily relate. For example, Christine explained, “As the process has gone on, my mom has had a lot of questions. And her big thing was, ‘Well you have domestic partnership . . . it’s the same thing.’” Christine described that in order

to illuminate the differences, she told her mother to consider what it would be like if her brother had access to marriage, and her sister didn't because she is female.

Christine continued. "I said, 'You are telling me I am not just quite the same as . . . all my other brothers and sisters. I am not just quite the same. My relationship is not quite the same.' And when I put it that way, (snaps) it kinda went off. A light bulb went on; she never really thought about it that way. And being able to say that almost put a human perspective on it. Even though I have been talking to her the whole time."

Thomas shared a similar strategy. He explained, "My family is a pretty conservative family. I think that I only had one discussion with them sort of about it, and I was trying to let them understand that there shouldn't be any difference in what my relationship is called and from what their relationship is called. . . . I tried to get them to see that if you take the religious argument out of this—then there really is no argument. That you are basing it on a religious, historical belief—that this [heterosexual] type of relationship is more valued than any other. And, I wanted them to see that—that love is love. And I remember telling my father—he was asking me about, 'Well you know, how are you reconciling this with your faith?' And this and that—and I said to him, 'All I can tell you is that love is not a sin. That's all I know. Anything else—I have no idea. But all I know is that my love for Larry is not a sin.' So, that's all I could do."

He went on to say, "I remember telling my sister, and just trying to get her to wrap her head around the idea that 'it's just a word—that you're having trouble with. And the idea that this word—that my relationship be called a marriage—you are having a problem with this word. But all it's saying is that my love is just the same as the love that you have. And I know that you know that that's the same. I know that *you know* that my

love for Larry is just the same as your love for your husband. And so you just have to try to think about—is it really?—it’s just a word.’ So, I remember just having that discussion and really—not really trying to win an argument—but really just having—having her think about it.”

Jerry said, when speaking with others, “One of the things that I really point out to those who are in alliance, but also who maybe do not get it—*do you know how cruel, and inhumane, and un-American it is to give someone their rights, and then to rip them away?* Imagine someone conducting heart surgery with a dull X-Acto knife. That’s exactly what it felt like to me. And I explain it—‘You have no concept of what that feels like. Unless you are in our shoes. You might have empathy, but you don’t know what it feels like. To have—your own people rip away what was given to you.’”

As Jerry continued, he described a tension that exists for him as he considers humanizing the debate as an engagement strategy. He explained, “[But] it all depends on how it hits me. Because sometimes, I just want to go in and bombast because they are not going to come over to our camp anyway. So I might as well just call a bigot a bigot. And then there’s other times I am much more in educational mode. But I am tired of educating those—I am just tired of educating people. I’ve been doing it since I was 27. I am done. I am approaching 60. I am done. Because, we are just saying the same old thing. It’s 2011, folks. Just look around. We are human beings. What is it—how can you look me in the eye—really look me in the eye, into my soul and tell me—and try to convince me that you are a better person than me? Just because I happen to love another man. And that kind of gets them where they live. *You just look me in the eye, in to my soul. And tell me, convincingly. That you are better than me. Simply because I love a little*

differently. And not all that much different. Hopefully it might hit home. Hopefully.”

These examples echo the sentiments of many of the participants who dared to humanize the debate by using comparisons to which others could relate, thus eliciting greater understanding in their listeners.

Visibility. Visibility—the fourth engagement strategy described by participants—had one critical component for couples: representing themselves as a married same-sex couple to those who may not have had much exposure to gay or lesbian individuals or couples, in order to increase their awareness. For example, Jennifer said, “We have offered to go to other churches, you know—just to—you know as a married couple . . . in fact that was a pretty bold step for me to offer.” Jennifer also described how after Courtney’s involvement with a task force at their church, which was addressing the church’s position on LGBT issues such as same-sex marriage, she attended a function that was held for the group and their spouses. She explained, “Courtney . . . wanted me to come. And, you know—my relationship with Courtney is one in which we act like—I guess like I think that married couples do act—you know, you support each other by attending those things. So, when I went as *Courtney’s person*—I mean, I enjoy meeting people and interacting with people. And I am just regular. So that was a good way to show that *Courtney’s person* is regular.”

Jennifer concluded, “So, I guess it’s just the more and more exposure. And that’s why we volunteer to go to other churches, too. To just say, ‘This is who we are. What is it about us that is wrong, or bad or . . . ?’” “Threatening,” said Courtney. Jennifer continued, “Yeah, exactly, threatening.”

Mitch and Cameron also spoke about visibility as an engagement strategy aimed at effecting social change. Mitch said, “Well, the best thing that I can do—we can do—the way I see it is—I don’t have a gazillion, billion dollars to contribute to help, you know, support it. You know, I wish I did, ‘cause I would. The time—if I had all of the time in the world to join and fight and do whatever needs to be done, I would. But I think the best thing we can do is just show how we respect marriage. And just keep ourselves together as a couple. And just show that this is what marriage is all about. You know, people have a problem—well, you know marriage—no the reality is—what marriage is about—what it stands for—and if we can show that, and support that in that way—I think that we’re doing a good job.”

Chloe and Leanne also described multiple ways in which they utilize visibility as an engagement strategy. Chloe explained, “We had a *Just Married* sign in the window. And then we had an equality sign. So it kind of, you know, represent[s] our home as a place that stands for equality.”

Leanne also explained: “I can only be so political at work . . . but the best kind of activism you can have is to just be out about whatever. You know, when you say nothing you’ve actually caused some harm. So, if somebody asks, I would, you know, state my position—or I am really out about that I am married to a woman. Or that I support this thing. Just in everyday conversation when it’s not going to put somebody on the defensive. Because, that’s it. If you’re really out in little bits all of the time then it starts to sort of diffuse into people’s mindsets.”

Chloe agreed, “Yeah, make them aware.” Leanne added, “So, it’s just increasing awareness.” Chloe explained, “Yeah, it’s kind of a continuation of what I have been

doing all along, anyway. Is just being out. I've been out at work for ages. It kind of started way back in my first job in the late '80s. I was—kind of like wow, should I say anything? Is it still a fact that I could lose my job or not? And, it didn't seem to matter so it's like it didn't hurt there, so when I got my next job, I sort of let people know me for other things first, so that it's not 100% of what they know about me. And so by the time that they know that I am gay, it's like 1% of what they know about me . . . OK, so it doesn't blind them to everything else. Sometimes, if that's the first thing that they know, then it puts this wall up. So, I have always eventually come out, and they've already befriended me by that point. But to kinda be out as much as we can."

Chloe and Leanne also described that they utilized visibility as an engagement strategy through their participation in community protest. Chloe made a fist and said, "We marched in the march." Leanne also made a fist and said, "We marched with handmade signs." "We had great signs," said Chloe. "We did have great signs," agreed Leanne.

Chloe explained, "Yeah, yours said, *A simple majority should not change the constitution*. And mine said, *If our marriage threatens your marriage then your marriage needs help*." Chloe continued, "Yeah, that was great. That was a huge—I didn't expect such a big turn out. That was very energizing and empowering. And a great memory for us to be in that march together as one of the couples that got in that little window of time." Leanne then recalled, "We also participated in the—we were friends with a professional photographer who did a series called *142 Days*. And it's just photographs of couples that got married during that time period."

Amy shared similar sentiments, explaining that “[the visibility of] my marriage has hopefully impacted the debate.” She continued, “And I have always had knowledge of how we’re discriminated against in terms of our committed long-term relationships—financially, legally, emotionally—so many ways. So, I just think that the fact that we are married—and you know, neither one of us makes a very big deal at our work place. We go to work, we do our job the best we can, and we come home to our community, and to our family. It’s that silent presence, of ‘this is who I am, and you’re not, because you don’t like me, doesn’t mean that your opinion of me is going to change me.’ So, it’s just one more step in visibility. If that makes sense.”

Amy then explained that ever since she had first contracted with her company in 1997, she had “never made a big deal out of being gay.” She continued to explain, “I never have made a big deal that I don’t wear dresses even though that was a very big deal when I first started. You know, ‘Oh my god, you’re not wearing a dress.’ It’s like, ‘No, I don’t own a dress.’” “She was the girl who wore pants,” added Karen.

Amy explained, “So, it’s just been a presence. That you like me or you don’t. I won’t scream in your face about it. We did that back in the ‘80s and that works for some things—‘80s and ‘90s. You know, to move some issues forward . . . but by being present and having them know you as a human being. And that you have the same needs and the same desires. So, I think it’s a silent presence, and that that presence is growing. And it’s stronger, it’s more visible. People are beginning, I think, to understand, you know, that marriage—for us, is not going to destroy who they are. It’s not, and should not be threatening to them and their families and their relationships, and their sense of community. So, you don’t have to like me . . . you don’t even have to like what I do. But,

you know. I have value. So, just strengthening that visibility. Not just our marriage, but all of us who have gotten married. That presence . . . hopefully has strengthened the debate.” Thus, visibility was not a passive act for the participants. It was a very political engagement strategy, which, for many, had its roots in earlier fights for LGBT equality.

Participation in the LGBT rights movement. A fifth engagement strategy, described throughout the couples’ narratives, is participation in the LGBT rights movement. For some, Proposition 8 incited their participation in the movement, while others had been involved for decades previous to Proposition 8. This often had the effect of the participants’ experiencing greater levels of social support, a strategy which will be discussed in greater detail later in this section.

Carol and Sylvia provided one example. Carol explained, “Well, [it was] my very first protest march ever.” “Oh, yes! I am so proud of you!” Sylvia exclaimed. Carol said, “We participated in the one that was shortly after [the election]. It was the following weekend.” “We did two, I think,” said Sylvia. “We did two—but it was the one that was about a week after the election that was huge here in San Diego,” explained Carol. “It was a really big one—it was great,” said Sylvia.

Joel and Sam also described that participating in the rallies and marches was a meaningful engagement strategy for them. Joel explained, “Those [the rallies] were significant—for me anyway. The rallies—because, you know—everybody was pretty fired up, right, so that’s kind of—along with us together—participating in those things was definitely supportive during that.”

James also recalled, “We did so many of them [rallies and marches] after that [Prop 8 passed]—we went to several rallies—we live in Hillcrest, so we went to several

rallies at the park. We marched in the streets—we did several things.” “Saw some great signs,” said Steven. “Yeah, so—as a couple we did that,” said James.

Participation in the LGBT rights movement often took the shape of marching and rallying, campaigning, television appearances, phone banks, and committee and organizational participation. Some participants described participating in ways that were a little more behind-the-scenes but equally valuable. For example, Sue explained, “You [Desiree] did a lot of things that would support the work. She would get materials together . . . so that if parents came to volunteer and their kids—they needed to bring their kids with them, that there was stuff that the kids could do.”

Leanne also explained, “I did child care for the phone bank.” Chloe remembered, “Oh, yeah. During the phone banks for Proposition 8 you—she didn’t want to do the phone bank itself but it was a big—it was definitely a valuable service you provided so that people with kids could do the phone bank. And you were playing around with the kids and giving them games and stuff to do.” Leanne said, “I had the kids out in the street in Hillcrest with sidewalk chalk. Took them for ice cream.”

These examples illustrate that organized participation in the LGBT rights movement proved to be a meaningful and important engagement strategy for the participants. However, tension existed for some of the participants when engagement in the LGBT rights movement resulted in their feeling like their participation became harmful to them. For example, Cameron explained, “What I did individually is during that whole thing, I volunteered for the *No on Prop 8* campaign [phone bank]. That was . . . horrible. A horrible thing. I mean, I am very passionate about all of this stuff, but—

being on the telephone and talking to these idiots was—was not good for me. Not good for me at all. So that lasted for a little bit.”

“Was it the feedback that they were giving you, when you were making calls?” I asked. Cameron agreed, “Yeah, yeah. Just the ugly, ugly. You know. Just the ridiculous—points of view and attitudes and—I mean, just awful . . . awful . . . awful. So, the whole Prop 8 thing—we kind of have to—as important as it is—as passionate as I feel about it—personally I had to take a step back. Just for my own wellbeing. Because it just—it just all hurt my feelings. You know.”

Desiree and Sue described another example. Sue said, “Right, so—we first started participating in the *Decline to Sign* trying to get people not to sign . . . to get Prop 8 on the ballot.” Desiree shook her head, “Standing out in front of Target asking for a signature. . . . We asked for peoples’ support, and asked them not to sign. And I just couldn’t do it. I mean, I don’t want to be around a lot of people. I don’t want to have to go up to people and say, ‘Do you support gay marriage? You do, oh—well that’s good. Would you sign this so we know that you support?’”

Desiree continued to explain that when people would say they were not supporters, she would reply, “Well, we hope that you will decline to sign.” She then said, “Well, I just did not like doing that. And . . . then I felt guilty because Sue was so good about that. I mean, she was probably the best of all of the hundreds of people that did it. And I was just—it was just too painful. I could do that for an hour, and I was emotionally drained. So, I had guilt. From that. And so I did what I could.”

Silence. Finally, most of the engagement strategies described by the couples were aimed at transforming the social context. However, silence was used as an intentional

strategy of non-engagement when engagement in the above-mentioned ways would result in harm to the individual or couple. When I asked about negative responses that the couple had experienced to their marriage and throughout the period of Proposition 8, and all of the ongoing legal battles connected to its passing, Scott and Derek explained that while people did not usually go out of their way to engage them in negative ways, there were times when they chose not to bring the issues up as subjects of conversation. Scott explained, “I think you just don’t want to bring it up. You go to an event where, like when Shaun [a friend of the couple] is there I just don’t feel like making a scene. It’s like when you go to places and you don’t talk politics. You know, what are the things you don’t talk about? Politics and religion. It’s kinda like that. You know, you just don’t bring it up in diverse company.” Derek cautioned, “If they bring it up I am ready. I am not backing down, you know. So, I am not going to ruin someone’s night or day. But, I’ll—if I hear it in earshot, I certainly ain’t going to ignore it.”

Further, many couples described that they would hesitate to or chose not to disclose their marital status in relationship to their sexual orientation, if they were concerned that it could have negative personal or professional ramifications or was inappropriate for the context. Several examples of this were already provided in the second emergent theme, *Not a Simple Matter: The Complexities of Language Choice*, earlier in the narrative.

The engagement domain was comprised of the relevant dimensions of **being educated, dialogue, humanizing the debate, visibility, participation in the LGBT rights movement, and silence**. As these six relevant dimensions of the engagement domain illustrate, the participants utilized active, intentional strategies and practices in

order to navigate anti-LGBT and non-affirming contexts. The couples explained that these strategies and practices were helpful to them and had the effect of buffering them and their relationships from the ongoing challenges related to the legal and national debate on extending marriage rights to same-sex couples.

Support. Support became the second domain that the couples described, which they utilized as they navigated the experiences and challenges of the local and the national debate on the extension of marriage rights to same-sex couples. Within the context of the strategies and actions that the couples have taken, the relevant dimensions of the support domain include: **assessing the support of others, accessing the support of others, offering support to others, and building a supportive network.**

Assessing the support of others. Assessing the support of others was an important strategy for the couples as they chose how to navigate their contexts. Many examples of this occurred earlier in this narrative in the participants' descriptions of how context influenced their language choices. Assessing the support of others also came in the form of evaluating their actions. Many participants spoke of how the actions of others conveyed their support for their relationship. Carl and Jerry provided one example, outlining how they connected with their families in order to assess their level of support surrounding the vote on Prop 8. Jerry explained, "Well, when it was on the ballot, I got on the phone with my family and said, 'We need to talk about this,' because I know you are going to vote.' And they were all in our camp. Good. That was important. It wasn't an easy conversation, because we just never—I sensed they would be, but you just never know." "So you were overt in making that phone call?" I asked. Carl agreed that Jerry had been overt; he fully understood Jerry's feelings that it was very important to know

where his family stood on the issue. This was true, despite the potential risk that the conversation could confirm a negative position.

Accessing the support of others. Building upon the assessment of other's potential to be supportive, the next dimension of the support domain was accessing the support of others. The participants accessed the support of one another, their friends, families, and communities, and also, as previously illustrated through the emergent theme *Our Commitments have Rich Histories*, sought legal protections for their relationships.

Participants often described that they sought out the support of one another as a way to navigate the process of Proposition 8 and all of the ongoing legal battles connected to its passing. For instance, Jennifer explained, "I feel that our relationship does provide a lot of support through difficult issues and certainly during that [the local and national debate]."

Karen and Amy spoke quite a bit about how the two have navigated Proposition 8 and all of the ongoing legal battles connected to its passing through offering one another their support. Karen said, "When Prop 8 passed, there was one of us—was really deeply affected." "Right, that was you," Amy said pointing to Karen. She then recalled that she had been more deeply impacted when the Supreme Court later upheld Prop 8. Karen continued, "Amy really—was supportive of me through that time." Karen then confirmed, "Actually, I think you are right, because by the time it got to the Supreme Court, I just figured that 'well, they're just going to uphold it.' I thought it was a given. And so, when that decision was made then—and that one affected you [points to Amy] more deeply. And so I think that we were lucky in that we were affected to different, on different degrees by each of those decisions, so we could be there for each other."

Amy explained, “Karen and I have a really strong, supportive relationship. And I think that we give each other a lot of space and we also give each other a lot of support at the same time . . . you know, there are ups and downs in life, anyways. And I think that you know there were probably times when one of us was more strongly moved or affected by some of this. Like we kind of mentioned before. . . . But, it’s a matter of providing the space for somebody to feel as deeply as they are feeling. And also the support and love to let them know that you are there. As they move through that.”

Karen said, “But that’s the whole point. So, I think that whether it’s around Prop 8 or whether it’s around anything else that we’re dealing with. We just over time have really figured out how to recognize when the other person needs us—either needs us to come closer or needs us to step back. Or needs us to do something. You know.”

Desiree and Sue expressed similar sentiments when I asked them if there was a particular instance that would exemplify how the two of them came to support one another throughout the ongoing process of Prop 8. Desiree said, “You know, I just think we do that so much every single day. It’s woven in little bits throughout our whole relationship. For me, there isn’t one—*Oh this happened*. But every day, it was, ‘I love you, I appreciate you. Thank you. What can I do? How can we make this better?’ So, I think that just those little bits every single day.”

Sylvia and Carol also said that they accessed one another for support throughout that time. Sylvia explained, “I think we just sort of are depressed together when something bad happens—or if it is something celebratory—we are just on the same page with it. Kind of in sync.”

Scott and Derek provided another example of the importance of the two coming together to support one another. Scott recalled that on election night, the two were vacationing in Mexico City. He explained that the two watched the election results come in. “We were all excited about Obama. And then California came in and . . . yeah, I remember laying there in bed that night with you, and we were just talking about it.” “And just goin’, ‘Awe,’” added Derek. “So, if we hadn’t been there for each other it would have been hard. To just sit there and stew about it on your own,” Scott explained. “Or had we not been married. It might have been harder,” Derek posited. “Uh huh, what if you had nobody to talk to about it that night, all of your frustrations you know?” Scott asked.

The couples also described that accessing the support of their friends, families, and communities has been incredibly important throughout this ongoing process. For instance, Jason offered, “Talking to your [Joe’s] aunt and uncle sometimes—it’s nice to know that there are straight allies out there. Who see it and are totally with us and get it. That’s kind of nice.”

Karen and Amy provided a rich example. Karen explained, “You know, the other thing is, we have a really close group of friends, of four couples.” “All of whom got married. We all were at each other’s weddings,” said Amy. Karen then explained, “And I think that we really, through all of this, have been each other’s support. Through emails and phone calls. One of our friends is an attorney, so she’s like always interpreting all of the legal jargon for us and sending out emails. One of our friends is a conspiracy theorist (both laughing), so she sends us all of the conspiracy information. So, I mean, you know—it’s a really eclectic group. And we have some really heated discussions. But we

also have—we have celebrated together, we’ve marched together, we’ve been at each other’s weddings. We have cried together. We’ve gone and, you know—drunk champagne, and we’ve gone and got drunk (both laughing) together. Based on whatever the political decision of the day was. So, I think that we are definitely, we just definitely have great support for each other, but we have a really good support network, I think—who understand.”

Karen then said, “Honestly, I think that when that was all going on, we just. I don’t think we communicated any differently or did anything any differently [with one another], but I definitely think we connected more frequently and more deeply with our close circle of friends. I think that we saw them a lot more often and spent a lot more time debriefing with them . . . that’s what strikes me about that time. Not about anything different that we did.”

Sue and Desiree also explained that they have accessed the support of others. Sue said, “These wonderful young people [the *No on Prop 8* organizers] that are still our Facebook friends and still find ways to support us and remind us that they care for us a lot . . .” Desiree added, “So, I think that you don’t navigate really difficult times if you don’t have a broad base. And if you don’t—I think we just were extraordinarily fortunate to have all of these new people in our lives and then have our faith community.”

Sam and Joel provided an example of how they accessed the LGBT community’s support after the passing of Proposition 8. Sam said, “When Prop 8 passed, you know—we had a—kind of a group of friends get together and we—um—were all sort of sharing our grief about the Prop 8 passing. And . . . the mayor was at the Lesbian and Gay Center and, yeah, we were kind of sitting there and hugging each other.”

“That was pretty emotional,” said Joel. Sam agreed, “Yeah, that was really emotional.” Joel added, “The local political authorities were addressing you know—the issue.” Sam later explained, “We did the first big rally together, which I think was the Saturday right after Prop 8 passed—or two Saturdays after. We did that one. And we—you know, walked together the whole time—and held hands and whatever.” Joel responded, “For me it seemed that we were able to get together and kind of focus on something—right. We went to a lot of the rallies and marches and things. So, that was a lot of fun—and kind of unifying. Like, not only us—but like us *in the community*. So that was—I found that to be a really good thing.”

Thomas also spoke about how he and Larry accessed support from the gay and lesbian community in ways that he experienced as unifying. He explained, “We did march with the rally down to the county building—we did that. And I guess my feeling as far as the community is that—you know that there is a sense of purpose, a sense of unity—that you know—that this is important. And it’s not something that can just be let slide. And that it’s a very important—important issue. And a very strong one, so that we need to make sure that our voice is heard. So I felt that that was a good, strong message and something that I was willing to stand up and say *this is important to me*.”

A final way that the couples described that they accessed support for their relationships throughout the ongoing process of Proposition 8, and the local and national debate on the extension of marriage rights to same-sex couples, was through obtaining further legal support and protection for their relationship. Many examples of couples obtaining this legal support for their relationships were described earlier in this narrative. As the above examples all illustrate, accessing the support of one another, important

others, and institutions was another helpful strategy for the couples as they navigated the process of Prop 8 and the ongoing challenges they experience related to the legal and national debate on extending marriage rights to same-sex couples.

Offering support to others. Offering support to others also became an important strategy for navigating anti-LGBT or non-affirming contexts. For example, Courtney explained that while she had been on the task force committee at her church, she and Jennifer also extended their support to another lesbian couple on the task force who lost a child. Jennifer explained, “We had dinner with them once or twice after they lost [the child]—so again, it was extending ourselves to show support to other people who were in pain and—kind of a double pain situation with losing that child.”

The two agreed, coming together to reach out to other people was a way that they had navigated their experiences throughout the local and national debate. Jennifer offered, “A value we share is extending ourselves to others. And that’s really helpful too because it’s not just one of us that says we really should go help out so and so, and so and so. It’s important for us to support each other but also our extended family and friends.”

Sue and Desiree also reached out to others in supportive ways. They explained to me that others have sought them out for guidance. Sue added, “And I think they’ve also asked for our support for issues that they are concerned with. And that’s given me—or us an opportunity to participate in other things with immigration reform, and so then bringing our relationship into that—it doesn’t have anything necessarily with LGBT immigration but we can bring that aspect of it forward or just be in the presence of people who may not have ever had access to a married lesbian couple—who have grandchildren.”

Sue continued, “And so, that’s another thing that I think is a benefit because it also brings me to new places. Because right now, we are sitting and waiting for marriage equality stuff, so there’s nothing in that area to do specifically but wait. And that doesn’t mean I am not going to be working on other social justice issues. So, people [are] seeking us out because [of] either our organizational skills or what we know, or just two bodies to help—whatever.” “Or bring food. I can always bring food,” said Desiree.

Kara and Christine also provided an example of how supporting others meant a great deal to them personally. Kara and Christine both agreed that one reason they decided to marry legally on June 17th was to be part of the group of couples who were married the first day that it became available to same-sex couples in San Diego. Christine stated, “We wanted to, you know, show—be down there to support other couples who weren’t, didn’t have the domestic partnership and hadn’t had that ceremony. But go down and support them, and then also be one of those that were able to experience that day.”

Couples also found it meaningful to support the larger movement for LGBT and marriage equality through monetary donations. Sam discussed how this strategy evolved for him. “I think that [the passing of Prop 8] was really—that was one of the first times that I ever took advantage of services at the Lesbian and Gay Center in Hillcrest. And so, we now contribute money to the Lesbian and Gay Center. And, um—also with the passage of Proposition 8 we found Equality California to be more important. And so we started contributing money to Equality California. We actually started putting our money to work.” Sam described the two as “sort of activist types—but we’re probably like everybody else. You know, we’re close by activists. If there is a march in Hillcrest or a march in North Park—or a march in downtown, we’re there! Right. But, marching on

Sacramento or, you know—going to Washington D.C. yeah, probably not . . . so, our contribution—we decided our contribution would be financial.”

Additionally, Jonathan explained that he made monetary donations to HRC [Human Rights Campaign]. He later stated, “It’s just a matter of really supporting the people who support our position. And reminding them that we are still here. And giving money to people who need the money in order to act on our behalf as lobbyists in Washington. Not much you can do with the courts, so you just keep your fingers crossed with them (crosses fingers). There’s nothing you can do there. So it’s always ongoing.”

Chloe and Leanne also offered their support through monetary contributions. Chloe explained, “And of course, we, I sent money in to so many organizations trying to do as—it’s like can’t you just all combine together and share resources?” Leanne recalled, “We sent [money] to Equality California . . . in honor of our marriage.” Chloe added that Equality California had also suggested that people could make donations to the organization in the couple’s name as a wedding gift, and so Chloe and Leanne also registered for that as a way of making a monetary contribution.

As these examples illustrate, in addition to offering support through their actions, many couples made monetary contributions a very important way to support organizations who fought for marriage equality. However, tension occurred for participants when they felt that their monetary donations were poorly handled. For example, Steven explained, “Well, we have—we still support those different agencies like HRC [Human Rights Campaign] that are out there. . . . Today, it’s not so much on the scene. We do follow closely, at least personally—the political machinations that are going on with regards to trying to overturn it . . . but, have I been donating as much as I

did? I honestly have to say that I was a little perturbed by—by what I thought was a poor use of money. So, I—that part of me is a little, um—disturbed by what I see as constant requests for more money and yet, very little action.”

Building a supportive network. The majority of participants felt that their marriages were very supported and affirmed by their friends, families, and communities throughout the process of Proposition 8 and all of the ongoing legal battles connected to its passing. It was not a coincidence that the couples had played a very intentional role in constructing those supportive networks for themselves. Jennifer and Courtney provided one example of how and why they had done so. Jennifer explained, “We live in Hillcrest and have a supportive church. So, we’ve got kind of an exceptional situation.” Courtney interjected, “But I think we’ve created that. Because it was important to us.”

Jennifer agreed, “Yeah I think so, yeah—we’ve worked towards that.” When I asked the two to tell me more about how they have created such a supportive network, Courtney explained, “Well, the fact that we chose a church that would be supportive of us—that was really important. We looked at lots of different churches before we made a choice. That was just really important. And for me, living in a community that is supportive is important. So that’s all choice . . . it didn’t just happen.”

Sue and Desiree provided another example of how they had been intentional in building their support network over the years and particularly through the process of Prop 8. Sue said, “We have our individual and our common support groups as well as our 23 years of togetherness.” Desiree explained, “I think that’s really helpful, because I have a group of wonderful friends and she has a group of wonderful friends. And then, you know—we have many friends in common.”

Desiree then recalled, “You know, the other interesting thing about this whole Prop 8 thing is how we saw young people working. And, kind of the love they generated around that office. It was really wonderful for me, because I have some young friends now that I would have never had. And, I think that just being able to talk with them and we have those friends in common—I think that was one of the ways that we navigated it, too. Young people see things so much differently. For me . . . it was forming new friendships. It was forming new support systems. It was continuing to talk with each other. And affirming each others’ actions.”

Desiree expressed, “So, I think that you don’t navigate really difficult times if you don’t have a broad base. And if you don’t—I think we just were extraordinarily fortunate to have all of these new people in our lives and then have our faith community.” Sue then said, “And all of them—you know, it was OK to cry with them. Or it was OK to be angry. And it was OK to be whatever. And then, you know, move on. And to know that there are so many people there for us.”

Amy and Karen also created their support networks intentionally. Amy explained, “Everybody I work with is politically involved—everybody, when I think of community, everybody that I know is somehow fighting for marriage equality, fighting for transnational rights, fighting for—you know HIV awareness and health, fighting for whatever. Everybody.” Karen added, “We don’t have very many straight friends in what I would consider our larger community, and the ones we do are completely supportive. Because if they weren’t they wouldn’t be in our community.” “Yes, yes,” Amy agreed.

Carl and Jerry provided another example. Jerry said, “As far as—I don’t know of anyone in my life that was for it [Prop 8]. If they were, they wouldn’t be [in my life].

That's a deal breaker right there. Sorry, it's a deal breaker. If you don't support me in my marriage why are you in my life? Period. The door is that a-way. But we've never had that experience."

These examples all illustrate support, the second domain that the couples utilized as they navigated the experiences and challenges of the local and the national debate on the extension of marriage rights to same-sex couples. **Assessing the support of others, accessing the support of others, offering support to others, and building a supportive network** were all important strategies which they explained were helpful to them and, like the engagement domain, had the effect of buffering them and their relationships from the ongoing challenges related to the legal and national debate on extending marriage rights to same-sex couples.

Perspective. A third and very complex domain, perspective, was utilized by all of the couples as they navigated the experiences and challenges of the local and the national debate on the extension of marriage rights to same-sex couples. Within the context of the strategies and actions that the couples have taken, the relevant dimensions of the perspective domain are many: **accepting family members where they are, situating wins and losses within the perspective of the larger movement, locating the source of stress outside of themselves and their relationships, turning the *Yes on 8* arguments upside down, not buying into the lethargy of the LGBT community, situating the importance of the issue in relation to other social issues, drawing boundaries, creating balance, and offering solutions.** Perspective also applied to their adversaries. When couples perceived the opposition as being irrational or not having perspective, they

experienced tension, particularly when their opponents' aims sought to violate the separation between church and state.

Accepting family members where they are. The first relevant dimension of the perspective domain is accepting family members where they are. Thomas provided one example of how he has done this. Thomas explained, "I know in my heart—I mean—I know that probably—my father probably voted for it [Prop 8], my younger brother and my older brother probably both voted for it. I am not sure about—my oldest bother—he probably voted against it. And I don't know what my sister did . . . so, I don't know where it eventually ended up—but at the same time I knew that regardless of what happened I knew that my—my family loves me."

Kara also described that although her mother is very supportive of their relationship, she knows that it is still difficult for her to navigate anti-LGBT sentiments in vocal ways. Kara explained, "My mom, she just kind of follows my emotional roller coaster of 'YEAH! THEY WON. . . . No, no they didn't' (laughing). 'LOOK THEY WON AGAIN! No, no they still didn't.' You know, she is in a position, too. Because she is still up in northern California and her friends don't know. Most of her friends don't know. So, she has had the experience of listening on November 4th to 'Oh I sure hope that [Prop 8] passes' (shaking head) and just, cringing inside. But just not having the courage, and that is fine (looking at Christine). That's where she is at. So I can't—do that. But you know, [she is] very supportive—" These examples illustrate two of many experiences that the couples shared in which they endeavored to foster and preserve connection with those who were important to them, even when these family members' personal beliefs or

their ability to stand up against the personal beliefs of others did not position them in supportive ways with regard to the interview couples' marital relationships.

Situating wins and losses within the perspective of the larger movement. Chloe and Leanne provided one example of the second dimension within the perspective domain, situating wins and losses within the perspective of the larger movement for LGBT rights. Chloe explained that most people she knows can't believe that the extension of marriage rights to same-sex couples is even an issue. She explained, "They just think it's ridiculous that we're having this discussion . . . and in the back of my mind, I am thinking you are younger, and when I was your age I never even thought we would be having this discussion period. I mean that was back when—I would be thrilled if they let us keep our jobs and not kick us out of our homes. That was my idea of where I thought we might be lucky to end up by the time I was old."

Leanne then explained, "It feels kind of premature. Actually, to be dealing with it. Except—at least we are on the bus, you know. We can move up a seat here, and then we can move up another seat. And pretty soon we'll be at the front of the bus. But it feels kind of premature to be fighting for the whole bus at this point because somebody will notice we are fighting and kick us off."

Scott and Derek provided further examples. For instance, in talking about how the local and national debate has impacted their experience of marriage, Scott proposed that they try "not to paint it all in a negative light. . . . It's also very encouraging just to see how the numbers have changed in favor of gay marriage over the years. I mean, it is just really amazing to see the shift in opinion. I mean, it's like another major civil rights issue it feels like. And I think it's great, you know it's really affirming to hear people who are

straight and who are on our side on this issue.” Scott later added, “And we are fortunate to live now, when these things are happening. I mean, who would have thought that gay marriage would become legal during our life time?” “Or a black president. I mean all of these things,” said Derek. “Yeah, some big changes happening,” said Scott. Derek added, “I am just going ‘wow.’”

Derek explained, “Even ‘Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell.’ We are following that. That’s another one where you are just goin’ ‘wow.’ There is something, it’s kinda breaking down. And then there is another stay and stuff. So it’s just, we are just so used to it. But uh, but the fact that it’s still being talked about in the news. I just feel like, it’s not going to go away. And, you know, anyone with common sense knows that you can’t discriminate against—so clearly it is discrimination. Again, you know, the time will eventually come.”

Gabe and Jonathan also referenced “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell” as a way of situating the wins and losses connected to the extension of marriage rights to same-sex couples within the perspective of the larger movement for LGBT rights. Jonathan reported one of the brighter moments that the couple celebrated, when they had a private toast at home after the senate passed the repeal of “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell.” Gabe added, “That was a personal moment.” Jonathan said, “Yeah, it was a personal thing. So, I mean—you take every victory and—and the little small ones become important.”

I later asked them to tell me more about that toast. Jonathan explained, “Well, they finally passed it. We were at home—I said, ‘We need to toast, something—’” Gabe exclaimed, “So we broke out a bottle of champagne! I mean, we felt that was a big moment. It’s like, it’s about damn time. So yeah, we prepared ourselves to celebrate—

just the two of us at home . . . ” I asked them why that moment stood out to the two of them. Jonathan explained, “Well, it was a momentous moment.”

Larry and Thomas also described their thoughts on the passing of Prop 8, in the perspective of the larger movement for civil rights. Larry explained, “Well number one, everybody comes up with the fact of the numbers. That we did lose by a very small margin. And there is hope for the next time it comes up. And so we took hope in that. But when they asked me to speak, you know—Thomas and I—I said, ‘Look, we were joined by God—and that is something that no man and no government can take away from us.’ You know. What I hate is the fact that we are still second-class citizens—in the same way that they didn’t allow black people to marry—in the same way that they, you know—didn’t allow black and white people to marry later. You know—but we can still see how we’ve climbed with those issues. And this is the next step.”

Mitch provided another example of how he contextualized his experiences of Prop 8 through a historical lens. Mitch explained, “He [Cameron] says, ‘Why do people even have to do it [debate]? I am on the other side thinking—good, let there be debates. They are convincing more people that it’s fine. You are at least getting—educating a lot more people that are ignorant towards it. That’s my hope. That’s the way I am looking at it. I am thinking positive of it. You know. Sometimes you do need debates so that you can educate people who have no idea. You know, because the reality is—truthfully—there is a lot of information getting out there.”

Mitch added, “And there—and like I said—it’s in the 9th Circuit . . . they are getting the laws together. They are finding out what laws do apply and which ones need to be applied to make this thing legal. So, I am fine with that. Straighten this shit out—

you know? Get your ducks all in a row. You know, you can't just walk in and file and—oh, this is it. Get everything in a row so that this doesn't happen again. Ever. Ever. And we can have equality in this country. I mean, there is so much hatred in this world for Christ's sake, let's just get it over with . . . it needs to be right—it needs to be legally right.” These examples illustrate the multiple ways that the couples situated the wins and losses of Prop 8, and all of the ongoing legal battles connected to its passing, within the perspective of the larger movement for LGBT rights as a way of gaining perspective on these events.

Locating the source of stress outside of themselves and their relationships. The couples provided many examples of how they located sources of stress outside of themselves and their relationships. The first way that they did this was to say, “It's not my problem. It's their problem.” Steven and James provided an example of how they did this. Steven said, “We were watching Nate Berkus' show—we taped it and we were watching it today—and he happened to have Carson Kressley on as a surprise guest and you know—they were camping it up a bit—and James couldn't help pointing out—‘Look at that—there's somebody in the audience that is totally against that.’ And we rewound it, and he showed me who it was, and I said, ‘Well, you know what? In my opinion, that's their problem.’ It really is their problem. And the way they react shouldn't affect us. It really shouldn't. It's something. I guess you have to be . . . um—you have to be aware of—personally I have been the victim of hate crimes. So, um—you know you have to be aware of that, and it's OK to be *out and proud*, but you have to be politically correct when you are in certain situations.”

Mitch also provided several examples, some of which were referenced earlier. He explained, “I don’t care about what other people think. It’s just that simple. Like I said, everybody has the right to their own opinion. I don’t care what anyone else thinks. I will support equal rights. I will support marriage equality for everyone and do what I can. But I am not going to utilize my energy to try and understand why somebody is against it. That’s, that’s their problem. Not mine. You know, so. It’s not gonna happen.”

Participants also located the source of stress outside of themselves and their relationships by naming those whom they considered to be oppressors. Several instances of this naming have occurred throughout this narrative. In one example, Amy offered, “Well, it’s about outside forces.” Jerry provided another example. “First time in history. That rights were ever taken away. And it’s happened repeatedly throughout the country. And we know exactly where it’s coming from.” I asked Jerry to say more this. He replied, “Well, it’s all religion. This is all religion.”

Turning the Yes on 8 arguments upside down. Naming the oppressors also occurred when participants utilized another perspective strategy: turning the *Yes on 8* arguments upside down. After Jerry explained that religion was a conduit for oppression, he said, “If you measure what we’ve done to the Constitution. No issue. You measure it up to the *Bible*, you may have a debate. But I am not Christian. So I don’t live by Christian law. And I really resent someone who tries to force me to live according to a religion that I don’t embrace. To me that’s profoundly unconstitutional. So, it’s strictly a constitutional argument. For me. How can you read the Constitution, and then force me to live according to your religion? Simply because you don’t approve. Well then, don’t get married to someone of the same sex. Done deal. But if you really adhere to the

Constitution then you have no argument. That's the basic separation of church and state. And I am just standing for civil marriage. Because I think religion is a bunch of hooey." "Is this something Carl, that you are involved in as well? Is this a dialogue between the two of you?" I asked. Carl replied, "Yes, yeah. Except I am a Christian."

Joe and Jason provided another example of turning the *Yes on 8* arguments upside down. Joe explained, "Well, it seems to happen regularly. Oh—so the argument on the other side is that gays destroy—" "American families," chimed Jason. "American families," said Joe. Jason asked, "You know the comedian Lewis Black, right? He's on—like the Daily Show. He does 'Back in Black'—he's very angry." Joe explained, "He's very angry—and Jewish comic. And he kind of gets up there and gets angry at all of the—he says the things that people would get angry and say, if they really had the guts to." Jason explained, "He says it's actually—it's how he vents out his anger is like, you know, putting it all into his acts so, you know, he doesn't bottle it up. We saw this bit he did once about how—how the gays will, you know, dress all in black and sneak into an American family home."

Joe added, "Basically what he is saying is that, 'Gays destroy the American family.' Are you kidding me? Really? This is the best you can come up with? And this is how we feel. Because, we say the same thing. We are like—'Are you kidding me? I don't care about your children. We don't care about your kids.' We're not trying to go, 'Come be gay with us! Come on! Yes!'" "Want some candy?" Jason joked.

"No, that's not what this is about. But we will accept them, if you do not. If they are really gay. That's the irony here—is that we feel like we have more compassion and

acceptance then they ever would. And this is their flesh and blood—not ours. That’s what’s so frustrating about it,” said Joe.

Further, the personal and social meanings that each couple described were in contrast to the positions asserted by *Yes on 8*. For example, *Yes on 8* claimed that they were not taking rights away from gay and lesbian people, and that extending rights to same-sex couples would lead to greater social ills and destroy the institution of marriage. In contrast, the couples’ experiences illustrated the opposite: that on a larger social level, it was not that big of a deal, and on a personal level, it was significant. For example, in speaking about both themselves and the other gay couples they knew who had married legally, Derek reported, “The opportunity came and we all did it . . . and I don’t think the world has changed because of it, and I don’t think society has collapsed. So I don’t know what the big deal is.”

Later, Scott added, “What’s weird is that gay marriage has been legal for a while in Massachusetts and the world hasn’t ended, right? And it didn’t end here in California.” “Or Europe,” chimed Derek. Among the discussions of how legal marriage has impacted the couple’s relationships positively, in ways which were not likely possible without it, Kara described that, “being able to get that ‘piece of paper (gestures quotation marks with her fingers). Even though it is just a piece of paper, it’s not. (Shrugs) you know?” For Kara and Christine, the ability to recognize their relationship with this “piece of paper” was very significant to them in their lives. These examples are a few among the many that the couples provided of how turning the *Yes on 8* arguments upside down allowed them to gain perspective while navigating the challenges of the ongoing local and national debate on the extension of marriage rights to same-sex couples.

Not buying into the lethargy of the LGBT community. Not buying in to the lethargy of the LGBT community is a perspective strategy and also, at times, a source of tension for participants, such as Christine and Kara. As previously described, they both felt that the community had come together around Prop 8, and yet, in Kara's words, "it didn't take long for that to completely fracture again." Christine added, "During Prop 8 it was (gestures hands together)." Kara elaborated, "Everyone came together and you didn't see that. And it's, it's fallen apart again. And, when you are not in a cohesive unit, you tend to get lethargic and not focused because you are just doing your own [thing]. You are more worried about what is going on with your little group, and you lose focus of the big picture. Does that make sense, at all? And I see a lot of that."

Kara and Christine explained that they are intentional about not buying into that lethargy. Kara said, "I have always been a fighter anyway. You know. Always been a champion for the underdog, always. So, for me it's. I think I would be fighting and be just as involved in this particular fight even if I wasn't gay. . . . It [the lethargy] is something that has always bothered me about this community. I have always said that, you know. If we would just get together and stand as a unit. I think it was Michael Firestein or Feinstein whatever it is. He said, 'I wish, sometimes, we had been born with a horn in the middle of our head, because if you can't hide, you have to fight.' So, that has always been—(throws hands up)."

Christine summarized it this way: "One of the things is that—Hillcrest isn't the only place to live anymore. You can live out in the suburbs, you can live everywhere, so we are not all in one area, now." She explained that she felt this had a fracturing effect in that there was less of an urgency for the LGBT community to come together. She said,

“You know you just don’t come together. I mean you come together on Pride, but Pride is just one big party now—it’s not, but that’s the only time that this community really comes together.” Kara added, “Well, and they don’t get along when they are together.” Laughing, Christine said, “They don’t. The fact that you don’t have to be, we don’t have to be segregated into one place anymore. Because of the beauties of the fact that, you know, society is changing. But that has also been a hindrance on us staying together as a group. Because, there isn’t a tragedy right now. There isn’t AIDS. There isn’t an AIDS epidemic. There isn’t a fact that if you leave Hillcrest you are going to get your butt kicked. You know, you can live somewhere else. For the most part. So we don’t have that, we are not all in one place anymore. And even the people coming in to Hillcrest, you know. It is amazing how many straight people are in Hillcrest now. Because of the fact that we are a welcoming community, and so everybody is welcome there. But it has also taken away from our uniqueness—almost.” Christine and Kara’s sentiments were echoed by other couples as they reflected on how they have navigated the tension they have experienced, at times, within their own community.

Situating the importance of the issue in relation to other social issues.

Participants also utilized perspective as they situated the importance of the extension of marriage rights to same-sex couples in relation to what they considered to be more pressing social issues. Chloe explained, “Well, and—quite honestly for myself—when the whole question of gay marriage first came up, I was rather unexcited about it myself. I thought, this is going to cause a backlash and hurt our cause. And I am more—if I were to pick an issue in the world that everyone I wish would get gung ho about is the environment and where our planet is going. The devastation of habitats and other species

that, you know that—our way of living and our human overpopulation is causing. I could go on for hours about that. And I just think that compared to that, gay marriage just pales in comparison. If I were to—if I was told I have to give money just to one cause in the world, it wouldn't be gay marriage. So, it's almost like that whole thing about perspective about—you know, in the way of the world, what's—what really matters to me?"

An area of tension existed when they felt that opponents elevated the importance of the extension of marriage rights to same-sex couples above what they perceived to be more important social issues. For example, Leanne explained, "But what I hear on the opposite side, at work from some people when they think nobody is listening—is that people are really riled up about the Prop 8 stuff on the other side. And that's—OK, so that really is where they want their money going. So that's a little unnerving." She then recalled that she had overheard a coworker at the hospital, who was unaware that she was within earshot, state that Prop 8 should pass. She recalled hearing her coworker state, "Two women together, that just makes me sick."

Leanne then said, "[The coworker believes] that we shouldn't have those rights. 'That just makes me sick!' So there's a lot of that still out there. So that's where the money is coming from. And I am thinking, I don't want to put that amount of money in. I really am concerned that we have no fire fighters. I really am concerned that my kid can't go to summer school [San Diego Community College District did not offer summer school to all students in Summer 2011 due to budget cuts]. I really am concerned that people—my colleagues' husbands are being shot overseas. And so, there is this disconnect—you know, where the people who are opposed are going fight, fight, fight. And I am thinking, I'd like to have those rights but I can't, I can't really justify fighting

for those right now.” This tension was also described by other participants on numerous occasions through out the interviews.

Drawing boundaries. Another strategy that couples utilized in maintaining perspective was drawing boundaries. This was certainly the case for Carl and Jerry. When I said to them, “So, it sounds like there’s been a lot of emotion tied to the last years around this process,” Jerry replied, “Oh yeah, you bet. If you touch a certain issue. Yeah.” Carl then explained, “Well, the thing is is that because we had been on such a rollercoaster, and when we do read something in the news or hear on TV, you know, things change so quickly that you can’t emotionally allow yourself to hang on to something that you don’t agree with—you know, that was said in an article . . . because you’re just going to have one more after another. And you can’t live your life that way. So, I am like—OK, the lawyers are there—they are representing us . . . you know, let’s see what the next step is, you know—the next approach. But there’s a lot of things that are out there that you could have gotten upset, gotten upset, gotten upset, gotten upset. And um, you know we are not in the position to do something about it, you know. So you have to put your trust in those people that are there. The lawyers and the people that are representing us. You know, hoping that they are going to do their job.”

“So, for you it felt like you had to put some trust in that rather than be really connected to and really tied to each piece of information, because you were seeing it change,” I said. Carl added, “You had to put a little boundary there, too. So that you don’t allow it to affect you each time that you see something that is not quite—because that would have been really unhealthy for us.”

Mitch and Cameron spoke extensively about how they drew boundaries in order to fully celebrate their legal marriage. Mitch explained, “Again, for me—it was something that I always wanted to do—never dreamed I was going to be able to do. So I didn’t really let anything—any negative vibes or opinions get in my way. Whereas, with him [Cameron]—he was involved with some—you know trying to help [with the campaign]. But he had to let that go—so that he could focus and be on a positive note with me in doing this [their wedding]. And we did. And we had a beautiful time. It was a great time.”

Scott and Derek explained another way that they maintain perspective through creating a boundary. They did this by focusing on the positive and not allowing themselves to get down or depressed. Scott explained, “When it [we] lost on election night, it was like, it definitely sucks, right. When Prop 8 passed. Um, but we still have each other (puts hand on Derek’s leg), and we have a lot of things in this world to be grateful for. And I try to always take that perspective when something really negative happens. Just focus on the positive things, you know. I just can’t get down or depressed about it.” Derek agreed.

Thomas and Larry described creating a boundary by being intentional about what they give significance to, and not allowing others to take their power. Larry described an intense verbal run-in he had with a Prop 8 supporter who was exhibiting anti-LGBT propaganda in his neighborhood. He explained, “Oh, boy was I angry. Because it was like meeting the beast face to face. You know, and she was trying to be nice and polite. But, you know—I called her on what it really was.” I asked them, “And how did the two of you handle that situation? Afterwards? As a couple?” Larry replied, “As we always do.

He holds me and tells me everything's OK. And then it's just us. At that moment the whole rest of the world disappears." Thomas elaborated, "Yeah, those are just moments that happen, and they don't really mean as much—they only have the significance that you give them." "The power," said Larry.

Thomas agreed, "Right, they really don't have the power. Because really—ultimately, it's what we feel and what we think and what we know—is what's important. So, I guess—even if I look back and think—even if the decision had gone the other way and we never had gotten married, it wouldn't change the way that we feel. That we've always considered ourselves husbands. That we've always looked upon each other that way. And so I have to say that that's, you know—we always look to each other. That really, it matters what we think and how we feel about each other. That's what's important." Larry concluded, "It's not the other stuff that defines us. Our relationship is defined within the two of us, and in Christ helping us." These examples illustrate the multiple ways in which the couples drew boundaries in order to maintain perspective throughout the ongoing local and national debate on the extension of marriage rights to same-sex couples.

Creating balance. Another strategy couples described—creating balance in their lives—has been useful to them as they have navigated the process of Proposition 8 and all of the ongoing legal battles connected to its passing. For instance, Jerry explained that his art helps him to create a balance in how he navigates the local and national debate. Jerry said, "That's why I am glad that I have my cartoons. Because I can alchemize it, throw it into the cartoons, make a funny comment about it, and just throw it right back at them. And pretty much go about my life. That's, I mean—my cartoons are my lifeline.

Because like for any artist, you know—their art is their vehicle for self-expression. Expression of their own authenticity. So, I just throw it in there and just do my very best to keep it in [the cartoon]. And if I can throw some humor at it, and make a point humorously, but still make a point, then hey, my job is done. And the issue is going to come back around, and come back around, and come back around, so. They just keep on handing me material. I just keep throwing it right back at them. That's my activism. That's how I stay sane amongst all of the insanity. Otherwise, I'd probably be a raging lunatic."

Carl laughed, "As he rages on." Jerry laughed, "As I rage on. Many times, something will come down the pike, and I will be like, I feel a toon coming on. And the best thing I can do is sit down [and draw] . . . anyway, because—again Erin, it just keeps me sane. And it keeps our relationship healthy, because I am not going off on him [Carl]."

Jonathan spoke about how he creates a balance between attending to the political and maintaining space for his personal interests. He commented on his use of Facebook as a vehicle for expression. "I have two Facebook accounts," he said. "One I use strictly for social and political issues—hot button issues—with people—generally speaking with people who are either gay-friendly or in the gay community. And I delve with those things in that site. And the politicians and other things that are political. My other account, I use for my hobby interests with people—photography. And it's like the topic of my existence under that account is photography. And anybody who starts sending me religious stuff and political stuff—I get rid of them. I don't want to do that there. I want it to be a freedom space, relaxing space, to not be [a space for] hot button issues. And, I

don't want to put stuff out that other people don't want to see—because they are photographers—so, I don't want to mix apples and oranges. So, I have two Facebook accounts, which is probably pretty weird but—that's just what I decided to do."

I asked, "Are there ways that—you called it not mixing apples and oranges—are there ways that you also do that in your lives? Where there will be spaces where you choose to be more political, and then there are spaces where you are more protective of your hobbies or your interests?" Jonathan agreed that he did that with the local photo club. Gabe agreed, "Yeah, you don't talk politics—" "Yeah, politics or religion—or sexuality—that's not why we're there. Now I have had one guy in the photo club—was sending out his politically leaning emails to all of his friends," explained Jonathan. "And that was inappropriate, because that wasn't the venue for it," said Gabe.

Jonathan continued, "He'd grab onto something that was his political interest—didn't have to do with gay—but he'd send it out to everybody. You know, and I just told him—I said, 'You either stop sending me this stuff because I don't want to see it—stick to photography—or I am going to block all of your emails.' Well, he responded—he stopped sending them to me. He regressed a couple of times, and I reminded him again. And so, he stopped sending it out—so. And so I try to do the same for other people—why should I assume that you want to receive literature about what interests me socially or politically? You are on my list because we like photography. And so I am not going to diverge from that and start sending out this stuff and that stuff. And even when other people put stuff up where I could comment, I don't. That's not why I am on this board. So, I try to keep things separate and not throw things in people's faces—whether they would agree with it or not isn't the point."

Self-care was another strategy that the participants enlisted in creating balance in their lives. When I asked the couples about the different ways that they had navigated the process of Proposition 8 and all of the ongoing legal battles connected to its passing, Jason explained, “I adore theatre, and we’ve been going to the symphony a lot. You know, just kind of stuff to relax and maybe go to the beach or something.” “Yeah. Basically anything to keep us from going insane,” Joe agreed. “Sometimes you just have to turn off the TV and just get away from it,” said Jason. Joe agreed, “Right. That usually works. You know, we don’t even pay for cable right now. So we just, we have the Internet, and you still get enough on there if you really wanted to find it.”

Jerry and Carl also described self-care through spirituality as a means for creating balance. Jerry explained, “I am a man of deep faith. I am a man of exploratory spirit.” “Spiritual,” said Carl. Jerry continued, “Well, the reason that I don’t identify with any sort of religion—because it’s too subjective. I don’t know what it means when someone tells me they’re this, that or everything else, because there are so many variations of it. It seems so diluted. I’d just rather be connected with nature and let nature be my guide. And that keeps me open to a tremendous amount of deep—spirited experience. So, yeah. I just don’t like anything organized or labeled when it comes to my spirit.”

Carl later explained, “Well, we need to find some sort of internal centering. You know, um. So we have been doing, like, meditation. I do yoga. I do a lot of things to de-stress. You know, in that regard. I have discovered something called centering prayer. So all of that kind of stuff really helps me connect spiritually. And that helps a lot. It does. You know, it’s like having—what is your ritual? What is the thing that you do that allows

you to get to that point? He's got his. I have mine. And some of them are—we do some of the same things but. But his are more ritual.”

Jerry agreed, “Yeah, there's more ritual, ceremony—tools that ground me spiritually.” “Did you want to say any more about that? Those tools that help to ground you?” I asked. Jerry replied, “Well, just ways to keep me centered and balanced. And I have a chance to just explore the nooks and crannies of who I am. Either through a ritual or ceremony, a sweat lodge. You know. Stream of consciousness—writing. You know, my art can be very shamanic in that sense. One of the things that I like about how my life is structured is one thing supports the other. It used to be very compartmentalized. Now it's very much a blend. And we are very compatible. In that regard.” These examples all illustrate the importance the participants place on creating balance in their lives as they continue to navigate the local and national debate on the extension of marriage rights to same-sex couples.

Offering solutions. Offering solutions to ways that the battle might be more effectively navigated was another strategy that participants sought, in order to maintain perspective. For example, Joe explained, “It's kind of funny. There's a debate I guess you could call it—with this word *marriage*. You know, the religious community doesn't want religion—doesn't want us to call it marriage because they want to protect their man/woman thing. But they're perfectly fine—at least from what I can tell with civil unions across the board. So, it's almost like—if the government were to change marriage to civil union . . . ” “Like across the board,” said Jason. Joe continued to explain, “Across the board—regardless of sexuality. It would be considered a civil union where all of the rights and protections were the same—there are very few people who would

be—who would object to that. My mother included. And then they leave the word *marriage* for the religious community and for that religious type of ceremony. And so you remove the word *marriage* altogether, and that solves the problem entirely. And, so on one hand I think I would be OK with that—if the rest of the country would be. On the other hand . . . ”

Jason interjected, “Separate is not equal.” Joe clarified his point of view, asserting that civil unions be the state-sanctioned option for both same-sex and opposite-sex couples to formalize their relationships. Joe then said, “But if you make it equal, if you [only have]—civil unions, and take marriage out of it all together, that would solve the problem. But I don’t think that would ever happen. Be it because of tradition or words like that. You know, that kind of thing. So, I guess that bothers me a little bit, that we are so hung up—” “On a word,” said Jason. “On that—because to me, marriage in Biblical times was far different than marriage today. But try to bring that up or make them understand that—it’s very—they get defensive. You know, it goes on a whole nother [sic] tangent,” Joe laughed. “So, in terms of impact, I think that would fix this whole war. But I don’t think enough people are willing to sit down and really come to terms with that,” said Joe.

Tensions within the perspective domain. Similar to the tension just described by Joe, as he proposed that there is an unwillingness on the part of the other side to really sit down and look at the issue, an area of tension existed within the perspective domain when the couples experienced the opposition as being irrational, or as Kara described it as “using lies.” Further, as many of the previously described examples illustrate, this tension was often related to the participant’s perceptions that this irrationality had the

effect of violating the separation between church and state. Scott and Derek provided one such example. Scott explained, “It still doesn’t matter.” “Because the *Bible* says,” said Derek. Scott continued, “I know, but it’s like all irrational things. You know, you kind of like observe things and say, ‘OK, maybe it’s not that big of a deal.’ But there’s no observing and there’s no rational approach to it on the other side. It seems like it is just ‘My way, and that’s it. My beliefs, that’s it.’ And I think the particularly frustrating thing is to hear that we are enforcing our beliefs on other people when it was sort of like: ‘Well, you are taking your religious beliefs and overturning a court decision that looked out for the rights of the minority. So really, you’re the one who is enforcing your personal beliefs to take away a state-established right from us.’”

Joe and Jason provided another example, which was similar to the tension described earlier by Leanne and Chloe. Joe explained, “Whenever—particularly the right—talking head or whatever says something that is supposed to inflame people, that’s when we get most frustrated. Because there is so much that we really need to deal with as a country, that this is such a scapegoat. It’s such a red herring that it shouldn’t even be on the radar—and for the most part, I don’t think that it is for people. But it’s when these politicians decide to inflame their base that it becomes—it sort of grows, and people get angry, and they forget all about the real problems that we need to deal with. Like their children’s education or something, for goodness sakes. You know, there is so much that we should deal with that is more important than whether or not we are married. And that’s what gets us upset and frustrated. It’s almost like we wish we could sit down and have a rational conversation with some of these people, but I don’t think that they would listen.” “Or slap them in the face with a fish,” said Jason. Joe concluded, “I don’t think

human nature is that they would listen. They would—they're just so uptight and set in their ways that it's almost impossible to try and talk to them. You know. I don't know, it's going to take time."

These examples all illustrate perspective, the third and very complex domain that the couples utilized as they navigated the experiences and challenges of the local and national debate on the extension of marriage rights to same-sex couples. More specifically, the relevant dimensions of the perspective domain were many: **accepting family members where they are, situating wins and losses within the perspective of the larger movement, locating the source of stress outside of themselves and their relationships, turning the *Yes on 8* arguments upside down, not buying into the lethargy of the LGBT community, situating the importance of the issue in relation to other social issues, drawing boundaries, creating balance, and offering solutions.** All of these encompassed important practices and strategies which were helpful to the interview couples and, like both the engagement and support domains, had the effect of buffering them and their relationships from the ongoing challenges related to the legal and national debate on extending marriage rights to same-sex couples.

Conclusion

Emergent theme III, *The Battle Metaphor*, speaks directly to the areas of focus guiding the dissertation which pose three questions:

- How do anti-gay amendment campaigns affect same-sex couples?
- How has the local and national debate about extending marriage rights to same-sex couples impacted the couples' experiences of marriage?

- How have these participants navigated the experiences and challenges of the discriminatory ballot measure Proposition 8, and all of the ongoing legal battles connected to its passing, together as a couple?

The first emergent theme, *Our Commitments Have Rich Histories*, oriented us to the many symbolic and legal ways in which these couples tried to commemorate and bring definition to their commitments to one another, in the absence of a nationally-sanctioned and collectively-recognized state of legal marriage. The second emergent theme, *Not a Simple Matter: The Complexities of Language Choice*, informed us that the couples' language choices also reflected the absence of representative and collectively-recognized language options for their relationships after their legal marriages. Building on these two themes, *The Battle Metaphor* confronted us with the experiences of polarization, division, inequality, and mobilization that these couples experienced acutely—throughout the experiences of the passing of Prop 8—as well as chronically, as a result of the ongoing local and national debate on the extension of marriage rights to same-sex couples. Further, *The Battle Metaphor* illustrates that the couples interviewed for the present study actively navigated both the acute and more chronic experiences through strategies and practices which fell into three separate yet, at times, interrelated domains: engagement, support, and perspective. In many ways, the climactic quality of *The Battle Metaphor* is ongoing, in that the couples have experienced and will continue to experience the buffetings of the equal rights battle for the foreseeable future, as the extension of marriage rights to same-sex couples continues to be a hotly debated aspect of social and political culture in the U.S. and worldwide.

As fascinating as the analysis of this ongoing gay and lesbian rights struggle will be, as rich a ground as it is for future academic and therapeutic study, our narrative will now begin to shift to the critical and final two emergent themes. *Support Shaped Lived Experiences*, the fourth emergent theme, will examine more closely the experiences of, meaning made around, and the effects of the presence or absence of support in the couple's lives. The last emergent theme, *Legal Marriage Shaped Individual, Relational, and Social Identities*, brings conclusion to the narrative as it follows the shifts—individual, relational and social—that occurred for the couples through the experience of being legally married in the context of both the local and the national debate on the extension of marriage rights to same-sex couples.

Emergent Theme IV: Support Shaped Lived Experiences

The first emergent theme, *Our Commitments Have Rich Histories*, described the legal, ceremonial, and ongoing symbolic steps that the couples have all taken in order to bring definition to and commemorate their commitment to one another despite the absence of a nationally-sanctioned and collectively-recognized formal designation for their relationships. The second emergent theme, *Not a Simple Matter: The Complexities of Language Choice*, described how the participant's language choices were also reflective of the absence of representative and collectively-recognized language options for their relationships after their legal marriages. This set the stage for the third emergent theme, *The Battle Metaphor*, which confronted us with both the acute and chronic experiences of polarization, division, inequality, and mobilization that these couples experience as a result of the ongoing local and national debate on the extension of

marriage rights to same-sex couples. Further, *The Battle Metaphor* illustrated the strategies and practices the couples utilized in navigating these experiences.

It is important, however, to understand that throughout those first three emergent themes, the participants also conveyed the profound support they had experienced from friends, family, and their community. This support shaped the couple's lived experiences in many rich ways. This was already evidenced when, on the occasion of the couples' legal marriages, public support came from expected and unexpected quarters: the important persons that they cared for, the crowds outside of the County Administration Building, and those whose jobs positioned them in roles which facilitated the legal marriage process, such as officiants and county employees. Second, as previously demonstrated, perceptions of support also influence the language choices that the participants make in speaking about each other and their relationships. More specifically, they experienced increased freedom to make language choices which were representative of their relationships in supportive contexts. Third, providing, receiving, and building support helped the couples to navigate both the local and national inequalities of relationship recognition for same-sex couples in this country. Finally, participating in community contexts such as rallies, marches, meetings, church functions, and campaigning played a reciprocal role, as it bolstered support for the relationship and also supported the larger cause for marriage equality.

The Battle Metaphor exposed areas of tension that existed for the couples, which also shaped their lived experiences, when people who they cared about or who held important or influential positions in their lives did not support the extension of marriage rights to same-sex couples. This had the power of shaping the lived experiences of the

couples in ways which were hurtful and limiting. The couples' ongoing navigation of this tension also enlisted the engagement, support, and perspective domains described within *The Battle Metaphor*. *Support Shaped Lived Experiences*, the fourth emergent theme that constitutes the narrative, takes a closer look at the experiences of, meaning made around, and the effects of the presence or absence of support in the couples' lives.

Emergent theme IV, *Support Shaped Lived Experiences*, provides a greater description of the support that the couples experienced through three relevant dimensions:

- 1. Responses to Marriage from Family, Friends, and Community**
- 2. Responses to Proposition 8 and the National Debate from Friends, Family, and Community**
- 3. Impact of Family, Friend, and Community Responses on Marriage Experience**

Responses to Marriage from Family, Friends, and Community

Responses from friends, family, and community to the couples' legal marriages can be summed up in three ways. First, the couples largely described the responses to their marriages as positive and affirming from their friends, their family and their community. Second, and consistent with *The Battle Metaphor*, many, however, did express that they had had negative or non-affirming encounters with important persons in their lives. Some described these responses from family or community members as reflective of the pervasive heterocentrism they experience on a regular basis. Third, the couples often described how important persons and institutions were silent about the event of their legal marriages, in ways which made them feel minimized or invisible.

Further, non-acknowledgement on the part of others was also evident in instances where participants had chosen to be silent about disclosing the event of their marriage, because they felt it was either inappropriate to talk about or because of the personal or professional ramifications that they felt the responses from friends, family, or community would have.

Support and recognition. Support and recognition were threaded throughout the majority of the responses of friends, family, and community to the couples' legal marriages. Karen and Amy, for instance, explained that the positive and affirming responses from friends and family to their legal marriage had been meaningful to them as a couple, in that it helped them to construct meaning around the value of the step that they were taking through marriage to formalize their commitment to one another. Karen explained that when the couple had told their families of their plans to have a low-key wedding, their families made it known that they would like to be present for the event. Karen went on to explain, "And so we ended up having, you know 40 people . . . but we were amazed by every member of our families, except for one of Amy's brothers and one of my brothers, who were just physically unable to be there, everybody was there. . . . And everybody was absolutely supportive. And I think that we were almost a little . . . just a little surprised. We figured, well, you know. . . . It was almost like we were devaluing it." "Yeah, we were . . . I think," said Amy. "You know, and internally," said Karen. "We didn't think anybody would show up," Amy interjected, "but everybody showed up. Everybody showed up, from across the country." "From Canada," added Karen.

“So it surprised us,” said Karen. “We thought, ‘Ehh, we’ll just have a couple friends for dinner,’” added Amy. Karen explained, “So, I think we were really, pleasantly surprised by how affirming our family were. I mean, we knew that we had supportive families . . . in our relationship. But I think that that really showed that they were not just supportive of us, they were supportive of the marriage. Which I think was important. To me at least.” “Our marriage,” said Amy. “Yes, of our marriage. But I think marriage in general, same-sex marriage in general,” concluded Karen. Amy agreed.

Later, when talking about their ceremony, I asked Karen and Amy if their family’s participation had helped to counter their initial devaluation of the meaning of the event, instilling it with value. Karen replied, “Oh, absolutely. Um hum, yeah. I think that we were, kind of, well I shouldn’t speak for you. But I was sort of thinking *oh, well you know we have been together for like nine years. We have already got the domestic partnership. . . .* It was definitely the next step, and it was important to us. But I just sort of thought, *well, you know. It’s on a Wednesday, and I don’t want to put anybody out . . .* I didn’t think it was going to make that much difference in our overall lives. But—and then the response from our families made me realize, you know what, this is really a big deal.” Karen noted that because the wedding and reception took place in the middle of the week, people had taken off work to fly to San Diego to be in attendance.

Karen continued, “So I think that, that for me definitely made me realize, kind of step back and realize. You know, not only is it important, but their recognition of it as being important was really, was really something.” Amy then said, “And I think their words, too. When they got up and spoke . . . for my family to be able to get up and speak about my marriage. My mother got up and spoke, that was really touching to me, and I

think that I cried because, um. You know, it has been challenging for her for me to be a lesbian. She really had other ideas of what she wanted me to be and where she wanted me to go. . . . She has always accepted my girlfriends and my partners but she really accepts this marriage . . . and I think that for me it really sunk in when she got up and spoke at our wedding. That was the first indication that she really deeply supported our togetherness and our marriage.” Karen agreed wholeheartedly, saying, “Yes. And I think that we are really lucky. We sort of take it for granted. But I know that there are people. There’s a lot of people . . . [who] don’t have that family support that we have. So for us, it’s just every day, but I know that for some people they really yearn for what we have.”

Larry and Thomas also provided an example of how recognition and affirming and supportive responses to their marriage from their community has impacted them each in meaningful ways. In speaking about community, Larry described the significance of his church, which has challenged some of the notions and fears that he has lived with for much of his life. He explained, “For so long, I lived in a gay ghetto. I am extremely—still today—extremely heterophobic. You know, because of the way I was raised. You know, and the way I was treated. That I had to totally live my life in a gay environment. I worked in a gay establishment. All of my friends were gay—and I went to the gay church, MCC—and all of that. And then when I got in the straight world, I was so homophobic that Thomas became Tanya—and I felt like—you know, I couldn’t be who I really was—except around Thomas and my friends—right.”

He went on to explain, “Well, we got into a wonderful church, University Christian Church . . . it’s an all-inclusive—and I like the fact that we are in a church that is primarily—by a vast majority—heterosexual. But we are not treated like—you know, a

minority. You know, I can kiss Thomas at church anytime, anywhere. You know—and that’s wonderful! They refer to us as husbands. They are—they are wonderful. It’s like the way that you’d always dreamt that life would be like in a good church. You know—where you can stop focusing on hiding—you can stop focusing on being, uh—‘Don’t kiss in front of the children, they might get ideas, and we want them to grow up *normal*.’ You know . . . that was the wonderful thing about—about our church being supportive.”

Explaining that he and Thomas are “kind of like the Ozzy and Harriet” of their church, Larry then recalled how their church community responded to their legal marriage. He said, “When the marriage thing came out . . . they said, ‘Oh yeah! We want you to do this—you gotta do!’” He then recalled that “the deacons came down with us to get our [marriage] certificate—cause we were afraid of news cameras and bashers and hate mongers. And so they came to protect us—cause I was—I am in a wheelchair. And also, I was so nervous—we both were so nervous, we forgot to bring money—and our pastor paid the five dollars.”

With a laugh, Larry continued, “And still to this day—he won’t take a cent back. And so we are going into the church history as the first legally married gay couple in our church. But it’s nice to feel like, you know—like you don’t have to think about being gay, the way that straights don’t have to think about being straight. In our church.”

I later clarified with the couple how they defined community. Thomas explained, “I guess I’d say that the community is the people that support us. The people that support us. And I would say that is the church community, my gay friends and our gay friends, and our families.”

Mitch and Cameron also reported that the response to their marriage has been “overwhelmingly positive” from their friends, family, and community. Mitch explained, “We have the best neighbors in the world. Family is great. Everywhere we go.” Cameron then added, “In society, what’s really sad—I mean, most people that know us are happy for us. I can’t help but feel that the controversy is because those people just don’t know anyone—that’s gay. . . . I would like to think that people, that the people that we know that might tend to think that way . . . in opposition to it—think differently because they know us. And go, ‘Oh, you know, they’re together—it’s very—we don’t know them any other way. We wouldn’t want to know them any other way. Can’t imagine them any other way. Why shouldn’t they be married?’ You know, so I would like to think that we set a good example in that respect.” Mitch agreed with Cameron.

In order to exemplify the support they have received from their community, Mitch and Cameron relayed that many of their neighbors came to the wedding. In contrast to the majority of the couples who live in or around San Diego’s Hillcrest neighborhood, Mitch and Cameron live in Escondido, a city about 35 miles north of Hillcrest. Mitch explained, “We invited them. They all came. They don’t treat us any different.” Cameron then described, “We live in a place like Wisteria Lane. We are *the* gay couple.” Mitch agreed, “Yes, it is totally Wisteria Lane. And we are in Escondido. We are in Lake Hodges area. You know, we are not in Hillcrest. We’re not in the hub.”

Mitch explained that they had not known anything of the area when the two arrived. He then relayed a story, an encounter that occurred when the two first moved to their home, which illustrates how they began to understand their community as supportive. “It’s the funny story about the phone call we first had [when we moved into

the neighborhood]. I was wondering why nobody came and welcomed us to the neighborhood, and there was a flyer for an annual block party. So he [Cameron] gives it to me, because he knows I am all into that. So I call and talk to this neighbor lady who was running it, and I sort [of] just told her who I was, and—so she is telling me about my neighbor and my neighbor across the street and so and so, and so and so. And she's like, 'So, tell me a little about you.' [I replied] *So, it's me and my partner Cameron*. At that time we weren't married. *This is my partner Cameron, and our two little boys*. And then, there was a dial tone."

Mitch continued, "And I thought, Oh, my God, she hung up. All I could see was the gay flag burning in my front yard—Oh, my God, where did we move to? Oh, dear Lord! But then she calls back and says, 'Oh, this damn phone—when I go to the other side of the house, it just drops the call.' And I was like, *I thought you hung up on me!*"

Mitch laughed, and added, "But, so we laugh about that all of the time. But we have all of the best neighbors in the world. And they don't treat us any different. They include us in everything. Like he said, overwhelmingly positive."

Mitch later detailed ways in which his family has respected their marriage. He explained, "And one other thing, too. I mean, that I find cute—is, um, going back to my family—the older ones that are—my Gracie and all of my *tias* and all of them that I thought would be opposed—you know—to us getting married—a lot of times kidding around, you know just talking and stuff, and they'll remind me, 'Oh, *mijo*—you're married now.' So, it's cute, you know. To hear them acknowledge that, you know and respect it." "So, it sounds like it is something that stands out to you—like that you notice it," I said. Mitch replied, "Yeah—oh yeah, I do." He then explained that the two "inherit"

his parents every winter, when they come and stay with the couple for a few months. He said, with pride, “They absolutely love Cameron to death, and they get along really good. So, but you know my mom—she refers to him—and my parents—they both refer to him as my husband.”

Mitch went on to explain, “And my dad . . . will be in the kitchen—and if he doesn’t say, ‘Where’s Cameron, Cameron’s still sleeping’—you know, he will tell me in Spanish, ‘*¿Y tu marido todavía está dormido?*’ You know, um. So, it’s cute.” He then recalled another example of family using language that conveys their support. “At gatherings—some of my older cousins are talking—and I will say something—you know—crazy—or— [They respond] ‘Mitch, you’re married!’ Or my aunts will say, ‘*¡Mijo, estás casado!*’ So—you know, it’s cute. I like it.”

Steven gave an example about how support showed up for their marriage at his workplace. Steven explained that he has been the team captain for the AIDS Walk for his company for the last 10 years. The year that he and Michael were getting married, the two had been very busy with wedding preparation and family coming in to town. He recalled that he had not really had time that year to head up the company’s AIDS Walk team. He said, “So, I put out a call to arms to ask people to help do it, and you know, actually try to raise money, and I explained why I couldn’t do it. And I got so many congratulatory responses from people. From higher ups, you know, that I had asked for money from in the past, you know, and—a lot of executives—a lot of people were very positive in their response back to me [about their marriage], which was very heartwarming.”

Courtney and Jennifer also described that the responses that they have received have been largely characterized by support and recognition. Courtney explained, “Well, people that I have told—that I have told, have been really happy about it. Especially—at church . . . I think they are just really so pleased. That’s meant a lot.” Jennifer added, “And your work group, too—have been supportive.” Courtney agreed, “Oh yeah—yeah. Yeah, actually my boss announced it at a large work event. Because there was a time when he was doing, you know like births, and graduations—and so he announced my marriage. So that was fun. Yeah.”

Jennifer then explained, “And I am out at work—I have only been out at work recently—in the last 11 years. So I’ve got a greatly supportive work group with the county now. So, at one of our regular staff meetings they acknowledged the wedding by giving some gifts, and it was wonderful. I mean, it just—I am sure I was brought to tears by that gesture. That you know—that really caring, thoughtful gesture. Which was kind of a leap for some of the folks. But it was so cool. And my boss at the time, gave us—gave us [a] beautiful orchid plant and a \$100 gift certificate for REI, because we wanted to buy a kayak. So, that was really sweet.”

Jennifer continued, “And—so a lot of great support from . . . some of my college friends, and my friends from growing up in Nebraska, too—just sent cards and money. You know—just as though we are a regular couple—which we are.” “Yeah, it was really nice,” said Courtney. These examples all illustrate that support and recognition from friends, family, and community for their marriages did not go unnoticed by the couples. In fact, that support was incredibly significant to them.

Negative or non-affirming. The support and the recognition of the importance of their marriages from friends, family, and community shaped the couples' lived experiences in positive and preferred ways. Further, the couples all described that they had very few overtly negative responses to their marriages from friends, family, and community members. When they did encounter negativity, however, it shaped their understanding of their lived experiences in more challenging ways. For instance, although Amy described the responses to their marriage as being "very supportive," she also explained, "I had one kind of interesting thing at work. I have a colleague of mine who's, you know, he's . . . not all born-again Christians are like this, but he is born-again Christian. He is Republican. He is straight. He is a white man, ironically married to a black woman. He does not support gay marriage. And he was actually going to be on our [wedding guest] list, because I consider him a good friend. . . . So, I was going to invite him as well to the wedding, and he, um. You know, when I went and told him Karen and I are getting married, he was like, 'Well, I just don't know how I feel about that Amy. I don't know how to feel.' And I was like, 'Why?' And he said, 'Well, you know. I want you to be happy, but I don't support gay marriage.' And it's like—I am going to swear in a minute." "Well you are off the list," chimed Karen. Amy continued, "You know, forget it—fuck you. So it was like, 'You know what, that is very disappointing, Glen. That is really, really disappointing to me, and that hurts me.'"

Many couples reported that responses from others were heterocentrist in nature. These responses reflected a context shaped by a lack of education on same-sex marriage rights and a lack of familiarity with lesbian and gay relationships. For example, Sam recalled, "I remember was talking with my HR person at work . . . because it was—not

quite open enrollment—and what I wanted was for her to clarify if going from domestic partnered to being legally married was a change in status that would change my health benefits. And, she said *no*—and then as I was leaving her office, she said, ‘Oh, I need a copy of your marriage license.’ And I said, ‘Excuse me?’ And she said, ‘Well, you know, um—I need proof that you got married.’ And I said, ‘Have you asked any heterosexual couple that works at this company for a copy of their marriage license?’ And she just kind of looked at me, and I said, ‘I thought not.’ And I just walked out of her office. That was the last time that she ever mentioned it to me.”

Silence. The couples also described instances where family members, friends, and their communities did not acknowledge their marriages. This silence was a response that shaped the participants’ lived experiences in powerful ways. For example, Karen expressed that one thing that still bothers her to this day is that her company did not recognize the couple’s marriage. She explained that unlike Amy’s company, which they “know is very conservative. Very white, middle class, male, American,” her company had quite a few gay and lesbian employees and also provided domestic partner benefits.

She explained, “Everybody is very supportive, and I mean everybody’s very friendly to you (looks at Amy who is nodding). And there has never been anything overtly anti-gay said or done or . . . even implied. But, when we got married, we didn’t get so much as a card. From a single person—in the entire company. Which surprised me. I mean, we had a small wedding. It’s not like we wanted gifts or anything. But even just a recognition with a card. . . . And somebody said, ‘Well, maybe it’s because, you know, they weren’t invited.’ I said, ‘It doesn’t matter.’ Several other people at the company have gotten married. You know, one got married in Tahoe. One got married in Hawaii.

There was still a collection taken up, and a card sent from the company, and everybody signed it. And—you know, it just—to me—it’s almost like . . . that—well, it doesn’t really matter, because it is just Karen and Amy. So, that kind of then—reinforced a little bit. . . . and I don’t know why. I don’t know why they did that, or didn’t do it. But, but it bothered me . . . because to me it felt a little bit like, ‘Well it’s not like a real marriage.’”

“They omitted recognition of it,” I stated. Karen replied, “Right. Yes. And they didn’t do that . . . if there was never a card sent to anybody, that would be fine. But when they sent it to straight couples, but that we didn’t get one. It just was little bit—made me feel kinda . . . it still does a little, like—” “Icky,” said Amy. “Yeah, icky,” agreed Karen. “It has an ick factor,” said Amy. Karen added, “Yeah, yeah. And I still love the people that I work with, and I still love my job. But it is kind of a little bit disturbing.”

In fact, silence was a relevant dimension that had a long legacy in the lives of the participants. For instance, Sam explained, “The members of my family that I still talk to have been very supportive. I had a—kind of a—off and on rocky relationship with different members of my family—my mom, my dad—um, and my older brother. But, you know again—being in the South—they’re either politically, religiously, or both conservative. Um, and so, um, there are several members of my family like aunts and uncles, cousins—whatever—that I don’t really talk to—um, because of that. The people that I do talk to have been—fairly supportive.”

“Well, your mother and brother came to our reception,” Joel offered. Sam agreed, “Yeah. Um—my older brother’s receptiveness is a little tentative. Um, they did come to our domestic partnership reception. My mom and my older brother.” Sam then told a story about when the two visited the South a few years ago. He explained that they

visited his family and “my older brother found it necessary to have a conversation about how I would behave in his house, because he has a 10—11 or 12-year-old boy.”

Sam continued, “And, he was really kind of uncomfortable even having the conversation with me—and I just—you know, interrupted him, and I am like—‘So you don’t want me making out with Joel, then.’ And he said, ‘Oh, yeah. That’s what I was trying to get at.’ And, I said. ‘You know, I will respect how you raise your son, but I would ask you—would you behave that way toward any heterosexual couple that you know and are friends with, if they brought over a new girlfriend or a new boyfriend—and they were holding hands or gave a peck on the cheek? Or something like that? Would you freak out over that as well?’ And, there was silence on the other end. And I am like, ‘You know what, you don’t have to answer me.’ So—but it has been kind of—you know—mixed a little bit.”

When I asked James and Steven about the responses from friends, family members, and community, James also reported that he had both experienced silence and responded with silence. James explained, “It’s kind of been mixed. I think—I haven’t actually got—had any outward—well—not so much any outward negativity—but a lot of you know—no comments. Kind of thing. And not everybody is OK with it. And I see that. And um, my boss is one of them. She is not OK with it. Um, and I work for a very conservative company, and there is a lot of people in my office that are not OK with it. So I don’t—I don’t, I don’t—I feel like—”

“And he is open about it,” said Steven. James continued, “I am open about it, but I don’t throw it in their faces. I don’t want to offend anybody. And I realize that sometimes it does offend people, so I don’t make a big deal about it. I really feel like it should be a

non-issue. And I really don't feel like I have to say, 'Hey I am gay, and I am married. I don't really feel like I have to say that. Straight people don't do that, so why should I? So I feel that's—I feel like it really should—especially at the workplace should be a non-issue. Your orientation. Because it doesn't make you a better performer or a less performer—less of a performer. With your work—it's not an issue to me."

James then described that his friends are both understanding and supportive. When I asked about his family, James replied, "My family—um—I think with my dad—he has come to the point here he doesn't really make a comment one way or the other. So he kind of keeps it to himself. When I was growing up he was *very* (chuckles) against gay people. He would speak it and he was very vocal about it. And as he has gotten older, I think, he has kind of mellowed a little bit, and so he tends to keep his comments to himself. So, I think if I were to sit down and corner him, I am sure he would still say he is not OK with it—but he has improved to the point where he doesn't comment. Where before he would."

James explained, "My family is a little more conservative. And I came out—I came out right away. I came out when I was 18 and—but I didn't tell anybody. You know I—I just lived my life. And I think my parents probably knew, but they didn't really want it to be verbalized. They really didn't want to bring it—you know—bring it to the surface. So I respected that. It was fine by me. It worked for me. I have friends who're like, 'Oh, I just had to tell them.' I never felt like I had to tell them. I never felt like, 'Oh, I have just got to tell my mom and dad.' I never felt that." James explained, "I just feel like it should be a non-issue really . . . and I do realize that it does offend people—I don't want to offend anybody, you know."

Choosing silence. Like James, some participants said it was their own reluctance or preference not to disclose their legal marital status. This was the case for Jennifer. She explained, “Well, I am not out to my family yet—even though I think everyone knows. So that’s been pretty awkward and difficult still. I came out to my nephew, my older sister’s son. And said, well, *Courtney and I even got married*. So I went even that step with him. So that’s, that’s something that I haven’t fully dealt with, yet. But otherwise, I am just so happy with my life, and Courtney, and that [marital] status. . . . So, that’s just a sad piece in my life. Not having the family acknowledge. And it’s because I haven’t told them.”

Courtney then explained that it was a yearly tradition for the two to write Christmas cards to important persons in their lives, which detailed the significant events that had occurred for them during the year. Courtney said that the year the two were married, Jennifer wrote another version of the Christmas card which she sent to her family.

Courtney recalled, “So, we didn’t ever send the one that I wrote—talking about the marriage.” “To my family, that is—everyone else, we did,” said Jennifer. Courtney responded, “We did? I don’t know if anybody got the one I wrote.” Jennifer replied, “Oh yeah, my friends did. Yeah, my family were the only ones that did not get—my immediate family. My siblings didn’t get it.”

Joe and Jason also spoke about how silence had played a roll in their own choices surrounding disclosure with family members. Joe explained, “I didn’t tell my folks that we were going to the Court House to get married. Which, looking back—probably was a mistake.” “I don’t think so,” said Jason. “Well, you are different than me, see,” countered

Joe. Jason explained, “His mom actually voted against. She voted on Prop 8 against us.” Joe continued, “So my mom. Yes, she’s very much a religious right.” “Fundamentalist,” said Jason.

Joe explained, “Yes, she was unfortunately addicted to pain killers for many years, and so she embraced the 12 steps and had embraced religion—kind of as her new addiction if you will. And then, that has obviously been in conflict with our relationship. Even though she cares for Jason very much and has accepted him into the family. And she loves me for who I am. It’s kind of—it’s just.” “Her beliefs are one thing, and then her feelings towards us are another. If that makes sense,” Joe chuckled. “So even though there’s conflict, that sort of can be set aside, and the joy of what we have can be embraced.”

Joe continued, “But up to the point of the wedding, there was a lot of friction, and I was better just not to talk about these things. And so I just, I felt—at the time, that it wasn’t right to tell her—that she would not accept that. And it was very hard for me. Because I remember the night before I came home, and I was just very upset. Very emotional. And I felt like I couldn’t tell them that I am getting married the next day. And it was very hard, I think—for a while.”

For some couples, discrepancies about beliefs around disclosure of marital status became a source of contention, in that one spouse understood this to mean that the other was censoring him or her in a negative way. For example, Thomas explained, “I don’t discuss my marriage or my sexuality with—because I am a teacher—that’s really none of my students’ concern, and it’s not really something I ever want to talk about, because it’s

frankly none of their business. Um, but I do find that with fellow teachers, there's never a problem. And that they are always very positive and supportive—and very encouraging.”

Larry interjected, “It’s like—don’t tell anybody under the age of 18. You know, you are X-rated.” Thomas disagreed. “See, you see it that way—I see it that it’s not what the point of my being there—it’s not about me. My job as a teacher is not to put the focus on me, but it’s to put the focus on the kids and focus on their learning. And that if they’re focusing on me and my sexuality, that gets in the way of the teaching. And so that’s really none of their business. . . . So I am never going to discuss my personal life. Again, it’s not the focus of what I am trying to do. That, that is not what is important—So, I never see it as a negative.” “I look at it as a negative—I do,” said Larry. Thomas concluded, “I want to keep that demarcation between my professional and my personal life.”

Larry continued to disagree. “I think it’s wrong. You know, I just think it just is being a—like when his brother came to stay with us, and he says, ‘I would really appreciate it if you wouldn’t kiss in front of me.’ Or things like that. And I said, ‘You’re in my house! When I have to go to your house, I don’t touch, we don’t do anything affectionate—we don’t kiss. We go by the rules. But you are in my house here, and you’re going to see a lot of kissing now.’ But the work place—I don’t think—it’s like you are hiding who you really are because others have made you feel ashamed of it. You feel guarded.”

Larry then gave a specific example, when a student asked Thomas a direct question about his marital status which Thomas chose not to disclose. He continued, “Thomas could have easily just said, ‘This is from my husband.’ You know, if that were

something acceptable. And that's not our fault (points to the two of them). It's their fault for not educating. Alright. And that's why you answered that girl in that way. Because a simple, 'It came from my wife—it came from my husband' would have been—you know—all she wanted. You know, instead, he had to get defensive. You were defensive." Thomas disagreed.

I clarified, "So you each see this sort of differently—how to interact with your community or specifically your workplace? Larry said, "Yes, that's why I am heterophobic—because I never know when I am out if I am going to run into some skinhead who is going to take umbrage. You know, I have been beaten up. Badly. And I have had several bad experiences with friends finding out and no longer being friends with me anymore, you know. And this kind of thing has, you know, taught me. At first, it made me feel ashamed and second class. And then I got angry. You know, and I said—*I got to create the world*. You know—I *can't just be its nice little toady*. You know, and go along with it. So, it's kind of—you know—when he told me that story, I just felt like—*ahh, that's just terrible*." "So you two are in different places with this?" I asked. Thomas and Larry both agreed that they were.

As these examples illustrate, the couples largely described the responses to their marriages as positive and affirming from their friends, their families and their communities. Many, however, had also experienced negative, non-affirming or silent/non-acknowledging encounters with important persons in their lives. Not surprisingly, positive encounters gave couples a strong sense of support from these important persons in their lives, while the negative, non-affirming, and silent responses of important others shaped couples' experiences of family, friends and community in hurtful

ways. The experiences of and/or anticipation of these harmful consequences, at times, prompted couples to enlist silence themselves, through nondisclosure of the event of their legal marriages to important others in their lives.

Responses to Proposition 8 and the National Debate from Friends, Family, and Community

As described in *The Battle Metaphor*, both the local and the national debate on the extension of marriage rights have had an impact on the lived experiences of the 14 couples who participated in the study. In addition to the above-mentioned supportive responses to their marriages, the couples largely described the responses from their families, friends, and communities, throughout their experiences and challenges of Prop 8 and the local and national debate on the extension of marriage rights to same-sex couples, as supportive and affirming. Reflective of *The Battle Metaphor's* relevant dimensions of polarization and “us” and “them,” supportive and affirmative people were thus positioned in the “us” camp of the “us vs. them” divide. Further, meaningful support and affirmation were experienced by the participants when family members, friends, or community were verbal in their recognition of what the participants were going through and/or took action to convey their support. Because negative tensions—the negative and non-affirming responses of friends, family, and community to the passing of Prop 8 and its ongoing legal battles, as well as the lethargy, complacency, and lack of effective action within the LGBT community—have already been well-documented in *The Battle Metaphor*, they will not be repeated here.

Actions speak. Participants experienced meaningful support when family members, friends, or community were verbal in their recognition of what the participants

were going through. For example, Steven explained, “I had these debates . . . horrible debates [about marriage rights for same sex-couples] with, um—I went to a Catholic high school, and there is an email chain through my old high school class. And there is one guy there that is extremely religious. And he was going on and saying all of these horrible things, and—I was—I was trying to be as thought-provoking as possible—and calm in my responses. And I think that a lot of people from my high school came to me and said, you know—we really respect what you are saying and what you are doing. So that—that’s meant a lot to me. Because I went to high school in Florida. And so, these people now live all over the country. So, it was—it was meaningful.”

Displays of this support often came in the form of actions which spoke volumes to the participants. For example, Steven recalled his mother’s dynamic change in both attitude and action. “Now my mother does everything in her power to show that she is supportive. The poor woman is on a walker—she can barely get around, and when we were in the Pride parade last year, she made sure she got to the parade route to watch the parade. And she was so pissed off at me, because I didn’t happen to look over her way when she was waving like crazy,” he said, with a laugh. He then exclaimed, “I mean, the woman is 90, right! But, so she—you know, she has really done a 180. It’s amazing.”

Karen and Amy provided another example of how actions shaped perceptions of support. Earlier in their interview, Karen had spoken about how knowing that she had support at home had been helpful to her through the experiences and challenges of Prop 8’s passing. She also said, “And I think also [support] from our families. You know, my sister-in-law in Canada was one of the first people to email: ‘Oh my god! I can’t believe it! What are they thinking!’ You know, I mean, this is a straight woman. This is

somebody who phoned around Vancouver looking for a church to go to. And she didn't tell them that was what she was doing—when they answered the phone at all of these different churches, she said, 'I am just wondering if you can tell me if you conduct same-sex marriages?' Because of course they are legal in Canada. 'Do you conduct same-sex ceremonies, wedding ceremonies?' And the first five churches said *no*. And so then the last one that she called said, 'Oh, absolutely! We'd be happy to. When are you looking to get married?' She goes, 'Oh no, I am not gay.' She said, 'But I just don't want to go to a church that doesn't recognize same-sex marriage.' And she said, 'I don't want my daughter growing up in a church that's going to teach her to hate her Aunties.' And I thought, *wow*. That was really touching. That meant a lot to both Amy and I. That, you know. That our families are supportive as well."

Larry provided another example of how his family member's actions shaped his perceptions of support. He explained, "I have a wonderful, loving, caring family. I really do . . . as a matter of fact . . . the youth group had a new pastor come in—and the pastor started talking about the abomination of homosexuality, and how we are to protect ourselves, and Martin [Larry's brother-in-law] got the whole family in the car, you know, and said, 'Well, I guess we are going to have to find another church.' So you know, they are very accepting."

Sue provided another example of how others' actions shaped their perceptions of support. She explained, "My nieces have been totally supportive of me and Desiree, forever. So, I am sure if I asked them to, or if there was a way they could help they would. I mean we had asked for donations to one of four [marriage equality]

organizations instead of wedding gifts, and so family and friends gave—you know, I think over \$9,000 total to those organizations as wedding gifts.”

Cameron also described how others’ actions shaped his perceptions of support. “I have a close friend whose daughter is in high school. And she is a member of the—they have gay alliance—” “Gay-Straight Alliance?” I asked. “Yes,” said Cameron, “which we never had in high school, when I was in high school—but that is beside the point. I think it’s great. And during the whole Prop thing, she had had a friend in school that had talked her into going to church and it was [a] very conservative, evangelical type of place—and everything like that. She was sort of getting into it. I mean she wanted to be spiritual and all of that kind of stuff. But she has also known me since she was a little baby. You know, and her mom and dad are, and you know her uncle are all very open and tolerant—and so she is very aware of human rights, animal rights—all of—I mean they live their life in a real positive way. And so when the Prop thing came up, you know, she was automatically a *No on Prop 8*. She goes . . . *Why not? It’s not that big of a deal*. And so, I brought home a sticker for her—from my volunteering thing—a *No on Prop 8* sticker. And well, what she did was, she stuck it to the outside of her *Bible*. So when she took that to church, they asked her to take it off. And she said, ‘But why?’ And so she had a little debate doing on with them there—and she ended up—in tears. And walked away and never went back to that church again.”

Karen and Amy provided another example of how the actions of community members conveyed their support. Karen said, “Well, our neighbors across the street had their Prop 8 signs out before we did, *No on 8*. It was like, ‘Oh my gosh, there’s the straight couple with the *No on 8* sign, we’d better get ours out.”

Often, the participants were struck by the fact that displays of support came from surprising or unexpected places. Christine and Kara shared an example of a time when a coworker's actions demonstrated her support in ways which surprised both of them. Christine said that one of her coworkers, who had just started working with her the week of the 2008 elections, marched in the protest with them. Christine recalled, "I had known her for basically a week. And she walked in the protest with us. Knowing her for a week. And I just thought it was amazing. You know, that she had that much passion." "100% supportive, basically," said Kara. Christine elaborated: "She had just gotten legally married to her husband, you know, two weeks before. She supported us to get that right to do it, to have that right. Which I thought was really cool."

I said, reflecting on their experience, "There was some support in some surprising places, then?" Kara and Christine both agreed. Christine said, "Yes, Yes. I mean, I had known her for a week. And she was like, 'I WANT TO GO, I want to go!' (laughing). And there she was, marching with us. So, that made me feel good."

Carol and Sylvia also described how meaningful it was for them to have received affirmation and support from people in ways which they described as unexpected. Carol explained, "My mom—my mom is so cute. My mom has always been very—you know—very conservative. Goes to church every Sunday." "She is like Blue Collar, Union, Democrat type—well not Union—" added Sylvia. Carol continued, "She just amazed me when—this whole Prop 8 thing—she—you know—she was just totally behind—you know—totally against Prop 8 . . . [She] has said things to some of her older friends—at the retirement home or whatever—you know, she has like actually spoken out

against things like that—which I—you know, years ago, I would never have imagined her doing.”

Sylvia agreed, “Yeah, it has stretched her a bit. You know—she has had to sort of come out a bit.” “It has totally stretched her,” said Carol. Sylvia and Carol then provided an example to illustrate their point. They explained that Carol’s mother displays a wedding photo of the two in her home. When others inquire as to who the women in the picture are, Sylvia said, proudly, “You know, and she will say, ‘Oh that’s my daughter and her spouse.’”

Joel and Sam described how others responded to Prop 8 in a supportive way, when they were genuinely interested in or concerned about the events that were taking place. When talking about the time frame around the campaign for and passing of Prop 8, Joel explained, “A lot of people beyond myself were kind of staying more in touch with what was going on. Like my—you know, straight friends at work. . . . It was a topic that they paid attention to because they knew that it was impacting me—whereas before, they may not have even read about it. So, I found that really interesting.”

Shifts that the couples experienced on the part of the attitudes or actions of their communities were also meaningful to participants. Carl offered a recent example, how the shift within the military community’s attitudes towards gay men and lesbians, and the actions that have followed, have had a strong impact on him. Carl had been in the Navy for 20 years and considers the military part of his community. He currently works with the military as a contractor. He explained that he had recently attended the Navy’s first repeal of Don’t Ask Don’t Tell training on the Navy base. He described it as “very well done. Very respectful—but authoritative.” Carl continued to explain, “And one of the

interesting parts of it was when they referenced the Chaplains. Because a Chaplain should be able to administer counsel—you know, spiritual support, to any faith that comes to them or any person. So, if the Chaplain had an issue with a homosexual, then the Chaplain can choose not to be in the Navy anymore. Basically [they] said, you know—‘Sorry, but we need support for all of our members.’ So, just watching that was just fantastic.”

Carl then explained that they spoke about DOMA, and how that will impact same-sex couples in the military. “And it was done tactfully and respectfully. I—hats off to them,” he said. Carl then said that because he is a contractor, unlike the “government service people and the sailors,” he was not actually required to go to the training. He continued, “But it was also open to us to attend it. So I felt a responsibility to go. You know—on several levels. One, just to kind of see how they would approach it. And two, just to—to witness a shift in history. Because I remember being a young sailor with doubts about *am I really a homosexual or not?* Because I didn’t really understand what my nature was. And, to have been able to talk with anyone about it back then. That would have been great. So then, you get buried deeper in the closet—back in those early days. So, it was a responsibility for me to be there, and to witness that shift in history.”

Many couples didn’t merely experience shifts in the attitudes or actions of their communities. Harkening back to the engagement strategies discussed in *The Battle Metaphor*, some of the couples interviewed played active roles in influencing and shaping those shifts, thus creating a more supportive context. For example, Courtney explained, “I think the debate has influenced our church in moving it forward quite a bit. I think it’s been harder to defend not acknowledging, and developing a right for blessing,

as the debate has been going on and on. So—we're hopeful that the laws are going to change—for sure. We would really like that to happen. So we are in a LGBT group at church—fighting for national recognition as well as the church['s].”

Jennifer elaborated, saying Courtney had been “involved with a study group at our church that actually led to the bishop changing his mind about [blessing same-sex marriages].” Courtney explained, “Well, being on that committee . . . to talk with people that were just diametrically opposed to *me* personally. They just felt I didn't have the right to be who I am. It was definitely a . . . challenging experience.” “To stay with it, yeah,” Jennifer agreed. “The whole process of Courtney's involvement with that study at church was just a really personal—um, I was so proud of that . . .”

Mitch and Cameron also shared a story about how Mitch had intervened at church in a way that created change. Cameron said, “That whole period [Prop 8 campaign] was just so frustrating, too. The fact that they get all of that propaganda at church on Sunday, too—just made me nuts! You know, I had to go down to the campaign headquarters to get my sign. They got theirs as they left church on Sunday! That is absolutely insane! I mean—”

Mitch interjected, “Well, that's different for everyone. Our church had it, too—but—But I approached my—I told him you know—‘That's not right—you shouldn't have that here.’” “So your church had the [*Yes on 8* signs]?” I asked. “Yes, they had a table out there. But I approached them right away and told them, ‘You know, you've got me, for example. I am gay—openly gay. And I am sure that there's others here. And I will always come to this church. Whether they believe it or not—you are not going to run

me out—but you can’t throw that in our face. And you’ve got family members. You know, people here whose sons, daughters, cousins, whatever [are gay],” Mitch said.

“Did they take it [the signs] out?” I asked. “Yeah, they did. They didn’t have it again,” said Mitch. “Well, at least they took it out. You never told me they took it out,” said Cameron. “Well, it never came back,” Mitch replied. “Well, good. Good,” said Cameron.

Mitch continued, “Yeah. It never came back. I mean they didn’t knock it down that same day. I mean—it just never came back. It was never there again. . . . You gotta speak up. I wasn’t going to run away with my tail between my legs or hide—like, *Oh God! You know, they are gonna*—No! I mean—you have to—stand up for yourself. You have to acknowledge to somebody—‘You know, you are hurting my feelings—um, hello—I am gay. What are you going to do? Run me out? You can’t run me out of this church. You can’t tell me where to go. You know, you do not dictate to me. I have a relationship with God.’”

Important people in the participant’s lives responded to Prop 8 in another affirming way, by viewing its importance in relation to other social issues. For example, Leanne recalled one conversation between herself and her daughter that occurred “when the worst of Iraq was going on.” Leanne’s daughter said to her, “‘You know I am not opposed to anybody being married, but there are really big problems happening in the world. We should not be spending money on this . . . OK, so you don’t have rights today. But today, how many people got shot overseas?’ So, that was her response. *There’s too much going on. The country has no money. People are dying.* That, yeah, you should have rights, but it is just not front burner and shouldn’t be.”

Kara and Christine shared a similar example which they experienced as supportive. Kara explained that their friends “ride that roller coaster with us.” Christine agreed, “Yes . . . even our straight friends.” Christine then explained that her coworkers have been congratulatory through the victories, and supportive through the losses. In particular, she said, “They are like, ‘This is stupid. What’s going on?’ I mean, they are both thirty. And they don’t get it.” Kara agreed, “Yeah, I get a lot of that.” Christine elaborated, “You know, ‘Why is this a big deal?’ And I think that a lot of people in their twenties and thirties, for them, it is just not a big deal. And that is the frustrating part.”

I asked, for clarification, “What is the piece that you feel that they don’t get?” Christine responded, “Why can’t we legally get married? They just don’t understand why it is such a big deal. Why do we keep on going through this?” Kara replied, “‘Why is this even an issue?’ is their question. Which is great, you know.”

Participants also expressed that their friends, family, and community expressed their disappointment and outrage throughout the experience of Prop 8 and the legal battles connected to its passing. For example, Jerry explained, “Well, all of our friends were in our camp. So, it was very upsetting. We were certainly there for each other. We rallied, we sang, we got together. We bitched, and cried, and laughed, and marched down the street, and banged a drum.”

Sam and Joel shared a poignant story about the dismay and anger that the LGBT community experienced after the passing of Proposition 8. I asked them if there was a particular moment that stood out to them, which they had experienced as a couple. Joel recalled, “Oh, for me it was sitting on the floor at that—the meeting that the mayor was

at—right. Because it was incredibly emotional—like the *whole* place was just very emotional. And we were together there . . .”

Sam added, “And actually, I think even more specifically—listening to the mayor talk about his, um—path toward accepting his daughter—and her relationship. And realizing that his early stance against gay marriage had been wrong. Um, and why he thought it was wrong. And that was really, for me it was one of the most emotional points of that meeting at The [San Diego LGBT] Center.”

Joel agreed. “Yeah—but I think that was the most—that was like the pinnacle of that whole time period.” “What’s your sense about why that stands out so much to the two of you?” I asked. Sam replied, “I think it was seeing all of the—all of the gays and lesbians there—kind of holding each other, and comforting each other, and crying—and um, you know—listening to some of the personal stories. And also, seeing, um—seeing a little bit of the anger—as well.”

Sam continued, “Um, you know—I think as gay men and lesbians we do a really good job of kind of eating our own.” He went on to say, “I felt angry at Equality California for not doing a better job getting the message out. And not doing a better job of getting the vote out against passage of Proposition 8. And, although I didn’t really say anything to the representatives of Equality California and HRC and two or three other large organizations there, there were people who actually did stand up and they were like you know—‘Where were you?’ ‘Why—how—why didn’t you?’ ‘You know, you told us all along that this wasn’t going to pass and that we had the votes. And that we had the money to take care of this.’ ‘And why, now, are we sitting here with Prop 8 as the law of the land?’ And feeling that kind of energy in the room—that sort of ‘Yeah, what’s—

what's going on here? What happened?' But then having that mixed with the personal stories—I mean *seeing* the faces of these people who were affected by it—was—was kind of awesome.”

Joel agreed, and explained that he had never really seen the “LGBT community as one that is very focused. I mean we have a lot of opinions and directions.” Joel continued to explain, “But, in that instance—when everybody was in the room—that was one of the first times I’ve been to—been in the community—and everyone being focused on the same thing. Right. Everyone actually—like even before the vote—everyone wasn’t in agreement—right. You still had—the day before—people in the community were saying ‘Oh, I think it should [pass],’ you know, ‘I don’t care if it does [pass]—I don’t know if we should even have marriage—I think we should have something other [than marriage].’ You know—opinions across the board!”

“But, at that moment—everybody was like ‘*This was wrong.*’ Or, ‘This was where we *should have* focused.’ Right. But they didn’t realize that until it was done. But everybody had like the same point of view—at *that* moment. So, I don’t know, maybe it was a moment of clarity for everyone,” Joel explained. This action, coming together to share temporary defeat, gave the community a strong cohesive emotional bond.

Impact of Family, Friend, and Community Responses on Marriage Experience

The couples largely reported that the responses of friends, family, and community members did not impact their marriages negatively. However, some couples provided examples of how negative responses from those they care about actually became a source of tension between the two. On the other hand, many couples did experience positive

impacts from the positive and supportive experiences that they had with those that they cared about.

Negative responses did not impact our marriage. The majority of the couples were very quick to highlight that negative, non-affirming, or non-supportive experiences that they had with friends, family, or community members related to Proposition 8 and both the local and national debate on extending marriage rights did not negatively impact their relationship with one another. It is likely that this was due to both the length of time that the couples had been together prior to their legal marriages, and the fact that the majority had been navigating anti-LGBT contexts for most of their lives. For example, Amy said, “I would say that the negative ones that I’ve confronted—which I’ve mentioned—hurts my feelings, and—it doesn’t hurt my marriage.” When I asked Gabe and Jonathan about how the responses of others that they cared for impacted their marriage, Gabe initially responded, “I’d say not at all. I mean, it doesn’t have an impact on the way that I feel about Jonathan.” Jonathan agreed, “No, it hasn’t altered our togetherness—our marriage.” Gabe later added, “I mean—if everybody I knew didn’t support what I was doing it still wouldn’t impact how I feel about Jonathan. One way or the other. I mean, that’s my attitude.”

Desiree and Sue shared similar sentiments. Desiree explained, “So, we’ve had all of this incredible support. And in some ways, I really don’t care what anybody else thinks. At some level . . . and, so Sue and I have—no matter what the response was—if it would have been negative—we are still a unit. And nothing is going to change that. No matter what’s on the outside. It’s kind of like, I had to live my life and move forward, no matter what was going on. So, in some ways—for me, I really don’t care what someone

thinks. Because you have that internal core of strength, and you know who you are—and I know what this relationship is. So, how can anybody change that? They can't."

Thomas and Larry also indicated right away that negative responses had not impacted their marriage. Thomas said, "Well, we just don't really focus on those kinds of things and let that stuff in to us." Steven and James shared similar feelings. Steven explained, "I mean, I have to be honest and say I haven't really let it impact my experience of marriage. I've—you know what—I am legally married, and if you have a problem with it, that's your problem. It's not mine. I know my rights, and I am fully comfortable in my own skin—in being married to my partner."

Jerry and Carl also spoke to this. Jerry explained, "We don't let it affect our marriage. Because we are very happy at home. We do what couples do. I mean to just kind of watch us go about our day-to-day routine. It's pretty standard. I mean, it's not anything out of the ordinary. But yet, we enjoy it. We love it. You know, we have two cats. We like cuddling up on the couch . . . and [we] watch television. And our favorite programs. And we'll fix dinner. You know, it's just—outside of what we have to do politically to stand up for our rights. Otherwise, we are just pretty much an average couple. We are very supportive of each other. We laugh and play a lot. I think what really keeps us together is a mutual love and respect. And the freedom to pursue what our passions are."

Joel and Sam also explained that the negative or non-affirming responses they have experienced have not negatively impacted their marriage. Joel clarified, "I actually didn't associate that with our marriage. I saw all of that as like a political circus going on external to our marriage. That's how I perceived it." Sam added, "Yeah, um—I think so,

too. I think I did get a little—bit—mostly from the apologetic friends—a feeling of support. You know, that I didn't think I would necessarily get. But I think that the core—you know—the principle of feeling happy about the decision to get married—um—feeling happy that our—well actually, because our marriage was you know—kind of in limbo until the Supreme Court decided to let it stand—um, but feeling very happy about the decision to get married. And that Joel was the person that I wanted to marry. I don't think the reactions of people really impacted that core—you know—principle of marriage for me.”

Tension: Negative responses created friction. Some couples, like Joe and Jason, provided examples of how negative responses from those they care about have actually become a source of tension between the two. After Joe and Jason spoke about their mothers' reactions to Proposition 8, I asked, “How would you say that those responses have impacted your marriage?” Jason offered, “Well, I think I am a little bit more standoffish towards your mom than what you want.” Joe agreed, “You are. You are. But like her, you are very stubborn. And set in your ways. And that's fine. It's just—you can agree to disagree. You know, kind of thing. I am a little bit more trying to smooth the water kind of a thing. Smooth things out. I think we occasionally will get into a little bit of a bickering match over it. And it can be—I don't want to say hurtful, but I can go to bed angry, and that's not good. For the most part, I get over it by morning.”

I inquired, “So, some of the tension that exists with family members has created conversations and maybe tension between the two of you?” “Yeah, a little,” said Jason. “Not as much as it was early on. I think it has probably mellowed out a lot too.” Joe agreed, “Yeah, but I don't think it would be—I think it would be abnormal if it didn't.

You know, unfortunately, it's just kind of the way it is. But we are not going to get divorced because of it or anything."

Support and affirmation had positive effects. Many of the couples explained that the support and positive responses that they experienced from their family, friends, and communities affected their marriages in positive ways. They used words like *validating*, *reinforcing the value*, and *affirming* to describe these effects, and they often reported that the support had made their marriage stronger. A feeling of equality became another positive effect that the couples reported from the support they experienced throughout the process of Proposition 8 and the ongoing legal battles connected to its passing. Couples also affirmed that the feelings of support coming from those whom they cared about likely lowered their levels of stress, and has, for some couples, also provided a sense of being insulated. Finally, the couples described that support from others led to individual and relational shifts that were specific to their own circumstances.

Stronger. Chloe and Leanne described the support as buoying and strengthening their relationship. Chloe explained, "Well, I think it always buoys you up a little bit when you feel supported. And people that I am around in my circles just think that Prop 8 was horrible, and they should make the decision to give us equal rights. And they talk about us as though we're—you know, which we are—we're a married couple. And so I think that strengthens any marriage—when you almost—it's sort of like, you know, stuff that married couples take for granted—straight people have taken for granted, so they don't know what it's like not to have it. And since this is a recent addition into our life, we know the before and after, and we can feel it. We are a little bit more aware of it. It almost starts to fade in the background—and you're going—wait a minute, this feels

good, you know. Remember that we didn't think we'd ever have this. And I think anytime people treat you like a married couple, it buoys the marriage."

Scott and Derek also spoke to the ways in which support from those that they care about has been affirming and validating of their relationship, in ways that have made their marriage better and stronger. Scott explained, "It's good, it makes us feel better. It's more affirming." Derek added, "Yeah, more affirming and also there is just no riff. There's no—like, it would be one thing if his mom or my mom was against it. But, the way it is, he comes over for the holidays. And they come over. So there is no, you know. It sounds boring, but there is really no drama." Derek provided an example of a friend they know whose circumstances were not so supportive. "I have a friend got married to his partner, and his parents refused to come. I can't even imagine that. They refused to come, and he basically wrote them off. He has written off friends. He is more abrupt." Scott added, "Good for him."

"And so conversely, in our situation, I think it, the support we have had from family and friends makes our marriage stronger, too," said Scott. "Better, because of the validation," added Derek. Scott continued, "But we'll say, 'Isn't it so nice that our parents get along and that everything worked out?' Because for so many years, his parents never even met mine. Because, you know, there was never that confirmation of our relationship, and now by having the marriage . . ." Derek chimed in, "Right, they acknowledge each other. They will ask about each other. Even though his parents are in New York and Florida, and mine are here . . . so it's just kind of a nice . . . so it kinda makes it what, I will use the word *normal*."

Courtney described their community's responses as providing support and validation. She described the responses as "very, very positive. . . . It's been really—really good. Yeah, it's nice. It's just another way of validation. Which I think is such a part of what marriage is about, in all."

"Can you say more about that?" I asked. Courtney continued, "Well, I think that's what you are saying to the community when you get married—is, 'We're going to need you to know about this, because we are going to need some help—in the future.' And that's a given. And I think that's a lot of the reason that tradition has continued as long as it has. Because it's just such a way to have, to have that support. And we have people that would—we would be able to go to, when things got hard. And so, that's worth an awful lot."

"So the community's validation has really provided that to you," I said. Courtney replied, "Oh, yeah—absolutely. Right. And not just our LGBT community, but our work and our church community." Jennifer then added, "So, it's just, you know—real acknowledgement. On a really broad scale, I think."

Amy and Karen also spoke to the positive impact that support has had on their marriage. Amy explained, "The positive ones [responses]—that's just a part of being a part of a large network—we are a net of, you know—support for each other." "So the positive responses and all of the support has created a support network?" I asked. "I think so, yes. Absolutely," Amy agreed.

"Absolutely. Yeah, and I think strengthened it," said Karen. Amy agreed. "Can you say more about that Karen?" I asked. Karen replied, "How I feel that it has strengthened it? Well I just think that, again, the people that we are surrounding ourselves

with are people that—I mean, of all of our friends, we have been together the least amount of time. So, I think—for us—surrounding ourselves with those kind of people makes us realize that—first of all, not everybody’s relationship is perfect.”

Karen continued, “When you go out to dinner, or you go over to a friend’s house, and there is [sic] three other couples sitting there that have all been together longer than you have. Um, you know, and 12 years, 11 and-a-half years. That’s not insignificant—but some of them have been together 15 years, 17 years. And it’s like, it just kind of—really reinforces—to me it reinforces the value of the marriage. And the fact that you have that resource—to me—I think strengthens the security that I feel, in that I know that if we’re having a rough patch—it’s not, you know—it’s not just us. And we also have places where we can—besides each other—where we can go. . . . I know that if I needed to I could, you know. So I think that that just reassures me. But, yeah, I think that the responses from everybody are . . . I would just say are positive. They have strengthened the commitment that I feel.”

Equality. Another positive effect that couples reported, resulting from the support of their marriages and throughout the process of Proposition 8 and the ongoing legal battles connected to its passing, was a feeling of equality. When I asked Thomas and Larry if they felt like the responses from the church, which they described as particularly supportive, have impacted their marriage, Larry exclaimed, “Yes!” Thomas elaborated, “Only in a positive way. In that—we feel—we feel supported. Feel that people believe in us—and believe in our commitment to one another. And see us as equals.”

He then provided an example to illustrate his point. “This past Valentine’s our church did a little Valentine’s dinner. And they played like a newly wed/oldie wed game. And we were asked to participate.” “Two straight couples and us,” added Larry.

Thomas continued, “Yeah, we were on a panel, and one couple had been married 57 years, so it was like—it was sort of saying our commitment is just as valid as theirs. It’s just the same. There’s no difference. So that was—that’s a really positive thing. And it wasn’t just by chance—because I was part of the meetings and groups—it was specifically that, ‘We want to recognize and have a same-sex couple be a part of this process. And be part of this, because we want everyone to see that this is just as important and just as meaningful.’ So, that felt good.”

Larry added. “Yes, and we don’t feel like we’re the gay couple—we feel like we’re just another married couple.” Larry went on to explain, “I think that that strengthens us more than it would strengthen us to be in a gay church where everybody’s gay. It’s really been very healing for me. I think that’s important.”

Mitch and Cameron also reported that it was meaningful to them that those for whom they care treat their marriage as a marriage. “They just don’t treat us any different,” Mitch explained. Cameron added, “Well, and they treat us with respect just like they would treat anybody else with respect. Our relationship is just as—real. As his brother’s and sister’s that are married. Or my sister.” “Nobody walks on eggshells around us,” said Mitch. “Or you know, anybody who we know that is married. Our relationship is basically the same,” said Cameron. Mitch continued, “I mean, they treat us just like regular people. They respect our marriage. You know, his family, my family. His brothers and sisters. They all call him brother-in-law—you know.”

Lower Stress. Similar to the sentiments expressed above by Derek and Scott, couples such as Kara and Christine also felt that support from those they cared about likely lowered their exposure to stress. Kara explained, “We have had so much support. We haven’t had to . . .” “Justify,” said Christine. Kara agreed, saying, “We haven’t had to justify. We haven’t had to, you know, argue about the parents. You know, ‘Your parents hate us,’ or ‘My parents hate us.’ We haven’t had to go through any of that. We have had nothing but support from—yeah, you know, we have had the occasional ‘Faggots’ and that type of stuff, and it is just like (rolls eyes). Whatever. Yeah, not from within our community, but from without, so, whatever. I am over it.” Christine added, “And if that happens, we just tend not to go back to those places. We have decided not to put ourselves in situations where we are not going to feel safe.”

Kara explained, “And it [the support] probably does impact us, but I think it impacts it in a positive way instead of a negative way.” I then asked them to say more about how it has affected them positively. Kara replied, “Just not having to have the worry about, jeeze, *What’s Mom going to say next time we talk?* I don’t have to deal with my mother sitting there thinking, ‘Gosh, I am sure glad that the judge decided that they couldn’t be married after all.’ I mean, that has an impact on me.”

Christine agreed, “Well yeah, ‘cause coming out to my mom, way back when, was scary. But now you just don’t have to worry about that. I mean, the acceptance is there, so that there is not that stress every time you get on the phone with your mom. And it’s OK, you’re not—every time you pick up the phone, *Aw, do I really have to talk to my mom now?* There is not that stress there. So that positive, that, that energy or whatever you want to say—it doesn’t drag you down when you feel like you have to call your

parent. Or even, if she talks to mine, or I talk to her parent, it's not, 'They don't like me, they don't want to talk to me,' you know—so it's, it's a positive thing.”

“So there is definitely less stress?” I asked, point blank. Kara responded, “Oh, yeah, there is no stress. There was no stress put onto us by reactions from friends, family, community None, whatsoever. So the impact would be that they didn't stress us out, I guess.”

Insulated. Other couples described a feeling of insulation, due to the support they have received from those they care about. Amy explained that because of their close proximity to and support from the LGBT community, “it does feel like a bubble.” She then said that she used to live in a more suburban area in northern San Diego. She recalled that “it was a completely different feel. So, it was very non-integrated—and, um—I feel much more comfortable in an area where there's—kinda varying economic levels—um, different color faces, just diversity.” “Just general diversity,” added Karen. “And up there, it just wasn't. There was a less—a less sense of safety. The safety was in the condo. And going outside of the condo—it just felt less safe. Whereas, down here—you know—going into Ralphs or Trader Joes [grocery stores in Hillcrest] there's, it is a much deeper comfort level. So, it is a little bit like a bubble,” Amy explained.

Karen went on to explain, “So we really, you know—and we've talked about this—we almost feel like we live in a little bit of a bubble. Because even though San Diego is conservative . . . you know, we drove by a *Yes on 8* bumper sticker just the other day. But I think that one of the things that we've talked about with our friends is that . . . we're so comfortable just being out and being ourselves, and you know—we don't walk down the street saying, 'We're gay, we're gay.' But also, if somebody specifically asks

us, or if we are talking in a conversation—we don’t hide who we are, or purposely avoid using pronouns or anything like that.”

Karen continued, “We have a false sense of security—and we realize that there are a lot of places where you can’t do that. There are a lot of people in this country that, and even in parts of this county—where you can’t do that. But . . . that’s not who we consider to be our community, and that’s not who we are surrounded by. So, I think that we’re just very—we’re just very lucky that as far as we know, those people are not in our lives.” “Yes,” Amy agreed.

James also described living in Hillcrest as a “bubble.” He said, “Well, of course our community is kind of, it’s kind of a bubble because we live in Hillcrest so it’s not—it’s not—it’s kind of skewed, because we live in a gay neighborhood. So, it wasn’t, it wasn’t a good cross section. You know, ‘cause we live kind of on an island.”

Comfortable about who we are. Jonathan and Gabe gave one of the richest descriptions of the effects that support has had in their lives. Jonathan described the effect of support as “more of a personal thing than an affecting-our-marriage thing,” but as the story unfolded it was clear that support has made him “feel comfortable about who we are” in ways which have shaped the couple’s lived experiences.

I asked Jonathan to say more about how support for their marriage has made him more comfortable. He replied, “Well, since I had to live a dual life for 33 years, I was just like totally . . . paranoid (laughing).” “Good word, good word,” agreed Gabe.” “And, what I said—who I was with—and actually—just fabricating an image to other people, because of my job position,” continued Jonathan.

Gabe then added, “And because he’s more comfortable, and less paranoid, it impacts me, because now I don’t have to be as careful as I used to be about who I say—or what I say to who—because every now and then, I used to get my hand slapped . . . and he’d say, ‘Don’t say that!’ You know, things like that.” “Or we’d be out someplace, and it’s like, ‘Oh my god! There’s my boss, run! Whoosh!!’” laughed Jonathan.

I then said, “So Jonathan—what you are describing to me, it sounds like the responses and the support and the people showing up for your wedding—and that whole community piece has helped you to integrate your life?” Jonathan agreed, “Yeah, because I would not have—probably, I don’t think that I would have gotten married had I still been working.” Gabe agreed, “Probably not, that’s true.” “I wouldn’t have taken that plunge,” said Jonathan. Gabe added, “That’s right, because you were retired by then.” “Yeah, I was retired,” Jonathan said, “and so it’s actually—I have been retired almost five years—and it has taken me five years to get over being employed. Over that dual life style. And I am sure that I am still not over it—”

“It sounds like it has helped to integrate the different aspects of your life, and that that’s had an effect on you [Gabe],” I said. Gabe and Jonathan both agreed that this was true. Jonathan said, “Yes, to achieve close to what you might call a normalcy, that just was not possible before. A union, a pair.”

“It sounds like the level of paranoia has decreased,” I later reflected. “It has . . . but I think growing up when I did, and being in the military and having a top secret crypto clearance, and then getting a private job with a DOD [Department of Defense] secret clearance. I mean, I developed that paranoia throughout my whole life out of self

preservation, so that I could stay employed. So it was just deeply engrained and rooted—and it's hard to get rid of all of that,” explained Jonathan.

I then asked for Gabe's perspective. “Can you say more, Gabe, about what it has been like to see this shift—not worrying about getting your hand slapped?” Gabe responded, “Oh, yeah—well, yeah, it's much more . . . what's the word I am looking for—um—it's a healthier feeling. Um, not having to be too careful about what I say, or when I say it in public—because Jonathan is more comfortable than he used to be—and like he said, not as paranoid.” Jonathan asked Gabe, “Do you think it's because of the marriage, or just because I am finally free of my job?” Gabe replied, “Well, obviously marriage had something to do with that in the whole scope of things—with Prop 8 and so on and so forth. I mean, that was a vehicle in itself.” Jonathan agreed with Gabe. “You know, the fact that we were permitted to get married,” Gabe said.

Jonathan agreed, “That's true, I don't know—if Prop 8 wouldn't have come up—I really can't say whether or not we would have gotten married or not.” Gabe continued, “Yeah, yeah. I think that probably had some kind of an impact on it. Because I know that we both got—once Prop 8 started, we both got more involved. Politically.” Jonathan added, “Yeah, because DOMA had been around for a long time. That was like—ancient history practically—since Clinton. So getting married, not getting married didn't really have any connection to DOMA.” Gabe concluded, “Yeah, but—yeah, it's refreshing for me to see Jonathan more comfortable than he used to be. You know, not having to be so cautious and careful.” “That was worth something, huh,” said Jonathan. “Yes,” said Gabe. “Oh, OK,” Jonathan said with a smile. Gabe smiled and laughed. After 35 years together, the support the two experienced from their friends, family and community had

the power of unraveling the effects of decades of hypervigilance surrounding the couple's living of a double life.

Conclusion

Emergent theme IV, *Support Shaped Lived Experiences*, provides us with a greater understanding of how the effects of the presence or absence of support in the couples' lives informed their experiences and the meanings made therefrom. Largely, the couples reported supportive responses both to their marriages and throughout Prop 8, and the ongoing experiences of the local and national debate on the extension of marriage rights to same-sex couples. Friends, family, and community shaped the couples' lived experiences in positive and preferred ways. Additionally, participants experienced meaningful support and affirmation when family members, friends, or community were verbal in their recognition of what the participants were going through and/or took action to convey their support.

Further, the couples all described that they had very few overtly negative responses to their marriages from friends, family, and community members. When they did encounter negativity, however, it shaped their understanding of their lived experiences in more challenging ways. The couples also described instances where family members, friends, and their communities did not acknowledge their marriages. This silence was a response that also shaped the participants' lived experiences in powerful ways. For some of the couples, however, this long legacy of silence has begun to crumble, adding ease and comfort to their lives.

The majority of the couples were very quick to highlight that negative, non-affirming, or non-supportive experiences that they had with friends, family, or

community members, related to Proposition 8 and the local and national debate on extending marriage rights, did not negatively impact their relationship with one another.

Positive reinforcement and support of their marriages from family, friends, and communities did affect participants' marriages in positive ways. More specifically, couples reported the following welcome effects of having strong support systems: their marriages felt stronger, they had a greater sense of equality, their exposure to stress was lessened, and support helped them feel insulated from harm and isolation. Thus, emergent themes I-IV—the detailed examination of legally married same-sex couples' lived experiences during California's battle to extend marriage for all its citizens—lead us naturally to emergent theme five, which explores how the newly gained right of legal marriage has shaped the participant's individual, relational, and social identities in the context of their lived experiences. This emergent theme, *Legal Marriage Shaped Individual, Relational, and Social Identities*, brings conclusion to the narrative.

Emergent Theme V: Legal Marriage Shaped Individual, Relational, and Social Identities

The final emergent theme—*Legal Marriage Shaped Individual, Relational, and Social Identities*—unifies the narrative. The fourteen same-sex couples who participated in this inquiry all experienced the as yet rare right to live within a legally married context. Having seen that their commitments had history (*Our Commitments Have Rich Histories*), their language choices were contextual (*Not a Simple Matter: The Complexities of Language Choice*), and their relationships were situated both within the discriminatory context of the debate over the extension of marriage rights to same-sex couples (*The Battle Metaphor*) and the overwhelming support that they received from

friends, family, and community (*Support Shaped Lived Experiences*), the narrative now turns to considering how legal marriage itself shaped the participant's individual, relational, and social identities. The couples did describe ways in which identity shifts had occurred through their experiences of being legally married. Thus, in addition to the factors considered in previous emergent themes—all essential to reaching a comprehensive view of the topic—emergent theme five presents the shifts couples described that occurred for them individually, relationally, and socially through the experience of being legally married.

Significantly, interviewees reported that their identities were shaped on an individual level due to legal marriage: a shift occurred with regard to what the participants thought was possible in their lives. Participants often said that they never saw marriage as a part of their futures. Further, their relational identities changed through being legally married, with many couples describing their relationships as being stronger and more stable. Socially, the couples described legal marriage as having changed their public identities, because they saw themselves as having a greater sense of equality and legitimacy.

However, study couples also realized that while identity shifts have occurred for them on the individual, relational, and social levels, these shifts are limited by the larger fight for relationship recognition and marriage equality for same-sex couples on the national and international level. As a result, for many couples, their marriage experiences either further reinforced or incited a shift in their social identities, in that their experiences positioned them as agents of social change.

Emergent theme V, *Legal Marriage Shaped Individual, Relational, and Social Identities*, is comprised of five relevant dimensions:

- 1. Legal Marriage Shaped Individual Identity**
- 2. Legal Marriage Shaped Relational Identity**
- 3. Legal Marriage Shaped Social Identity**
- 4. Looking Back: What has Changed and What Still Needs To Change**
- 5. Moving Forward: Commitment to Fight for Equality**

Legal Marriage Shaped Individual Identity

In evaluating their experiences, many of the study participants articulated that through legal marriage, a shift occurred with regard to what they thought was **possible** in their lives. Participants often reflected that they never saw marriage as a part of their futures. Derek and Scott spoke to this evolution. Derek explained, “I think that being married is great. And I tell my straight friends. I joke with them, ‘So this is it?’ You know, ‘So overrated.’ And I am like, ‘We are just as miserable as you are now!’ (Laughing.) But no . . . it’s funny, because I never thought I’d be—get married, you know.” Scott agreed, “Me either, yeah.” Derek continued, “That’s one thing. I thought, ‘I will never get married,’ you know, and *everybody wants to get married* . . . you grow up, and you want to, and I thought, well, prior to being married, ‘I’ll never be married.’ So here I am married. So it’s kind of nice.”

Scott said, “Part of it, I think, is part of that whole stigma of, well, like you are a lesser person, you can’t get married, you are not as stable.” Derek added, “Yeah, even if you have a domestic partnership, that’s not marriage.” Scott continued, “People, some people look down on people who never get married, like, ‘Oh, well you never reached

that’—that thing in life where you got married . . . like a mark of your success. Oh, you are successful, you found someone to spend your life with. And because gay people couldn’t get married, it’s like, ‘Oh, well, you’re gay and you, you know, you’re unstable. And you can’t be in a long-term relationship.’”

Sue also spoke eloquently of gaining a right she never thought she could: “I understand now that I never expected to marry. I mean, I knew as an eight-year-old that I would never walk down the aisle with my father. So, marriage from that time on was somehow—I mean, it was just nowhere. And when we were planning our commitment ceremony, and I went to try on dresses, I mean—I just sobbed. Because I just couldn’t believe this was a possibility,” Sue said with tears in her eyes. She continued, “So, knowing how many people can’t do this, it’s just such a precious gift that I am living in a state that had the opportunity for this little—this brief amount of time—Is just amazing.”

Mitch and Cameron had a shared experience of understanding marriage as unavailable to them in their lives. Cameron said, “It feels good—but it takes some getting used to. Because you know what, for 50 years we were told we could never be married. And you just kind of grow up—OK first of all, you are dealing with the fact that you’re gay—and you know—basically no one else is. So, you deal with that, and then—OK, you come to terms with that. Then you come to terms with—OK, I am never going to have kids, I am never going to be married. I am never going to—you know, that kind of stuff. And you learn to accept it. And you learn it’s just a way of life. And then all of a sudden, boom—it isn’t exactly that way, anymore. So, it does take some getting used to, but in a good way. In a good way.”

Making an analogy in order to explain his experience of being legally married, Mitch said, “It’s just like with the new house. When we bought the house—it took me two years to feel that it was my house. You know, I was feeling like I was house-sitting for somebody, because it is such a beautiful home, and I am like, *I can’t believe this is my house*. You know, it took me that long to be able to say *I am married*, because we had goals—well, I had goals for myself from 40 to 50, and marriage simply was never one of them. And I am proud to say that I accomplished my goals, but—being married—we had a nice big ceremony, all of our family was there, and friends—it was great—but we were together for all of this time, so it didn’t feel much different to me until that day. I was like—proud. OK, now I feel like I am really married.”

James explained that he also had not imagined marriage as being a part of his future. He said, “I came out when I was 18 and so, you know—it wasn’t a—marriage wasn’t in the picture for me. Obviously. It wasn’t legal—so. It just wasn’t—in my life—it wasn’t something that I, you know, strived to do. It wasn’t available to me. “Was it ever something that you thought would happen for you?” I asked. James replied, “I always hoped it would. You know, I have always hoped that we’d all have equal rights.”

In addition to creating a shift in what participants thought was possible for their lives with regard to relationship recognition, Chloe described that her thinking had evolved in another way which resonated with some of the sentiments expressed earlier by Derek and Scott. She said that she used to believe that gay and lesbian relationships always end. This belief shaped how she viewed and participated in her previous relationships. She explained that initially, when marriage rights for same-sex couples started to become a focus in the community, she had been skeptical. She said, “It’s like,

Wow. You guys, be careful what you ask for, because then it won't be so easy to end things when—when it ends. And I was beginning to believe that they always end, after a certain number of years.” Chloe continued, “But, it just seems like once I got domestically partnered, and then once I got married, I just—maybe I became more aware of them, but I became more aware of more long-term couples that have been together for so, so long. And I am going, yeah—we are just as capable of staying together many years as any other couple.”

These examples illustrate how legal marriage, for many of the participants, actually altered their ideas about what was possible for their futures. In terms of the possibility of having a longstanding relationship and in being able to symbolically and legally call that relationship a marriage—in the same way that their heterosexual counterparts were able to—legal marriage shifted their experiences in profound and meaningful ways.

Legal Marriage Shaped Relational Identity

Building upon the individual identity shifts that occurred as legal marriage became possible for the participants in the study, many of the couples reported that the **meaning** surrounding legal marriage shifted as they considered how to make sense of it, how to embrace it as something that they had access to in their lives. Referencing the controversy within the gay and lesbian community on access to marriage, Gabe said, “I think, too—both of us—our thinking has evolved on marriage in general. Because I think we would both agree that at one point in time, we didn't really give it that much consideration. We just knew that—OK, we've got domestic partnership—that's pretty good. Do we need to, quote, *have the marriage title*? Do we need to be married? And,

obviously there has been a tremendous amount of discussion about that in the LGBT community, where you've got one side that says, 'Well, we don't need to be married—we know we have each other—we've got commitments—blah blah blah.' And so, for them, it's just a word. But, um—my thinking has evolved where I think, yes—marriage is very important. . . . Does everyone who is in a committed relationship need to be married? I don't believe that. You know, that's a choice. And, when you get right down to it, what is marriage? It's a contract. Pure and simple. I mean, that's what it is. I mean, that's the definition of marriage. It's a contract. It just so happens that obviously the federal government has decided that it's only a contract between a man and a woman."

Further, some of the couples hadn't anticipated just how much legal marriage would mean to them or make a difference in their lives. Steven explained, "I will say this—I think we almost got engaged on a lark. Even though we were already registered partners—domestic partners. *Well, we thought, well, what is this going to get us that we don't already have?* Really—legally there was nothing else that it was offering, other than the term *marriage*. But, um, through the process, it just became so much more important, when we actually—when we started planning the ceremony, and we started doing all of these things leading up to the actual event."

Sam and Joel had similar reflections. Early in their interview, Sam said, "Well, initially when I heard that marriage was legal in California, I didn't want to get married—because my thought was, *That's really what heterosexuals do*. You know, domestic partnership is fine for us. Or, if they created civil unions that would be fine. And then the more I thought about it, the more I was like, *You know—this is kind of a historic opportunity for us to get married* and so—*Let's do it!* And—it wasn't just the political or

historical—you know, obviously, I wouldn't have married him if I didn't love him—or accept the marriage proposal if I didn't love him. But, like Joel said, once we got married—it was really powerful. It was a really good feeling.” “More . . . more than I expected. Absolutely,” said Joel. Sam agreed, “Oh, yes—and even more so than I felt—because we got domestically partnered before that—um, in 2005. And getting married was just very different—a different feeling.”

Joel later explained, “One of the things that I would like to convey—is that the people in our community . . . and maybe those that are not married—I don't think you can really appreciate what it means until you have it—and then maybe have, you know—you have to deal with potentially not having it. Right. I mean, like I said earlier, I didn't really under[stand]—or, I didn't really appreciate what it was until we were there. Right—I mean being able to call Sam my husband is just an amazing thing that I would have never realized before. So, for those that would say, ‘Oh, it's not a big deal,’ or ‘We can call it something else’ (shakes head). It's not—it's a *huge* deal. You know, and I don't know how to convey that to people or have them understand that until—I mean, I didn't understand it until I was there.”

Sam agreed, “Yeah, and I think—again. You know, like we've said—it was surprisingly powerful. You know, to be able to—to use—well—to be able to use the word and *mean* it. Um, I didn't really see it a lot *here*, but when I lived in North Carolina and Louisiana and whatever—after you'd dated somebody for—you know—six months—eight months—whatever, everybody said, ‘blah blah blah—Oh, your husband.’ You know—and I never really thought about it then, but saying it [husband] for the first

time with the legal power behind it was just—*powerful*. I mean—it was very forceful and it felt *different*—like the word felt different—*the whole world felt different*.”

Positive impact on relational identity: Legal marriage made our relationships stronger and more connected. In evaluating their experiences, many of the couples agreed that legal marriage did impact their relationships in positive ways. Couples described the shift as having stronger and more connected relationships. Steven offered, “I think it’s strengthened our relationship.” I asked, “Can you say more about how you think it strengthened it?” Steven replied, “I think it strengthened our relationship not only from a legal aspect—but, um—I think it brought us a little closer together. . . . But, I think it tends—you just feel more comfortable with each other, and you know where you stand.”

“I just think we are more tied into each other. Also. Don’t you [James] think that?” asked Steven. “Yes, I do,” said James, “No, it’s true. Yeah.” Steven explained, “Well, I think that we rely on each other a lot more. We have, um—we make more decisions together I think. I think that we take each other’s opinion and considerations into play.”

James added, “Well, I think that, um—it has strengthened the bond. You know, I think that we share more, we ask each other’s opinions more, and we bounce ideas off of each other. And we, um, we plan for the future—that’s our thing.” “Do you think maybe the relationship became more collaborative?” I asked. “Yeah, I would say,” said James. Steven agreed, “Yeah, we um, we work together as a unit now as opposed to—I mean, we take each other’s feelings into consideration before we make a decision.”

Some of the couples believed that the intersection of their legal marriages and their experiences of Prop 8, and all of the legal battles connected to its passing, had the effect of bringing the two closer together. Like a few of the other couples, Carol and Sylvia had been exposed to different levels of homophobia and discrimination in their lives, with Sylvia being exposed to much more than Carol. Prop 8 allowed Carol to understand Sylvia's history in a way that made them each feel more connected to one another and to their community. Carol illustrated this by explaining, "Well, I think just with respect to being gay. I mean—you [Sylvia] came out much younger—and in a state—you know—not as supportive of that as California can be . . . and your parents weren't supportive." "Just everything," said Sylvia. "So you had a lot more [discrimination] I think—" said Carol.

Sylvia explained that she had moved to California "to get away from Virginia when I finished grad school." Carol then said, "I came out later—and really—for the most part—had never had a bad—you know. I mean—I didn't lose any friends over it—I didn't lose any family members—I didn't have any negative things happen. And so I—so yeah, this whole Prop 8 thing was the first time where I was like, you know—how dare they! And it really got me worked up—a little bit. So, Sylvia always teases me because she is like, 'You don't—you don't understand how the world can be. You don't have that—that viewpoint. Or you haven't had those experiences.' So, with this whole Proposition 8 thing, I mean I kinda got to see some of that. So, I would say that brought us closer."

Sylvia explained, "Yeah, I have just often felt like an outsider. In my adult life—and then, you know, you've [Carol] always been on the inside—just to make it black and

white. So—it's funny." I reflected to Carol that she had felt that the experience had brought the two closer. Carol replied, "Yes. Yeah—just having kind of that shared experience as the outsider—or the person who's rights are being trampled on. The person who's having to fight to get what they deserve."

I then asked the couple if their experiences had also had the effect of bringing them closer to other people who were around them, who were also involved in the battle. Sylvia replied, "Um, well, I would say *yes*. I mean all of our friends—whether they were married or not. I mean everybody was just—I mean gay people were just—our gay friends were just—we were all equally hurt. It was very common." Carol added, "Well, even some of our straight friends. There was actually a lot of support from them." Sylvia concluded, "Definitely support from them. But as far as just that, um—you know—the visceral—you know, feelings about what was happening. You know, it just felt like we, we're—brothers and sisters."

Positive impact on relational identity: Legal marriage gave us a greater sense of stability. Couples often spoke about another powerful effect of legal marriage, that of having a greater sense of relational stability. Chloe's notion, described earlier—that gay and lesbian relationships don't last—has been challenged by this new stability. It counters the stereotypical assumption that gay and lesbian coupling is fleeting, opportunistic, and/or doomed to fail. For instance, Joe and Jason provided an example of the greater stability that legal marriage afforded their relationship. Joe explained, "I like to say from time to time that we are kind of the envy of our friends—I think that—this is my personal experience—and before meeting him—you know I—the whole scene is very (sighs) kind of party boy like. And it's not really about establishing a lot of meaningful—

at least long-term relationships. It's more about the here and now in the moment kind of thing . . . I think it's more of an age thing. That, you know, [gay] people in their 20s aren't looking for something [long term]. They're not looking for love, as they say. There's only a certain few of us who are sort of wired that way. Who kind of want that stability, I think. Part of it is maturity and all of that. But this is kind of a way to reaffirm that we have something special."

Jason later explained, "It's been kind of nice. Like one—being out of the dating scene." He laughed. "Do not envy that. I see friends that are still in it, and I am like—ehh—don't miss it." Joe agreed, "Yeah, knowing who we get to go home with is nice. Not having to look for that trick or look for the next boy—or just deal with all of that drama. It's really nice. You know, and it's nice to have more of a functioning [relationship]—" Jason then added, "It kind of lends it [our relationship] . . . a little more validation, too. Like, my mom can kind of look, and be like, *OK, well, they're cemented, they're not going anywhere*. Because before it was like, you know, 'So who are you dating this week?' It's not like that anymore, she—I think it's more cemented in her mind. Now it's, see we've got a license—you know, the state says [we are married]."

"And we have our—you know, we have ups and downs, but nothing too dramatic. You know, if we fight, we're better by the morning . . . it just works. And it's been two years, going on three. And it just seems like, you know—this is our life. We're just happy," Joe said with a smile.

Kara and Christine also spoke to the greater stability that their legal marriage afforded them. Curious about what they felt that marriage had made possible for them in their lives, I asked, "Specific to your own experience, is there anything that you think it

would help for other people to know about what it has been like to be married, or what that has brought to the two of you in your life?” Christine responded, “Stability.” Kara added, “We share that, yeah, the stability, we do, we share that with people, too. I mean, we talk about that—it’s like, you know, did we feel any different about our relationship? No. Was the relationship different? Probably so. Just in the fact that it is. . . . So we get into a fight, you are not going to just go break up and start dividing up the property.” Christine added, “Yeah, the stability is there. You are not a girlfriend, you know, domestic partners. . . . It’s not just I can walk away from it anymore.” “No, not anymore. Which is good,” Kara added.

Amy shared similar sentiments on the stability created through legal marriage. “I think that if I could take that same thing and just bring it to the next level, of what it feels like to be married, as opposed to . . . I am 52, or I will be 52 this year. I have had a lot of relationships (laughing) over the course of the last, you know, 30, 35 years. And, um, I’ve had domestic partnerships, I’ve had partnerships, I’ve had girlfriends, I’ve had, you know. I have been through a lot. Marriage is different. And, it just feels—different. It’s not that I am any more committed to Karen. It’s not that I am any more committed to the relationship. Um, it’s more like there’s a sense of . . . um . . . ease. In that there’s a—I don’t want to say that there is a binding. . . . There’s a quality to it that—is strengthening to me personally. That, you know, when you are partnered, and you are in a domestic partnership, you kinda hope that you make it through all of the challenging times and things like that, but to have actually have presented to our families and to our friends, and now continue to present, to our communities, to our places of work. There’s almost, a . . . when things get difficult—which doesn’t happen very often for us—but, when it does,

there is almost a deeper sense of support from the world . . . around me. That's just me personally. It just feels completely different to me."

Steven also described the sense of stability that he and Michael experience through marriage. He explained, "So, I like the fact that—if tomorrow we got really upset with each other and decided to break up, it wouldn't be an easy thing to split. So, that mind frame says, 'You know what, I need to work harder to make sure this thing continues successfully.' Because, having been through a divorce, I know it is financial and emotional suicide. So, I think it's something not to be entered into lightly. So, I think that we—it's something that we relish having, because it helps keep us closer."

Steven also explained, "Well, I have been married before. So, I have had that experience, even though it was with the opposite sex. So I know I am more comfortable being married. There is more certainty involved. We have a common goal. Um, we are planning our retirement together—we're planning our lives to the end of our lives together. And as a result, that's what being married is for me. We work things out together. And that's why that is important."

Cameron took the theme of stability a bit further by explaining that legal marriage would likely take some getting used to in the gay and lesbian community. He said, "I have a feeling, that, um—when it does become legal for everyone . . . that it is going to be something that—it is going to take some getting used to—the idea of it—because—how many times have we been in a relationship for a year or two—or five—and went 'Oh, this is not working out anymore.' And we go our separate ways, and that's all there is to it. It's just not that easy anymore. Once you get married, it's not that easy to just go—I have known men who have been together for 15, 20 years and all of a sudden they

just get up and boom, aren't together anymore. Or, you know, if they got married, it wouldn't be. It's, it's different—you know, it's not that easy [to separate].”

These examples illustrate that for many of the participants, their ideas about the meaning of marriage shifted as it became possible for them in their lives, oftentimes in surprising and unanticipated ways. Further, their legal marriage experiences had positive effects on their relationships. These effects included the couples feeling their relationships were stronger and more stable. Further, they described that their shared legal marriage experiences had the effect of bringing them closer to one another and to others who had similar experiences through their own legal marriages.

Legal Marriage Shaped Social Identity

Positive impact on social identity: Legal marriage afforded us a greater sense of equality. Couples often reported that there was little change that they experienced in their actual day-to-day relationships as a result of their legal marriages, often due to the length of time they had been together before they had legally married. However, in evaluating their experiences, these couples did state unequivocally that their legal marriage brought them a greater sense of equality socially and politically. For example, Jerry and Carl attributed their relationship length to the resiliency in their relationship. Jerry explained “It’s—as I said earlier . . . who knew I was the marrying kind? I prefer married life. I like it. I like it a lot. In fact, I love it.” Carl offered, “We’ve been together for 14 years now . . . we were together quite a while before we got married. Well, legally married. So, not a lot impacts our marriage.”

Jerry later explained that their legal marriage “just reinforced deeply what was already there. It just anchored it.” He went on to explain, “That feeling of equality feels

so good. You know, personally, professionally. You know, being in this country. Like, wow—it's great to be on equal footing. . . . It did make a difference. It just—it was more solid. It was more welcoming into society as opposed to just kind of like an add-on or—you know, we liked being domestic partners, but the more you think about it—you compare it side by side. I looked at, well domestic partner, that's separate but equal. I felt like, wow—they're just throwing crumbs at us. You know, you are not quite *good enough*. To be *married* in the sense of a man and a woman . . . and I was looking forward to the day that *yes*, we were on equal footing."

Jerry also explained, "And I really felt, you know—much more a part of the country. Wow—now—now that this is given us, we're on equal footing. We are on equal footing. It feels more like home. It *feels* more like home. Instead of just being a misfit that's welcomed in. It just felt right. And signing that piece of paper just really took it that much deeper. And has anchored us as a couple. So we can, in conversation, legally say—and ethically, and realistically, that we are a married couple. Husband and husband."

Derek and Scott provided another example. Derek explained, "For me—being able to say, 'I am married' It kinda gives me more power than just to say, 'I have a boyfriend.'" Scott said, "Puts you on equal weighting. It's not this second class—civil union thing—oh, yeah, separate but equal." Derek said, "There is no, 'Oh, one of those (fingers in quotes) domestic or civil union.' I have got what you have, so. What? There's nothing, you can't say [its not equal]."

Scott explained, "I think that was the best argument, when I was doing the phone polling, calling people up to do *No on Prop 8*. People would say, 'Well, you already have

all of the rights of married people, why can't you just go with that?' And I think that the key argument to make is, 'Well, that's kinda what they said about black people during the Civil Rights era.' They've got, you know, everything is the same. It's just separate. Well, that's not equal." Derek continued, "So, yeah, for me I think being able to—being married, and talking to people. . . . You can't put me down. Or you can't say, you guys are—no, I have what you have. So, you know. Let's talk about it, or whatever. . . . I am not backing down on, you know. I have nothing, nothing to—we are even—"

Jonathan and Gabe gave another example of how legal marriage provided them a greater sense of equality in the eyes of others. "I think it affects the way that they [others] look at us," said Jonathan. "Definitely," agreed Gabe. "We are married," said Jonathan. Gabe added, "It does, it does change their attitudes, I think. . . . I think you are right there." "In what ways?" I asked. Gabe responded, "Well, I mean . . . it's something they would take for granted. OK. The married couples. And now they see us as someone who's also married."

Jonathan added, "The same stature, the same level, the same level of equality as far as the law goes—and rights go. As opposed to just being a couple of guys that were living together." Gabe agreed, "Right. And I think they share the same—a lot of our straight friends share the same joy—for lack of another word—that we do, because being close friends, they were frustrated for us. Now they don't have to be as frustrated for us, because now we have that legal document that they have. And I think that that makes them feel better also—for us."

Like Jonathan and Gabe, Sue and Desiree had been established as a couple for decades previous to their legal marriage. They also described that legal marriage brought

them a greater sense of equality. Sue explained, by distinguishing her relationship from couples with fewer years under their belt, that she thought they were different than “a relationship that decided to marry because it was now or never. Rather than having the time to evolve and be as deliberate.” She went on to explain, “I mean, luckily, we had all of this time to be in a relationship that was like marriage before getting married. And, you know—that wasn’t by our own choice, but I mean, it was really beneficial for us.”

Sue later explained, “It’s just incredible to me how different it is. And not the level of love—it’s such an intangible difference. Just making me feel whole and—a total person. There was always—you know, when you don’t have the rights—you’re not whole. Somehow. There’s always something missing. And, there isn’t anything missing in my life—because I am allowed to—I was allowed to marry the person that I love. That’s you honey. I love you,” she said in a whisper.

Positive impact on social identity: Legal marriage afforded us a greater sense of legitimacy. Building upon the previously described greater sense of equality which came as a product of their legal marriages, the couples also reported experiencing their relationships as more legitimate. Derek and Scott provided one example. Derek explained, “We have been together for eleven, almost eleven years now, and married two. So, it was kind of the same as when you talk to other couples, and they have lived together, and then got married. But it has been great. Feels a little more, um—everything just feels more legit now. . . . It’s been great.” Scott added, “Yeah, like Derek said, we had been together for nearly eight—or nine years, when we got married. So there wasn’t a huge change in terms of our relationship after we got married, but one of the key things when we got married was that you (looks at Derek) came out to your parents. So, I think

it kind of legitimized—the fact that we were able to get married made it more legitimate in their eyes, you know.”

Derek continued, “Yeah, I was a late, uh—I came out late to my parents. Everybody knew, so it wasn’t—but it was just one of those, uh, unspoken things that they knew . . .” Scott added, “They kinda already knew anyway, right?” Derek said, “They knew.” Scott continued, “But it was just, that was the way we were officially doing it.” Derek elaborated that he felt that the fact they were getting married provided the perfect opportunity for him to come out to his parents, explaining that he was willing to take the risk of them rejecting him or accepting him. He recalled, “Fortunately, they kinda looked at me like—AND? So it was good. So everything was good.”

Derek also agreed that legal marriage helped his parents understand the framework of his relationship. He explained, “I am first generation. I’m Filipino. So they are from the Old World. So for them, you know it’s—they’re coming here and realizing. They’re kind of adapting to the American ways and how it has changed. So, I think it kinda gave them something, like, ‘OK you know it’s . . .’ I don’t know, for me it just made it a little more, perhaps more accepting because it is was legal (nodding). So, I think that did.”

Christine and Kara provided another example of the empowerment and legitimacy they experienced through legal marriage. Christine said, “It is a good feeling.” Kara added, “It does make a difference. The word. To say it and actually have it be TRUE. Because a lot of people refer to spouse, wife, whatever [when they are not legally married]. But to actually have it BE TRUE. You know, and I remember our pastor, when

he said, ‘By the power vested in me AND the state of California.’ You know, it’s big! . . . It’s an emotional thing to have the right to be able to do that.”

Thomas and Larry provided another example of how legal marriage created greater social equality and legitimacy for their relationship. Thomas said, “I remember thinking to myself—‘Well, my marriage certificate is the same as my brother’s and sister’s. So it’s just the same. It’s no different.’ And you can’t re-label the relationship something less. It can’t be redefined as less—than what anyone else has. And I would have to say, as far as our relationship, nothing changed there. But that did feel good that, you know, ‘Hey, I have a marriage certificate just like anybody else.’ And that just, you know. I really did like that. And I do remember being able to mark on my—you know—tax form *married*. Not *single* . . . *married*. And so that—I did like that. Being able to mark certain forms *married*. That’s what I am. You know, nothing different. So that felt good.”

Reminiscent of Sue’s sentiments that social identity shifts profoundly with marriage, many of the couples described that their legal marriages made them feel more complete, more whole, or like they had finished something. Jonathan and Gabe explained how this became true for them, as well, in a way that provided them a greater sense of legitimacy than their domestic partnership had. Jonathan explained, “Well, I feel it’s [legal marriage] a lot more realistic than domestic partnership—which is just kind of like a stopgap measure. I mean, as far as the government world is concerned, that’s a faux marriage. Marriage is marriage. And it comes with all of the legal rights of marriage, as far as the state of California is concerned now—” “And responsibilities,” Gabe added. Jonathan continued, “As opposed to domestic partnership, where they kept every now

and then—tacking on a few more rights, and a few more rights, and a few more rights. So, it was like—it just wasn't the same. It was just like a stopgap measure. Where, once you get married, it's like, well, there it is—the whole nine yards—marriage. Though now, in the case of the federal government, it doesn't even exist at all—the state government, you've got everything that anyone who gets married has. There isn't any piecemealing it together—it's the whole nine yards. And so yeah, I think that the feeling of being married is like just the final act—finishing up. I mean we only got the domestic partnership just for some of the legal rights provided, it didn't really change the relationship.”

Finally, Jennifer spoke to the symbolic social significance of the legitimacy she experiences through wearing her wedding ring. Jennifer said, “Well, wearing a wedding ring is a big deal to me. You know, the decision to get the rings, and again, finding something that we agreed on—and ordering them and all of that. It was really exciting to have—to you know—to be able to do that. And, you know, I have done a ring exchange with people before, but this is a *wedding ring*. You know.”

The impact of legal marriage on our day-to-day lives. Participants also spoke about the day-to-day effects of their legal marriages. For instance, Leanne and Chloe spoke to ways that legal marriage has made their lives easier on a daily basis. Chloe explained, “And it is nice to just say that you are married. And then kind of, you don't need to go further than that.” Leanne agreed, “Except now—except now we can say, ‘Yeah, I am actually married.’” “As long as we are in California, we can say that,” added Chloe. “It makes it easier,” said Leanne. “Yeah, it does,” agreed Chloe. Leanne explained, “Because marriage carries this—you don't have to explain it. ‘I have a domestic partner.’ Or, you know—‘I have a girlfriend, but really it's like we are married.’

You don't have to explain anything. If you say you are married there's this whole *concept* that goes with married. And that's why the word is easy." Leanne and Chloe both nodded in agreement.

For many couples, the dailiness of being married echoed the "no big deal" idea examined earlier in this study. In these couples' realities, even though the extension of marriage rights to same-sex couples has been a huge focus of both the LGBT community and the larger social and political arenas, when it comes down to it, marriage doesn't define them. Joe said, "Yeah, marriage to me is—it's very special, but it's not what defines us." James spoke directly and frequently about this, in his own evaluation of his experiences: "You know, it's really funny. It's almost surreal. It's like, you know—we are married now. I do see little differences—very minor differences in our relationship. Um, it hasn't been dominating to me—I don't know. We were together before—we are together now. It has kinda helped us a little bit, I guess to share more things and that sort of thing—and plan for things. But, you know—it's not that big a deal, it's a piece of paper for—I mean when you boil it down, it's a piece of paper—"

Amy and Karen also spoke to their ideas about the meaning of legal marriage in their day-to-day lives. Amy explained, "I just think that marriage is marriage. And it doesn't matter if you are gay, or if you are straight. I think that you confront. Honestly, there's no difference. The world is creating a difference. And so, I think in a way, we tend to."

"It doesn't matter if you are gay or straight, right?" Karen offered, elaborating. Amy agreed, saying, "So I think that it doesn't matter if you are gay or straight. You know. Marriage—is marriage—is marriage—is marriage. It doesn't make any difference.

You have to work [things] out, you have to—you know, there is give and take. There is compromise.”

Amy explained, “It’s just about being human. But it’s about wanting to make a life with somebody. And to be supported during the challenges and also through the celebrations—with—from your family, and from your community—and from your workplace. And, you know. It doesn’t matter who you are. You. It’s a human thing. And, it’s universal. It’s a universal desire. So, it shouldn’t have to be something special. Except in the way that it is special for everybody.”

These examples illustrate that, for many of the participants, their social identities shifted through their experiences of legal marriage as they were confronted with greater experiences of equality and legitimacy. These shifts were also present in more subtle ways, as they moved through their day-to-day lives. As these shifts have occurred in their social identities, many have integrated them to such an extent that they can step back from their immediate experience and understand marriage to be a desirable and valuable part of human experience, and further, a commonplace aspect of their daily lives. When you consider the individual shifts described at the outset of this theme—*Legal Marriage Shaped Individual, Relational, and Social Identities*—in that marriage had historically not even been considered a possibility for the lives of many of the participants, this ability to understand marriage as applying to same-sex relationships on a human level is both subtle and profound. “Marriage—is marriage—is marriage,” a universal human desire. This point of view is reflected in the next relevant dimension, as the couples consider the larger societal and political shifts that they have witnessed, as well as those that they feel still need to occur.

Looking Back: What has Changed and What Still Needs To Change

Many of the participants, in reflecting on their own personal shifts in their attitudes towards marriage and the possibilities for it in their lives, also spoke to the shift that has occurred within the LGBT community in its attitudes towards marriage. Chloe and Leanne shared their thoughts on this major shift. Chloe explained, “It’s kind of just a matter of access to equal rights. It’s about equal rights and equal opportunities. So, even people [in the LGBT community] who aren’t so pro-marriage still see it, now, as—you know, this actually opens—if you get gay marriage, then that opens the door for all kinds of other equalities that are attached to that, so you are not fighting as hard for all of those other rights, individually. It’s all kind of like a package deal. And people start looking at you and thinking of you differently, because ‘married gay couples’ doesn’t sound like an oxymoron anymore. I mean in the ‘80s and ‘90s, are you kidding? That was completely—you know—gay people weren’t interested in marriage, period. Even among themselves, you know. So, it just—the marriage thing helps people view us differently. As couples who deal with laundry and paying bills and going to work and doing our taxes and—there are so many similarities [with opposite-sex married couples].”

Another social shift which nearly all of the couples spoke to, which they described as both reflecting shifts in social attitudes and having a strong impact on those attitudes, is the inclusion of LGBT lives in popular media. Gabe explained, “I think one program on television that’s had a huge impact on attitudes—if I could name one program—*Glee* . . . I’d say *Glee*. Because it’s had a huge impact on the youth in this country. And I think that’s helped change attitudes practically overnight. Practically overnight.”

“I wish there had been like a *Glee* show when I was a little 16-year-old growing up in Wyoming. That would have made a big difference,” said Jason. “Of course you do!” Joe exclaimed. He continued, “No, I think it’s getting easier for younger people. I think they are coming out earlier, and I think that’s great!”

Other participants described ways that they experienced the larger social landscape shifting and changing. Some viewed these shifts more positively than others, while all agreed that continued progress is needed. For example, native Californians Carl and Jerry reflected on the generational shifts they have seen in the social and political landscape in California, and some of the effects that has had on the couple. Carl said, “We are both native Californians, we’re older too. And when you are around in the ‘60s and the ‘70s. You know, California was the place for imagination and to be creative. California was the state. You know liberal. It was very free-minded—free-thinking. And for Prop 8 to go through, you know, there’s that depression. But then there’s like Iowa which does get it. And there really is a disappointment in California. You know, it’s like—we should have—what happened? So there is a little bit of loss there, that I kind of feel. You know, this was our state. And we lived through it in those eras. That—how did we let it get away? Where did that energy go?”

“Like if there was somewhere this was going to become legal—” I offered. “It would have been here. It would have been here. In a landslide,” said Carl. Jerry added, “And I am still reluctant for it ever coming to a vote. Because I don’t feel civil rights should—” “Rights should not be voted on,” said Carl. “Should not be voted on. It’s got to come from an enlightened legislation, or judiciary. *Enlightened* being the operative word,” concluded Jerry.

Jennifer and Courtney also reflected on the social and generational shifts they have experienced. Jennifer explained, “It’s interesting. We’ve got a group of friends in Northern California. Many of them in their 70s, and one of the people mentioned at one of our New Years parties that—she kind of is a curmudgeonly type of person, and she said, ‘I kind of miss the olden days, when we had to go to a bar in a sleazy neighborhood, and it was kind of like a secret society. You know, I kind of miss that.’”

“So, we were all kind of laughing about that, because when I was younger . . . the name [of the bar] wasn’t out front [of the bar] or anything—but the great thing now is that society is more open, and you go to a universal bar where everybody goes—you know, everybody is fine just as you are. You know, so—but thinking back on that comment—is sort of like, boy, that was a long time ago. And yeah, we got married, and you know, maybe the need for a special gay running/walking group isn’t needed anymore—and some of the changes that have really happened in society. Yeah, it’s good. A lot of it is good,” said Jennifer. “It needs to get better,” said Courtney. “It needs to get better,” Jennifer agreed. “A lot of work still to do,” said Courtney.

Larry also spoke to his hopes for and the need for continued shifts in social thinking. He explained, “For me, I get all of the emails, and I sign them. I sign every petition. I keep up on that. This is like—so important. And it’s not just important for us—it’s important for everybody. Gay and straight. So that we can get this behind us. Quit having kids murdered. You know, like 80% of Utah’s teenage suicides are because of their homosexuality. They’re actually thrown out of the house at 15 or 14—and have to live on the streets. You know—it’s getting rid of the locker room talk, you know—“Hey, faggot. Hey, cocksucker.” You know, that kind of language that makes you feel like a—

like you are the new nigger. You know—and I can't wait until we have the time when people will be rewriting books so they can take the word *faggot* out of there."

Although the participants did comment on the larger social and historical shifts that are occurring in largely positive and hopeful ways, they also evaluated their experiences in terms of the battle for the extension of marriage rights to same-sex couples—discussing what have been and will continue to be the difficulties in its effects on the community. This tension was often a motivating factor in the final relevant identity dimension: the commitment to be engaged around the fight for equality.

Over and over, participants spoke to the hypocrisy that they experienced from those on the other side. Jason explained, "I mean, if you look at it from the federal perspective—I mean, because we've got several friends who are in the military and stuff—and you know, the feds don't recognize their marriage. It's like how—they say they want to strengthen families and stuff, but if they don't want to even bother validating our marriage, you know—thinking that we are less than people—you know. Well, my tax dollars are good enough for you. Why isn't my marriage good enough for you?"

Joe agreed, "Yeah, I guess I hope that people will better themselves and work on their marriages before they decide to fight against mine. Because I would in no way try or want to infringe upon their ceremony, their marriage, whatever symbolism that is there that they hold in regard—that's fine. You know, I don't have a problem with that. So, there really shouldn't be this fight, this debate. It's not, it's just not that big of a deal. And . . . I don't see the impact. But, for some reason they do. And it's all up here (points to his head). And so, how do we change that? I guess we have to change what's up here (points to his head). But how do we do that in a responsible way? In a productive way? Without

fighting? You know, these are the things that our generation will have to come up with. Because it's probably going to be that long before we have nationwide acceptance. I think a lot of these boomers and even the older people really will have to perhaps pass on before things really start to change. And that shouldn't be the way it is, but I see it that way."

Joe and Jason also voiced a concern which many of the participants raised, about the difficult effects of the battle. They feared that the debate would have negative effects both on same-sex couples who do not have access to marriage rights, and to youth who have been exposed to anti-gay messages and negative propaganda, which has been a very present and visible component of the battle. Joe explained, "Right, and that is going to make it harder for them, I think. Because we have a different kind of validation. You know, we got married. They briefly allowed us to be validated enough to actually be accepted into society as married people. And so we got that. And then all of a sudden they took that away. And so, for all of these people that are either growing up or maybe finding these relationships that they want to spend their lives with—people that they want to share their lives with—they can't do that. They can't have what we were lucky enough to get in this little window. Because we happened to find each other at the right time. And I think that that has a bigger impact—that has the most impact. Because what does it teach gay youth that are growing up? You know, how does it—because it directly impacts them. You know, and then there's this bout of gay suicides recently. Clearly this debate, this *war*, if you will, clearly has a huge impact on a lot of people. And that was when it really kind of struck me how much. That moment, and then of course the

suicides, recently. That really bothered me. Because it's like, you know, people don't get it."

Gabe and Jonathan also described their concerns about the negative effects of the battle. Gabe said, "And . . . for my context, because I have been so involved in the past religiously—and my background—I see the church as an enemy. . . . Because the church plays such a significant role in determining what happens in society. Unfortunately. And, in this particular case, for example, I mean, the church has been very vocal opponents to what we think needs to change. Which makes me personally angry, coming from the [religious] background. You know. And so, I see the church structure as an enemy that needs to change. And that's extremely frustrating."

Jonathan explained, "As far as marriage goes, I see some religions and religious people as eliminating the separation of church and state in this country. I view them as a threat to the freedoms that were originally intended—even though, back when the country was founded, they did not write the Bill of Rights, the Declaration of Independence, the Constitution with any thought in mind at all about gay people. But, just going back to those foundations of thought, I view the church as violating the principles of the country." "Or trying to impose their will," added Gabe. Jonathan continued, "So in that regard, I become not—not their friends, that's for sure. Not accepting of them, opposed to what they are doing." "It wells up a lot of animosity," said Gabe.

Jonathan agreed, "Yeah, a lot of animosity . . . and uh, and resistance . . . and going at legal battle with that issue. And so that—their attitude towards marriage affects my attitude towards them and towards our marriage, because how would they like it if I

had similar feelings and got them made into law that affected them? You know, I think that the people particularly who are of the dominant religion, who are trying to convert their religious beliefs into law, need to think about what if there was another dominant religion in this country, and they were trying to convert their religious beliefs into law? And, but all they think about is what they believe is right, and how they're going to tell people like us how we will and will not live. And it's just very annoying to me. Through the law. Not just—not just through the church, but that they keep pounding this stuff in through the law—and that it gets passed.” He then shared another concern about the judicial process that allows the state constitution to be changed and put into effect, before being ruled on by the Supreme Court. He said that while legal battles such as the battle regarding the constitutionality of Prop 8 are waged, “in the mean time, it's in effect—regardless of the issue; financial, human rights, or whatever—time, money, and peoples' lives are being wasted while they are fighting over something that in some cases may be ruled by the court to be unconstitutional. And it's like, well now, what about all of the damage that was done while it was in effect?”

Moving Forward: Commitment to Fight for Equality

For many couples, the aforementioned evaluations of their marriage experiences either further reinforced or incited a shift in their social identities; that is, their experiences positioned them as agents of social change. More specifically, the couples spoke of their commitment to be engaged in the fight for equality, in order to play a roll in creating the shifts that they believe need to occur. For example, Derek said, “Being able to say married, it's huge. To be able to walk down the street and be equals with the people . . . it would be great if we wouldn't even have to talk about this. But there is

something about right now, to be part of this and know that we are at the forefront of—we can do this. I feel like I am, well, not just me but the people that we also associate with, we are all just very ready for the battle.”

Jonathan also expressed his ongoing commitment to be engaged in the process of creating shifts. He explained, “Now that we are married I feel like—since we’re legally married in this state, now I feel like I have more—well, if I am complaining to people in the federal government about the negative impacts of DOMA, I feel like I am more justified in doing so than if I wasn’t married. Since we have been together for so long, and we could have gotten married, if we didn’t get married and now I am complaining about DOMA—that would be like an empty shell.”

Gabe later explained, “We do both view the marriage opportunity as a step in the right direction. And we are not there yet. Because again, until DOMA is repealed—” Jonathan interjected, “We’re almost complete. Almost full. Almost equal. But we are still not equal. So you still have this feeling of being just sec—you know one-and-a-half class. Maybe not second class anymore, but one-and-a-half class. Just *not* quite there yet.”

Jonathan then explained, “Well, I am glad we finally got married.” He then explained that the two were holding back on “getting real rings.” He explained that the two had picked up their wedding rings at a local LGBT bookstore for “like 20 bucks a piece.” Jonathan said, “But once DOMA is repealed, it’s the bottle of champagne and two real rings.” Gabe agreed, “Yeah, then we’re getting two real nice wedding rings.” Jonathan continued, “So that would be a celebration, of sort, that I am holding back on until that happens. So I have a little something to do in the future when—if I live long

enough—when it happens. I don't say *if*, because I think it *will* happen. It's just will I live long enough?" "Yeah, will we live long enough?" asked Gabe.

Visibility as a Strategy Moving Forward. As previously described, in many circumstances, social engagement came in the form of increasing visibility. In evaluating their ongoing commitment to be engaged in the larger fight for the extension of marriage rights for same-sex couples, many couples imagined that increasing visibility would remain an important and preferred strategy for so doing. Chloe and Leanne explained that they were excited to be a part of the study. Chloe said, "So, you just think—you are part of history and in as many ways as possible—you want it to be on as many record sheets as possible, legal documents, city records, county records, state records. Somebody reads it later that Chloe Sanderson and Leanne Watley were a couple. Were married, were partnered. So, wherever we can document that and leave our footprints like that, we want it."

Chloe continued, "And so, it's [visibility] a way to stand up and be counted. It's a way of activism, I guess. Live what you want the world to be. And be the change that you want to see in the world. So, if somebody gives us a chance, why would we turn it away?" She then explained that when the two were considering domestic partnership, she asked some friends how it had changed their lives. Chloe recalled that her friends replied, "'We did it back when there weren't that many rights attached to it. But, we just gotta grab whatever they give us. We'll take whatever we can. And then it builds momentum, and then we get more rights, and so we take those and just—you know, if they can see the response that we want whatever we can get, then maybe it will just keep the momentum going.' And teach people that there are many gay people that want to get married."

Leanne asked, “Well, wasn’t that the same conversation where she said, ‘Do you really want to die and not have any record of having been together?’”

Kara and Christine also provided an example of the importance of visibility to them as they engage in the fight for change. Christine described how the “experience [of the battle for marriage equality] had made their marriage stronger.” Further, Christine offered, “Yeah, you know, you just, it just feels *really* important to set a good example too.” Kara agreed, and Christine said, “You don’t want to be, you know, we get married and two years or a year later, now we are divorcing. You know, *Told you, told you* (pointing her finger in accusation)!” She concluded, “Yeah, but it is just one of those things. You want to be strong and have a strong relationship. Not just for the two of us. But, you know, for everybody around us. It is a positive thing.”

Karen and Amy also explained that visibility is an important way that they engage in the larger battle. Karen explained. “I think, kind of continuing what Amy said a little bit earlier on, I think that we just are who we are. And we are sort of out there as much as we can be and just to try and be normal. Just lead a normal life and hopefully, eventually, you know . . . society as a whole will get that.” Referencing the recently-publicized change of opinion of a public figure in favor of marriage equality, Karen said, “You know, he just suddenly gets it. He gets it.” “He’s changed sides,” Amy added. Karen concluded, “You know, he’s only one person. But every single, one person that realizes—and that’s one of the reasons that I think it’s so important. You know, I think it’s really important that we be out there, and we represent ourselves as married.”

Joe and Jason said that the visibility of their relationship is one way that they intend to be a part of creating shifts. They hope this visibility will create more cohesion

in the LGBT community, particularly for young people. Joe offered, “The gay community talks a lot about family, like, *Are you family?* In other words, if you are gay, you are considered part of the family. I don’t know if it’s necessarily the same in the heterosexual community. They don’t think of each other like that. So, if marriage for us can impact our community, *our family*, in a way that allows more of them to feel more like family, I think that’s very important. I think that’s an important thing—an important reason to fight for marriage, because I think the community in general may not necessarily be as cohesive as we’d like. In other words, there are a lot of acquaintances, but not a lot of relationships. Be it friendships or long-term relationships. Those types of things. So, if there’s anything that we can pass on to young gays—we’re still young—but to the community at large, it’s that—don’t ever stop fighting for this, because it will probably bring us all together in ways that we haven’t even seen yet.”

Jason then said, “I think there have been major strides made.” “Well, of course there have,” said Joe. “This wasn’t even on the radar 10 years ago,” Jason added. Joe explained, “No, no. There’s been huge leaps and bounds. I understand that. We need to go further. And we can’t ever forget why we are doing this. Why we want people to be validated and to be married. And for the world to be a better place. You know, I think all of those things kind of tie together.”

Joe concluded, “So I think that the more of an example that we can set, as a married couple in the community, I think the better. I hope that that would have high impact, and people would see that. Especially kids if they are suicidal, or they feel like they are just so lost, or they’re never going to find love or whatever. It does happen. And it’s important for them to know that. And there’s not enough of us yet. We need to allow

this to happen because there needs to be more examples. We need to set these examples for people. That way they know that it's OK . . . and be happy. *Life—it gets better*, as these people say [referencing the *It Gets Better Project*]. It does get better. Life is good—it can be hard, but it works out for the best. And there is somebody out there for you.” Participants’ visibility thus became an inspiring force which tied them to the deeply-perceived greater good of social change. It took them beyond themselves. The profound unity of being human, which rises up in difficult times, shaped their identities, forging a commitment to act for the good of all.

Conclusion

Emergent theme five provides us with a greater understanding of the effects of legal marriage on the individual, relational, and social identities of the fourteen same-sex couples who participated in this inquiry. Within the context of the overlapping circumstances which were described in themes I-IV, *Legal Marriage Shaped Individual, Relational, and Social Identities* speaks to the participants’ evaluation of the actual effects of being legally married. Their discussions of the identity shifts that occurred as a result of this hard-won right bring conclusion to the narrative.

Throughout the interviews, the participants often spoke of life legacies which had not included marriage as a part of their anticipated trajectories. Through gaining access to legal marriage, they experienced a new and previously unanticipated life option, one which both celebrated and protected their relationships on a level that had previously been reserved for opposite-sex couples in the state of California, most of the country, and the majority of the world.

Additionally, on a relational level, couples experienced their unions as stronger and more stable within the context of legal marriage. This strength and stability culminated, on a larger social scale, with couples reporting that their legal marriages opened doors to greater levels of social equality and legitimacy.

However, study couples also realized that while identity shifts have occurred for them on the individual, relational, and social levels, these shifts are limited by the greater fight for relationship recognition and marriage equality for same-sex couples on the national and international levels. Couples discussed both the power of social movements which have helped them gain access to the relational status of legal marriage in California, and the immense work ahead for the LGBT community in order to create further progress and change. Additionally, they expressed concerns for what they perceived as the larger expenses of the battle—expenses which have resulted in harm to the LGBT community, and more specifically LGBT youth. As a result, for many of the couples interviewed, their marriage experiences further reinforced and/or incited a shift in their social identities, in that their married status now positioned them as agents of social change.

Chapter Summary and Conclusion

The rich and dynamic stories of the 14 couples interviewed for this dissertation produced the narrative of Chapter Four. First, consistent with portraiture methodology, both the social and political landscape and interview context were described. The narrative then developed through five emergent themes. The first emergent theme, *Our Commitments Have Rich Histories*, entailed the many symbolic and legal ways in which the couples endeavored to bring definition to and commemorate their commitments to

one another in the absence of a nationally-sanctioned and collectively-recognized way to do so. Building upon that theme, the second emergent theme, *Not a Simple Matter: The Complexities of Language Choice*, illuminated the ways in which the couples' language choices were contextual and also reflected the absence of representative and collectively-recognized language options for their relationships, after their legal marriages. Further, the couples' legal marriages were situated both within the discriminatory context of the debate over the extension of marriage rights to same-sex couples described in emergent theme three, *The Battle Metaphor*, and the overwhelming support that they received from friends, family, and community discussed in emergent theme four, *Support Shaped Lived Experiences*. Finally, the aforementioned experiences also created shifts for the couples individually, relationally, and socially, through the brief window of opportunity of being legally married in California. Thus, the fifth and final emergent theme, *Legal Marriage Shaped Individual, Relational, and Social Identities*, brought a distinctly unified conclusion to the narrative.

The aforementioned emergent themes speak to the complex and multilayered lived experiences of the 14 legally married same-sex couples who participated in this inquiry. Chapter Five will present the supporting results and distilled discussions of the focus group that I held with 16 of the participants, after concluding the original interviews. The follow-up focus group was designed as a tool for further validating the emergent theme *Support Shaped Lived Experiences*, and also as a method for investigating a shared area of tension described by the participants in the face of silence. When important or influential persons were silent about and/or did not recognize the legitimacy of their legal marriages, couples described those encounters as both

challenging and distressing. Additionally, the discriminatory experiences and events surrounding their legal marriages often evoked negatively-perceived silence. Chapter Five both explores these tensions and validates the fourth emergent theme. Chapter Six will then provide a discussion of both the narrative and the follow-up focus group, the therapeutic implications from this inquiry, and my personal reflections in order to bring conclusion to this dissertation.

CHAPTER 5

FOCUS GROUP

Introduction

Chapter Five presents the follow-up focus group that was held with 16 of the participants. This chapter consists of four sections. First, the topic of the focus group and its rationale are presented. Second, the focus group processes are reviewed in order to situate the reader to the context of the group's discussion. Third, the outcomes of the focus group are presented. Finally, the outcomes are summarized, providing a transition to Chapter Six, the final chapter of the dissertation.

Focus Group Topic

The following five emergent themes, reported in Chapter Four, all speak to the complex and multilayered lived experiences of the 14 legally married same-sex couples who participated in this inquiry.

- 1. Our Commitments Have Rich Histories
- 2. Not a Simple Matter: The Complexities of Language Choice
- 3. The Battle Metaphor
- 4. Support Shaped Lived Experiences
- 5. Legal Marriage Shaped Individual, Relational, and Social Identities

The emergent theme *Support Shaped Lived Experiences* was chosen for discussion at the focus group in order to gain the group's insights, opinions, and reflections on the theme.

This emergent theme was chosen as the main area of focus for discussion at the focus group for six reasons:

1. The size of the focus group (16 participants) and time allotment of two hours necessitated a specific area of focus in order to ensure that each participant could have the opportunity to participate in the dialogue.
2. The field of marriage and family therapy is distinguished from other mental health disciplines in its relational focus.
3. The energy, time, and enthusiasm that the participants displayed in their descriptions of the importance of support in their couples interviews.
4. The theme was richly supported by the three themes which preceded it and contributed greatly to the theme that followed it in the narrative.
5. The theme's relevance to the third area of focus guiding this dissertation:
What are the implications for gay and lesbian affirmative therapeutic practice from this inquiry?
6. The literature on stressor and resilience factors as described by Russell and Richards (2003) emphasized the impact of *failed* or *successful* witnessing of important persons for lesbians, gay men, and bisexuals confronting antigay politics.

Finally, the focus group was proposed as a tool for further validation of the themes which emerged from an analysis of the couples interviews. Due to the above-mentioned rationale, the focus group was specifically designed to accomplish two goals: first, as a tool to further validate the emergent theme *Support Shaped Lived Experiences*; and second, as a method for describing more richly the specific area of tension that occurred within the narrative when important or influential persons were silent about and/or did

not recognize (a) the legitimacy of the couples' legal marriages, and/or (b) the discriminatory experiences and events which accompanied their legal marriages.

Focus Group Process

Sixteen of the original 28 participants joined me for a follow-up focus group to discuss the overarching theme of *Support Shaped Lived Experiences*. The mood was light, as introductions were made around the tightly-packed room. Before the group's discussion began, I felt that it was important to contextualize the conversation by describing my overall research agenda and providing the participants with updates as far as the progress that had been made towards the project's completion. I then introduced the theme of the focus group which I, at the time, had tentatively titled *Support Shaped Lived Experiences*. I summarized the theme through brief examples taken from the couples interviews. Heads nodded around the room as the examples resonated with the lived experiences of the participants.

The conversation that ensued centered around three questions. I contextualized the first question with the following reflection:

We discussed many ways that you each demonstrated support for one another within your relationships. On many occasions, you described that accessing support systems, participating in community, and providing support to others were ways that the two of you navigated the experiences of Proposition 8 and both the legal and national debate on extending marriage rights to same-sex couples together as a couple.

I then asked the question:

1. What are the most significant ways that the family, friends, or community showed their support that mitigated the effects of anti-LGBT politics including the local and national debate on extending marriage rights to same sex couples?

All 16 participants then discussed the question in a conversation that was approximately 53 minutes in duration. I then contextualized the second and third questions with the following reflection:

You each spoke of some of the ways that you handled negative responses either to your marriage or to the local or national debate. You also spoke about silence. You spoke about experiences with important or influential persons or organizations who did not say or do something negative per se, but also did not show recognition or support.

I then asked the questions:

2. What are some of the ways that you have made sense of the “silence” or non-recognition of important or influential persons or institutions?
3. How do you navigate the “silence” of loved ones, friends, or community members?

The 16 participants discussed both of these questions in a conversation that was approximately 57 minutes in duration. Although the majority of the couples had never met before, the amount of respect and support that participants showed for one another was palpable.

Focus Group Outcomes

Introduction

Through examples illustrating how their perceptions of the presence or absence of support had shaped and are continuing to shape their lived experiences, the participant's discussions of all three of the above-mentioned questions largely reinforced the emergent theme of *Support Shaped Lived Experiences*. In order to illustrate this reinforcement, the focus group outcomes are described in three sections. In the first section, titled **The Presence of Support Shaped Lived Experiences**, the focus group participants spoke to three specific aspects of support:

- Action Speaks
- Support Came From Surprising and Unanticipated Places
- Support is Evolving

The second section, **The Absence of Support Shaped Lived Experiences**, describes how participants made sense of the silent, non-affirming, or negative responses and actions of others. It also describes the decision-making processes of how they chose to navigate those responses and actions. Further, the second section describes the navigation strategies enlisted by the participants when they encountered silent, non-affirming, or negative contexts that were discussed in the group context.

Finally, in the third section titled **Looking Back, Moving Forward**, the participants reflected on how their navigation strategies in silent, non-affirming, and negative contexts have evolved over time. This involved reflecting on their personal histories, the evolution of the LGBT rights movement, and the larger social shifts that they have witnessed. Further, this reflection was enlisted in making sense of the progress that has been made and, as was the case with the couples interviews, the continued identification and definition of what they feel needs to occur moving forward.

The Presence of Support Shaped Lived Experiences

Through the focus group process, the participants described how the presence of support shaped their lived experiences in three ways: **Action Speaks, Support Came From Surprising and Unanticipated Places**, and **Support is Evolving**. The following paragraphs provide specific examples of these three aspects of support which were meaningful to the participants and shaped their lived experiences in positive ways.

Action speaks. The actions of supportive others spoke volumes to the participants. For example, Gabe explained, “That’s what I find to be most significant—support that we’ve received from friends and associates when they don’t just tell us they support us, but they actually do something about it. They actually go to rallies. Or they support organizations that support gay marriage. And so forth. When that’s going on, I feel much better about their support. It’s not just saying the words. They’re actually doing something about it.”

Thomas provided another poignant example. He explained that after Prop 8 passed, many people at church (an integral component of his and Larry’s support system), were very visibly upset. Thomas explained that it “felt good to have people that, really—people who were really upset and who were really angry at people of the same faith, who just saw things so differently and just seemed to use words of hate, and violence, and just anger.” He then explained that it felt really good to have people surrounding him who assured him that they felt those words of hate, violence, and anger were “just not what we’re about. That’s not what we should be saying to people. It’s not the message that Jesus and God are trying to—it’s love. And we should be telling people about the love and not about the negative.” He went on to explain, “People were, in some

ways, more angry than I was. Really. And they were really angry for us. And there were a lot of people that were just crying—and just so upset. And that felt good, to just have people that wanted us to know that they really thought that this was just really crappy—and that all of this was just wrong.”

Joe also shared a story of demonstrated support which has impacted his life for years. He explained that when he was 16, his aunt—who is now very supportive of his and Jason’s relationship—introduced him to a gay couple who were sero-opposites [one partner is HIV-positive and the other is not]. This couple had been together for many years. He said, “I didn’t realize the impact that that had on me, until later, of course. But she [Joe’s aunt] knew that that would impact me. She knew that, because she asked her friends, ‘What is the most important thing that you wish you would have known at 16?’ And he [Joe’s aunt’s friend] said, ‘That there were more people like me.’ And so, she felt it so important to introduce me to them and to expose me to that, and it’s just remarkable to look back.” Joe then explained that his mom would not have taken that sort of step. He said, “So, in terms of silence, Mom was very silent. She knew, but she wasn’t going to go there. And she was just hoping that I would end up not being gay. Whereas my aunt had a completely different attitude about it—a completely different exposure.”

Joe said that he still thinks about that experience a lot, especially given that he and Jason are also sero-opposites. “Isn’t it kind of cool that you are that couple now?” Derek asked. “It is. It is,” Joe agreed. Derek felt that Joe and Jason were similar to that couple, in that they also have the ability to have an impact. “Whether it is a cousin, or your neighbors—your neighbor’s kid. I mean, you are now that couple—that you still kind of

look back on. That's really cool," he said. Leanne agreed, saying, "Or even for straight kids, anybody, any young couple." "A student—anybody who has questions," said Derek.

Leanne said, "Yeah, it occurs to me that our models are generally heterosexual, married couples." "Exactly," Derek agreed. Leanne continued, "Right. And our marriage is really, really good. So, any kid who sees us is going to be like, *oh, this is how you handle conflict, this is how you run a house.*" "That's right. It's normal. You are them. That's cool," concluded Derek.

These three examples of support clearly illustrate that for the gay and lesbian participants of this study, the words and actions of others who accept, respect, and value the couples' individual and relational identities, and who also recognize the harm that is caused when others do not demonstrate similar acceptance, respect, and valuation, have a strong impact on the lived experiences of the participants. Further, as in the example provided by Joe, study participants enthusiastically agreed that the effects of demonstrated support can persist for years, and can even become a catalyst for further action when participants step into mentor roles, helping to break down societal barriers created by the primacy that is socially afforded to heterosexual coupling.

Support came from surprising and unanticipated places. For many of the participants, support before, during and after their legal marriages came from surprising and unanticipated places. For example, Steven explained, "I know in our situation, our families, both of our families, came to the wedding. And we weren't even sure that we should be inviting all of them. And I wanted to do that. I wanted to make sure that everybody had the opportunity if they wanted to come. And we were surprised when so

many showed up, actually. So, that was very beneficial, and it really showed us a lot of support. So, we were very happy with that.”

Often, as in the narrative presented in Chapter Four, unanticipated support converged with action. Joel described an interesting example: “I have some friends that I wouldn’t necessarily—you know, heterosexual couples—really good friends . . . I wouldn’t have pictured them getting so behind an issue. But, as soon as the issue came up, and they took it on themselves—and they were much more of an advocate than I was—and I felt that was very supportive . . . and you know—they would come to me and they’re like, ‘Oh, this is what I read today!’ And they were kind of feeding me information. . . . So, I found that very supportive and also very surprising.”

Connecting with several focus group members, Chloe provided another example of this convergence of support and action. She explained, “The other thing about straight colleagues or people we know [who were] fighting stronger than we would—I belong to the First Unitarian Universalist Church in San Diego—and I swear, half of the phone bank on University Avenue during the campaign was people from the church. It was quite astounding. And like you [Thomas] said, after it passed, anyway, they were—it was just this postpartum depression kind of aura over the church. After that. But, you know—they are continuing to fight.”

These examples further illustrate how meaningful support was experienced through the actions of others. However, these examples also illustrate that this support can come from persons that the participants might not have previously included as a part of their support system. It follows that the unanticipated supportive actions of others also has the potential to erode the societal barriers created by the primacy that is socially

afforded to heterosexual coupling; this unanticipated support had the effect of building connections between the participants and others with whom they interacted outside of the LGBT community and who, through their actions, were now understood to be allies.

Support is evolving. Building upon the convergence of unanticipated support and action, participants described how support from key figures in their lives was evolving in preferred and meaningful ways. For instance, Sam described that a few weeks prior, he and Joel had been in North Carolina and had lunch with Sam's mom for Mother's Day. Sam recalled, with pleasure, "She said to the waitress, 'Oh yeah, my sons are visiting from California.' She's never called Joel her son before. Which was awesome." Both Sam and Joel smiled at one another.

Amy shared a similar story. "My mother is 83 years old. And . . . for awhile there, when we were first married . . . I didn't refer to her [Karen] as my wife, when we were not amongst friends. And we were at a party one time, and my mother—who is 83—actually referred to Karen as my wife. 'This is Amy's wife,' she said."

"Our mouths dropped!" said Karen. Amy continued, "I was like, 'I was going to use *partner*, Mom.'" Everyone laughed as Amy continued to explain that her mother's best friend, a woman in her 80s, also has gay children who are partnered. Amy said, "Her best friend Dedra just will not acknowledge these relationships in her daughters' lives. And Mom is just always lecturing her on what she's losing in the relationship with her own daughters. And how much destruction there is going on as far as how close they are. Because when her daughters come and see Dedra—when the kids come and see her, they don't bring their partners. There's no integration of families and lifestyle. So, Mom is trying to do her little bit of education as well."

Karen then broadened the impact of this story. “I think that one of the hardest people that we have had to deal with is actually my daughter, who spent her teenage years growing up in an Evangelical home with a homophobic father. And, [she] did not come to our wedding. By choice. She is 23 now, so she was 20 when we got married . . . and just this year, for the first time, sent two Mother’s Day gifts. . . . And she did, for this year, for the first time say *Moms*.”

As these examples illustrate, the participants were cognizant of how support was evolving on the parts of these important persons in their lives. In addition to helping shape their lived experiences, these examples provide a counterstory to the dichotomy of the “Us/Them” divide described with great immediacy in *The Battle Metaphor*, illustrating how the positions of those previously understood to be unsupportive can and do evolve in meaningful and positive ways over time.

The Absence of Support Shaped Lived Experiences

Making sense of the silent, non-affirming, or negative actions of others.

Several of the participants used perspective to deal with an absence of support from those around them. Larry, Derek, Gabe, and Jonathan said they believed that others’ discriminatory and intolerant beliefs and actions were learned. As Jonathan described, this point of view helped him to conceptualize a rationale about how he preferred to be in relation to others who positioned themselves in opposition to him, his relationship, or the LGBT community. He explained, “I think in that regard, when you do come across people who are silent, or maybe even negative, you have to look at them in a reverse case, as they are looking at you. If they look at you, and they are anti-gay, I don’t want to look at them and be anti-them. Because, they were taught—they learned this. It wasn’t

native to them, like I believe that gay is native. So, we weren't taught to be gay. They were taught to hate, or discriminate. So, by not giving the same treatment back to other people, I think I am doing myself—we are doing ourselves a favor. A benefit. By not being like them.”

Larry said he believes that homophobia, discrimination, and acceptance are learned through children's interpersonal relationships and interactions with publicly-sanctioned entities like the public school system. He said, “I realize that everything positive that people are learning about homosexuals are from meeting a homosexual or what they've learned on TV, or in the streets, but—it's really when you get in to the school systems . . . you know, most of the children come from heterosexual couples who want their kids to be heterosexual. And so they will teach them. They do not want [their children] to hear about gay—because they think if they are educated about gay, they'll think that they'll become gay, or they'll think that that's normal. Or on the off chance that that might be the tipping point, that will keep them from being heterosexual and getting grandkids. And that's where the real battle is. You know, we are fighting it in the streets right now, and individually, and at work. But it really has to go to the schools. Before we are ever going to see a big change in being accepted and not having it define us.” As these two examples illustrate, the participants' positioning of discriminatory beliefs as learned allows them to understand them as beliefs that can be challenged, unlearned, or taught as discriminatory notions rather than truths.

Tensions around perceptions of silence. While all of the above-mentioned examples illustrate the generally-shared perceptions of the participants regarding their views of the learned nature of discriminatory beliefs, a tension did occur when the

participants described their differing perceptions of the meanings that surrounded the silence of others. For Jonathan, the silence of non-supporters is a “progressive thing” which is “actually better than *in your face* negativity.” He then provided an example of how he had recently learned that two male high school students had been elected Homecoming King and Homecoming Queen by their fellow classmates. He explained that the news had been interviewing people to get their takes on this development. People who did not have an issue with the story provided comments for the interviews. Jonathan explained this: “The people who weren’t so cool about this, they didn’t want to be interviewed. They didn’t say anything negative. They are getting the point that it’s discriminatory. You know, this is not a good behavior. So, they had their own feelings, but at least they’re tempering—more people are tempering their feelings.”

Leanne countered, “I think it puts us in more danger when people who feel that way aren’t vocal. You know, if I can see the monster in the room, I know what I can do to protect myself. But if I don’t know who in the room really hates me, I am in danger.” She then provided an example from a trip she and Chloe recently took to North Carolina. Leanne explained, “I know in this town [San Diego], where I am safe walking holding her hand, and where I am not. I don’t know that in another state. So everything felt unsafe.” She explained that they had rented a house in North Carolina, and that they “were safe there, with family. But we weren’t so sure about any place else. And so that becomes dangerous. I would rather people were vocal.”

Jason later agreed. “Like you [Leanne], I would rather someone to be upfront to me, so I know where the monster is. Rather than keeping quiet and pretending to get along, just to get along. I would rather know, so that I don’t buddy up to you and think

everything's OK. You are fine with me, I am cool with you." These participants' expressions highlight that their understandings of the actions of others, in particular, the actions which do not explicitly state a negative opinion, shape how they move through contexts with regard to their perceptions of safety.

Struggle to claim definition. As described in *The Battle Metaphor*, the experiences of gay men and lesbians are situated within the struggle to claim definition of their individual, relational, and social identities. This struggle to claim definition, as we will see later, played out in the strategies that the participants enlisted when navigating anti-LGBT contexts. Larry illustrated the struggle to claim definition with a poignant example of how it plays out in his own lived experience. Larry said, "With a straight couple, they are defined by their relationship—you know when somebody says *husband*. But when we say *husband*, you are suddenly defined by your sexuality . . ." The focus group members nodded and were verbal in their agreement.

He went on to explain, "I belong to the VA—I am a Vietnam veteran. And so I get all of my work done at the VA. I had some problems after Prop 8 passed. That night, I had an extremely severe nightmare about people dragging both Thomas and I into our yard. And I watched them kill Thomas, and then they killed me. And so I went to my shrink, and I had to go on medication because of it. And I still have reoccurring nightmares about that."

Larry then explained that over the past 10 years he has developed a trusting relationship with his psychiatrist at the VA. However, he explained that he will soon be transferred to a new psychiatrist. Larry expressed concern as he said, "It's like—

especially in a military hospital, how are they going to define me? How am I to approach this? How is he going to define me? I am tired of being defined by my sexuality.”

Joe later recalled a time when he and his mother had conflict around whose voice was given the power of definition. Joe said, “When I was first coming out, we [my mom and I] were arguing about Pride—and you know, Mom was saying, ‘I am straight, I don’t need this big celebration to celebrate my heterosexuality.’ And I am like, ‘Mom, Pride is not about celebrating being gay. Pride is about Stonewall. Pride is about reminding people what we went through, and that we will never forget that.’ And so, it’s sort of this—in a way there is a sense of what is the word—naïveté? Being naïve about our history. When you are not involved in the community, or when you are not gay.” It follows from these two examples, as well as many of those provided in Chapter Four, that the privileged definition of lived experiences often differs substantially from the actual lived experiences of the study participants. LGBT preferred definitions can be squelched or misunderstood by those in positions of power, who define and/or minimize or erase from the record the accounts of the marginalized experiences of others. Thus, Larry’s concern about his new psychiatrist and Joe’s argument with his mother both stem from their past experiences with the limited understanding given them by the heterosexual majority.

Navigating silent, non-affirming, or negative contexts. The participants described how they were very intentional about the choices that they made when navigating silent, non-affirming, or negative contexts. Ultimately, their choices reflected either positioning themselves to **challenge** the status quo or positioning themselves to **maintain** it, due to concern for harmful consequences. The participants discussed two

contexts for their choices: where either standing up for themselves competed with the demand for preserving their safety, or where they needed to prioritize the intended purpose of the interaction above making disclosures about their identities related to their sexual orientation or marital status

Many participants spoke to the level of awareness that goes in to making informed decisions about how to move forward in such contexts. For example, Derek explained, “I think, whether we like it or not, I think we have a duty to be out. You know, because if *they* are going to make comments about it, at least come to *us* so that we can respond. Not just somebody saying, you know, ‘those fags over there.’ I hope that I am in that group when they say that, so I can go out and say, ‘Well, I am one.’ . . . I just feel like that’s the only way to, like, make it more mainstream” He went on, “We are way more conscious about our surroundings and people. And we are in tune with others . . .”

Karen also described this consciousness. She explained, “You sort of have to constantly be aware—OK, what words am I using, and what pronouns am I using? And you know, it takes energy. It’s exhausting.” Thus, as reflected in the second emergent theme in Chapter Four: *Not a Simple Matter: The Complexities of Language Choice*, the participants are constantly in spaces of negotiation when making choices about how to navigate perceived or confirmed silent, non-affirming, or negative contexts.

Jonathan provided insight into another aspect of this decision-making process, which expanded upon the notions of consciousness and awareness that Derek and Karen described. He said, “We are self-protective. We want to protect ourselves, we want to protect our insurance, protect our husband, our wife, our spouse. And so there is just so much going on—when, with a black person, they walk in the room, and you know they

are black. I mean, that's it. It's taken care of. But when you are gay or not gay, that's a level of our identity that is not [visible]. . . . But, as you just go about your natural life, you may or may not know—and some people, they care about it, but in the wrong way—and other people are just fine—live and let live. So, it's a very complex path that we lead, that people who are a part of the majority or the norm don't have to deal with. But, I think that we are more sensitive to it and think about it. And are more attuned to it in a positive and beneficial way than people who never thought about it at all.”

Sam also said, “I definitely do navigate the silence. There are times that it is more important to say something in a forceful way, and there are times that it's less important to do that, as well.” The sentiments shared by Derek, Karen, Jonathan, and Sam speak to the complexity of the interplay involved in LGBT language choices: the fact that sexual orientation is an aspect of identity that can require disclosure in order to be known, that there's also a perceived sense of “duty” to be out, that one must be consciously aware of one's surroundings, and that the desire for protection may require silence. All of these influence the process of making choices about how to navigate perceived or confirmed silent, non-affirming, or negative contexts.

Navigation strategies which challenge the status quo. Strategies for navigating oppressive contexts were often framed in terms of **engaging** persons or contexts in order to create change which challenges the status quo. More specifically, two distinct strategies were described by the participants during the focus group:

- **Education** through dialogue was the most frequently discussed practice of navigating many heterocentrist contexts.

- If education through dialogue was deemed by participants to be unlikely to effect change, establishing presence through **visibility** was frequently discussed as a means of navigating such silent, negative, or non-affirming contexts.

The following paragraphs first illustrate the importance described by the participants of **engaging** persons or contexts in order to create change which challenges the status quo.

Next, examples will highlight the distinct **education** and **visibility** strategies introduced above, which were also aimed at creating change through challenging the status quo.

Further, the group's conversation around these examples is presented in order to illustrate how the examples resonated with the lived experiences of the other group members.

Examples of negative or non-affirming responses and engagement. Gabe described his strategies of engagement. "One of the ways that I navigate, is that I will sometimes engage these people. I think a lot of us do. We'll engage these people who show a lack of sensitivity or a misunderstanding. And in cases particularly in the field of politics, or in my case—in the case of the Catholic Church, I refuse to be silent, because I can see the damage that is being caused when the politicians or priests and so forth—the bishops, are saying these things. I fight back. And in some cases, like in this case with [Republican Congressman] Duncan Hunter for example, as soon as I heard that Duncan Hunter was trying to slow down [the repeal of] DADT ["Don't ask, don't tell"], you know, just trying to lock it up, I thought, I am not going to let him get away with this. So, I started sending him emails. I am sure a lot of people are starting to do things like that. You know, like, 'What the hell are you up to?' I mean, 'What's this all about?' And I think that's one way in which we are going to move this along. We should not be silent. We have to engage these people at times. When it's appropriate."

Derek offered, “I agree about the engaging thing.” Responding to Derek’s earlier statements about the duty he feels to be out if he is near someone “who is using the word fag,” Sam described a situation where he had been out to lunch with his boss, the vice-president of his company, and two other co-workers. He explained, “There was a group of paramedics or firefighters or something at the next table and they were just you know, ‘Blah, blah, blah, fucking fag, fag, fag, fag.’ And everybody else at my table was all silent. And they kept kind of looking at me like (lowers voice), ‘Oh my God!’ And you know, I kind of thought, *Well, they’re really big—everybody I am at the table with are women.* Except for one guy who, he was really muscular—and he said, ‘I got your back.’ And so, of course—I did—you know, I put up with this for about five or ten minutes. And then I said, finally, ‘Hey! There is a fag sitting over here at the table. Shut the hell up.’ Like that. And then of course they were all quiet.” The group members chuckled and nodded as Sam storied both the process that he went through in deciding to confront the people at the table, and as he described the outcome of his confrontation.

Example of silence and engagement. Thomas provided a poignant example of silence from loved ones, and how he and Larry chose to navigate through it in a way that has led to some progress. Thomas explained that about four years ago, his father had put together a collection of photographs which was meant to be a pictorial representation of their family. Thomas recalled, “We had like a little thing [gathering], and we all got together. And he showed it to everyone. And he had left Larry out of it.” With tears in his eyes, Thomas said, “And I made a point—of making sure that he knew that that was wrong.”

Larry added, “Your sister jumped up and said, ‘Larry, I am sorry. You must be so offended by this.’” Thomas explained that his mother had passed away, and that his father had remarried another woman. Thomas recalled that he asked his father, “What if someone had done this to her? So . . . I felt like, well maybe I am pushing the boundary. Maybe I shouldn’t, you know, call him on this. But I kept thinking, *he has to know*.” Several in the group nodded and verbalized their agreement.

Larry then explained, “And he made a special DVD about our relationship after that. That he gave to everybody. And every year he sends me a birthday card that says, *I am so happy*—that has *Son-in-Law* on it.” Many in the group recognized the significance of this shift as they nodded and said “wow.”

Thomas recalled, “There was a time when my dad—he used to put those ex-gay tapes in my luggage. I would just find these tapes in there, and I would just be like, *Ok, I know he means it out of love*. It’s the only way that he can deal with it. That it’s like, ‘Well, maybe it’s a phase, or maybe if he listens to this tape it will change him.’” Thomas explained that rather than challenging his father on this, he would “just take them and throw them out.” He explained that after a while, his father “just stopped doing that kind of stuff.” But, he explained, when the incident with the family photo project occurred, “I just confronted him, like that’s just wrong. You just can’t leave him out. And I made a point, I am like, ‘You know, Larry and I have been together longer than any other relationship that any of your other children have had . . . so, literally, we are the longest relationship that’s been sustained, so you might want to think about that.’”

Thomas described that his openness has “been a positive thing.” He explained that he had been motivated to confront his father because, one time, on a trip to Utah, his

grandmother had told him that his father was intimidated by him. Confused by her sentiments, he asked her to explain what she meant by that. His grandmother explained that his father was intimidated, “‘Because you just openly talk about Larry, like—you just don’t even sensor.’ And I am like, ‘Well, why should I?’ And it was like really strange to me, because I was thinking—‘My dad’s intimidated by me?’ I am not like a huge intimidating guy. You know, and he is pretty strong in his ideas and his opinions. He is pretty straightforward. And, it sort of got me thinking. I am like, *well, that’s really strange. I intimidate my father. Just by being who I am* [openly gay]. And that kind of gave me strength. Like I should just be who I am.” Thomas’s statement about being who he is resonated with the group and many nodded in agreement.

Engagement through education. Sam introduced the group to his idea that education through dialogue effects social change with regard to the pervasive heterocentrism that he frequently encounters in multiple contexts. He explained, “‘They’ve [heterosexually coupled people] never had to argue about calling somebody *your husband*.” Sam then shared that he had recently begun seeing a therapist. He recalled that at the very first session, he told the therapist that he was married to Joel. Sam explained that his therapist then referred to Joel as his domestic partner. He said he corrected her by saying, “‘Actually, my husband, we’re married.” He recalled that she replied, “‘Well, wasn’t there that whole—that thing. What was that thing?’ I am, like, ‘*Prop 8*.’” Everyone in the group laughed, and Sam continued, “‘So then I described to her, the outcome of Prop 8—or at least the current outcome of Prop 8. And I was completely annoyed, almost didn’t stick with her, but, um, ever since then, she has been referring to Joel as my *mate*. Not my *husband*.”

Leanne reflected, “So, she can’t quite do it.” “She can’t quite do it,” agreed Sam. “She thinks you are Australian!” Gabe joked. Sam replied, “Yeah. It is continuing to annoy me. So, I think that my next session—which is next Tuesday—if it comes up, we’re going to have another education session.” Sam went on to explain that it is important for him to refer to Joel as his husband and to correct or educate those with whom he comes into contact if they challenge the appropriateness of his doing so, or express discomfort or a reluctance to accept it. He said, “It also is very important for me to do that. To say, hey—you know, this is my husband, Joel—and then have conversations sometimes, to explain why I say *my husband*.”

Leanne later said, “You know, you don’t have to do that when you are not gay. When you are straight, you don’t have to think about it all of the time. Am I using the right word? Do I share 40 other things, before I let them know that I am gay, so—you don’t have to think about it! And we are forced to be constantly educating or constantly thinking about it.” Many agreed with her sentiments.

“You don’t come out of the closet just once,” said Jason. Everyone agreed. Karen offered, “That’s what I was thinking, when Sam was talking about meeting with a therapist and having to provide that education . . . you are taking your time to do something that you shouldn’t have to do and that straight people don’t have to do . . . but, it is something that you don’t have to think about if you are straight. Or even what language to use.” She went on to explain, “You know, one of the things that we both find is our language around our friends and our family is much different than our language around our clients. And, um, you know—some clients we’re out to, but most—we aren’t.”

Derek then said, “I think as gay people we do have to educate people. And I am OK with that—because, you know, I am actually intrigued if they are like offended by it. It’s like—well, why? And I will talk to them in a civilized way.” Derek then explained that he was hosting an upcoming party. He described that a woman that he invited will be bringing along a “conservative friend.” Derek explained, “She knows there are going to be gay people—you know—my friends. She knows that I am gay. But I said, ‘Bring her. I’d love to meet her!’” Everyone laughed, and Derek went on to explain, “But you know, if you can touch one person—hopefully she will say, ‘Hey, I went to this great party! And you know—they’re not—’ Just let it take a life of itself, and maybe it changes one or two [people’s minds] along the way. That’s all . . . [They will] realize that these people are just like us.”

Engagement through visibility. Karen and Amy described that they have navigated challenging relationships such as their relationship with Karen’s daughter with a visibility strategy that Amy coined “gentle persistence.” Karen explained that gentle persistence is was not a type of communication where she is in another person’s face about an issue. She explained that Amy had encouraged their using this strategy: “all we have to do is just be ourselves, and show her that we are in a stable, loving relationship. And, you know, we go to work—we come home, we cook dinner, we pay our bills, we pay our taxes—we do everything, just like regular people do. And there’s really no difference. That slowly that will win her [Karen’s daughter] over. And that’s exactly what’s happened . . . it’s verbal silence, but I think that you are not being silent in more of a physical way. In an acting way.”

Amy explained, “Well, there’s a visibility. That’s what I have done at work. So, when I started . . . in 1997—it was very conservative. They were rated, like, 40 [percent out of 100 percent] with HRC [Human Rights Campaign Corporate Equality Index]. And, I was known as the girl with the pants. Because I don’t wear dresses. And that’s what they called me. And they had, like, a dress code in the office. All of the women wore dresses—now everybody wears pants. But—and you know, over the years, it’s being present. It’s going to their events. It’s not having discussions with management about my being a lesbian, it’s about bringing my partner . . . [to the] annual honor banquets . . . ”

Amy then explained that at one of those earlier events, when she and Karen went out on the dance floor, everyone cleared out and left. “But we didn’t,” said Karen. Amy added, “And one of the wives came up and gave Karen a rose at that party. So there was like one person that knew that we were kind of being radical. By just being open and present.”

Amy concluded that her company has made a great deal of progress since then. She explained that they now have an HRC score of 100 and added, “So—it’s not just me. It’s other people in the company just doing what we are doing. We go to work. We’re present. We bring our partners. We bring our wives and husbands. And you know, we’re just there. And they start to know us. And it makes a difference.”

Leanne shared similar sentiments when describing how she and Chloe utilized visibility in their home with Leanne’s young adult children. Leanne described, “It’s that matter of being who you are. So, ‘OK, mom’s married to a woman now, except, she still likes to do these crafts, she still likes these movies, we still like to go to these restaurants. I can still talk to her. She’s still going to get in my face about this thing.’ I am exactly the same mom that raised them.”

Building off of the group's discussion about visibility, Derek explained, "I am a proponent of the *Kill them with Kindness*. And that's what it sounds like you are doing. So, if someone says something offensive, you know, rather than get all militant, and in their face, it's better just to, like, talk to them, and then that kindness will just kill them and you win . . ."

Navigation strategies which maintain the status quo. The participants described that their decisions about the appropriateness of engaging in silent, non-affirming, or negative contexts were specifically influenced by two things:

- Generational, geographic, and cultural influences
- Histories of personal losses or harm

In contrast to the above-mentioned examples, where the participants engaged silent, non-affirming, or negative contexts in order to challenge the status quo, another strategy mentioned was **choosing silence**. Participants said their silence had the effect of maintaining the status quo. This strategy was enlisted because participants felt that engaging in education or visibility were inappropriate for the context, and would thus have one or both of the following undesirable effects:

1. The focus of the interaction would shift away from the intended focus to the participant's sexual orientation.
2. Possible negative or dangerous repercussions aroused fear and concern.

Participants also described **tensions** that they experienced during the group's discussion on choosing silence, based upon one's perceptions of negative or unwanted consequences.

Generational, geographic, and cultural influences. Decisions about the appropriateness of engaging in silent, non-affirming, or negative contexts were not arbitrary or ahistorical. Participants such as Jonathan, Larry, Thomas, and Gabe discussed how contextual variables such as generational, geographic, and cultural prescriptions shaped their past and present decision-making about how to navigate perceived or confirmed anti-LGBT contexts. For instance, as he reflected on the topic at hand, Jonathan said, “The question is navigating the silence of loved ones, friends, or community members, but you know, when I look back in time at my own life, it’s navigating my own silence. But, I have to be careful to not judge myself today by what I did in the past. Because times in the past were different. And in my particular case, I think Gabe and I lived together for 25 years, and I never told my parents that I was gay. But, it’s like—duh! I think that I waited until I was 50 and my father had passed away, and my mother asked me [if I was gay]. It’s like, let’s just clear this up. So, I mean there’s a two way thing . . . and if it comes up, then I guess you might have to decide for your own safety and well-being. Do you just navigate around that? Because we still live in times where you might want to protect yourself. Self-protection is a pretty high priority in one’s life. So, it’s what’s appropriate. It’s what’s useful.”

Larry also explained, “I am over 50, and we grew up during an era, you know, if you are over 50 you had that whole pre-Stonewall attitude. And where, you know—you had to watch your step. Where you did feel that second-class citizen feeling very strongly. And it gets inbred in you. And now, to hear younger people say *husband* in the same way that straight couples say *husband*, it is very different for some people that are older.” Larry then informed the group that he has an older friend who will “flinch” if he

hears the two use the term *husband*. Larry said he could understand his point of view and situated it as something that made his friend uncomfortable, in that the language challenges previously held beliefs about “how we define ourselves. How we have defined ourselves for generations. And now we are redefining ourselves during this time.”

Thomas responded, addressing the group: “I am not going to curtail my speech because it bothers him [Larry’s friend]. He can educate himself, or he can just sit somewhere else. Because this is who you are to me.” Thomas then admitted that it was likely because he does come from a different generation that he is “not going to be silent” or “use different language.” He later went on to explain, “But, I guess for me, I’ve not had really, very negative visceral responses to my being gay, so I don’t find myself curtailing my speech or curtailing what I say. I try to be as direct as I can. And I just—he’s my husband. That’s who he is. That’s who he’s always been. That is how I always refer to him. And I don’t flinch from it. And, if other people have a problem, then they are just going to have to figure out how to deal with that. If it bothers them, they can go somewhere else. Those are probably the people that I don’t want to be around anyways.”

Gabe later offered, “I think besides sometimes thinking in terms of generational—it’s sometimes geographical. I mean, we can see it in different parts of the country. You know, where attitudes are in one direction or the other. And a lot of that has to do with the Bible Belt—you know, for example. Where there is a lot of conservative religious thinking. But, obviously that’s changing, too. But ever so slow.” These examples all illustrate how geographic, generational, and cultural influences have shaped the decision-making process on how to navigate silent, non-affirming, or negative contexts. Further, as was the case with Thomas and Larry who have a 15 year age difference between them,

these influences may be more specific to each individual in a couple rather than influences which are have been historically shared by both members.

History of personal losses or harm. As previously described, decisions about the appropriateness of engaging in silent, non-affirming, or negative contexts were not arbitrary or ahistorical. They were, in fact, often connected to legacies of personal losses or harm that participants had experienced because of because of oppressive beliefs, discrimination, or violence that were perpetrated against them because of their sexual orientation. Examples of these losses included fractured or severed personal relationships, physical violence, acts of vandalism, and incidents which threatened financial security. Leanne, Karen, Amy, and Jason provided examples which illustrated their histories of personal losses or harm that resulted from others' bigotry and intolerance. Leanne said, "The biggest loss for me, were family losses." She explained that her biological family has been very "dysfunctional" and "estranged," and so her now ex-husband's family had become her family for many, many years. "But, when that marriage dissolved, and I came out, I lost all of his family. And that I could have coped with. But then they severed their relationships with my daughters, too. They didn't come to graduation, all of that kind of stuff. Because they might see me with Chloe."

Leanne reiterated, "The biggest losses were the personal ones. I lost most of my friends. I was a homeschooling, straight mom. I lost all but one friend. And that was decades of friendships that just dropped. So, I had to make entirely new friends. And they were all your [Chloe's] friends at first. So, I didn't have any friends of my own. I had to make my own friends."

“So, I guess they weren’t really friends,” offered Steven. Leanne replied, “Yes, but it still hurts. And it hurts to see your kid hurt—by a choice, no matter how good or honest it was—that you made. You know, I could have sucked it up and stayed married to their father, but do I want my kid growing up with a depressed mom?”

Karen then explained that she had experienced a very similar situation. She had been married to a man for 14 years. Her parents had passed away when she was 21, so, like Leanne, her husband’s family became her own family. “And, I lost them . . . so, it’s very similar, you know, losing those friendships is very difficult.” Karen explained that over time, some progress at rebuilding those connections had occurred.

“You almost have to start over,” concluded Leanne. Karen replied, “You do have to start over. But I think your [Steven] point is well taken. It’s really, how valuable were those friendships? . . . Even though some of the friendships that I lost were long-term friendships. I think, ultimately, they weren’t that valuable.”

Amy later provided an example of a financial loss she incurred, because a client found out that she is a lesbian. She said, “I actually lost a client. A very high-net-worth client up in Temecula. I am very googleable. And I think he googled me. And I lost him as a client. That was a big loss.”

Jason provided an example of how disclosure of his HIV status had harmful effects at work. He explained that he had been about to begin a new treatment, and he wasn’t sure how it might affect him. That prompted his decision to disclose his status to his direct supervisor, because he didn’t want her to think that he had “given up on the job” if he needed to “call in sick for the first few weeks.” He explained, “And right after that, she started being really—she changed towards me. You know, she was . . . not as

easygoing with me as what she used to be. And I don't know if it was—she also went to The Rock Church. You know, the ones who really went in for the Prop 8 thing . . . so, that really kind of changed my mind on what she thought of me.”

Karen described how aware she is about personal safety, that it is a real concern when making decisions about how to navigate a situation. She said, “Amy has actually coached me very well on that.” She reflected on Thomas’ earlier statement that he had “never really been a victim of a lot of negativity. Or particularly violence.” She explained, “Amy has in the past been a victim of some violence. You know, rocks thrown through windows.” “Bullet holes,” said Amy. “Oh, yeah, bullet holes through the window of their business. And so I think that that awareness of where that’s safe to do it, and where it’s not, is also very important,” Karen concluded.

As these examples illustrate, contextual variables such as generational, geographic, and cultural influences are not the only factors involved in participants’ choosing to remain silent; historical experiences of harm and loss provide insight into their decision-making processes surrounding whether to engage silent, non-affirming, or negative contexts in ways which would either challenge or maintain the status quo.

Choosing silence because focus would shift to sexual orientation. Silence was a navigation strategy described by the participants in order to maintain the status quo. Silence was enlisted because the participants felt that engaging was inappropriate for the context and would thus have undesirable effects. The first undesirable effect, the knowledge or perception that the focus of the interaction would shift away from its intended focus to the participant’s sexual orientation, was described by many of the focus group participants, particularly Thomas, Jonathan, Karen, and Leanne. This concern,

about an inappropriate shift to sexual orientation, was also frequently described in the couple interviews by these participants and others such as James, Carol, and Christine.

For example, Thomas said, “I am a teacher. And from time to time I will get students that ask me [about my marital status].” He explained that he will usually hold up his ring finger to show the student his wedding ring. “I just do that, and they see that and that usually ends any discussion, because once they see this, they see that I have a ring, and they go, ‘Oh, you’re married,’ and then whatever they assume after that, I don’t offer any other things. Occasionally I get other questions, and I’ll just say to them, ‘I don’t discuss my personal life, because when I am here in the classroom, this is not about me. This is about your education. So, the focus is on you. Not on me. So, let’s get back to what we have to do which is to help you understand.”

Leanne, who is a nurse, makes a determination as to whether she will disclose the details of her marital status to her patients or not, based on whether or not she feels it would have benefit to them. She explained, “It’s sometimes therapeutic for me to be out, and sometimes it is not. And just like your [Thomas’s] job, I am there for them. So, if a patient is really struggling with a marriage issue, and they want to talk with somebody who gets what they are struggling with, they may say, ‘Are you married?’ And I will say, *Yes*. And I wouldn’t have said that before, because what are you going to say? ‘I am as married as I am allowed to be. I am sort of married.’ So, now I can say *yes*. That doesn’t feel like a lie, because it’s not. But if they then say, ‘Well, what does your husband think about—?’ Then I have to gauge, is it to their benefit or not to say, ‘Actually, I am married to a woman.’ And so, sometimes I will say that. I’ll say, ‘Actually I am married to a woman. But, we’ve had that discussion. And here was something that we tried. Maybe

you could try this,” . . . because I’ve got to turn it back to them.” These two examples echoed the stories that were shared in the couples interviews described in the emergent theme *Not a Simple Matter: The Complexities of Language Choice*, illustrating that language choices were both intentional and contextual. Further, this strategy of choosing silence allowed the participants to navigate these contexts with regard to their immediate preference that the interaction not shift from its intended purpose to an interaction that was about the participant’s sexual orientation.

Choosing silence for fear of or concern over negative consequences. As described above, some couples used the navigation strategy of silence about their sexual orientation or marital status in order to keep conversations on track. This silence had the effect of maintaining the status quo. In these situations, and in the situations described below, silence was enlisted because the participants felt that engaging was inappropriate for the context and would thus have undesirable effects. The second undesirable effect that we will now explore, fear or concern about negative or dangerous repercussions, was also described by participants both in the focus group, and in the couple interviews.

In one such example, Thomas explained that he comes from a very conservative family. He understood that most of his family did vote for Prop 8. He explained, “That was not something that I just discussed with them at all, because I knew that it was not a discussion that was going to lead to anything positive. It was just going to lead to more negative feelings between myself and them, and I just decided that for me it was something that I just preferred not to discuss with them. Because I knew that it wouldn’t make any difference. . . . My younger sister—she became Mormon, and is married to a Mormon man. They live in Utah. And I’m sure that they gave money to the campaign . . .

but I just decided that, for that whole issue, that it was just better—I guess for me to be silent. I guess I was the one that was silent. And I just decided that I’d rather have peace than to have discussions. And maybe that’s something for me where I didn’t feel that comfortable. I was like, I just don’t want to be fighting with them.”

Jonathan provided another example. He said, “Silence can be a two-way street. Not just silence from the other person, but silence from you. If you have someone that’s a friend, and you want to maintain that friendship, why engage in any type of topic that you know you are diametrically opposed to? A red-button topic, because you are just going to go head to head. You are probably going to—neither side is going to give or win. And you are just going to throw gas on the fire that should never have been started in the first place.”

Jason gave an example, explaining that he did not feel that he was in a position where he could correct or educate. He said, “Well, I had a phone [job] interview—and she [the interviewer] was obviously an older lady—and she wanted to get to the personal stuff after a while, and she was, like, ‘Oh, tell me about yourself.’ I was, like, ‘Well—I’ve been here in San Diego seven or eight years, I live with my husband.’ She was, like, ‘Oh, you have a partner?’” “Noooo, I have a husband,” Jason crooned and everyone laughed. He continued, “I didn’t say that because I want the job, but I really wanted to correct her. Because it was like she was correcting me. You know, like I’d used the wrong term. It annoyed me—just like with your [Sam’s] therapist.”

Karen pointed out, “One of the things that I have found, is that I think it is easier to engage those that you don’t know. Those that you don’t have a relationship with. It’s much easier to get into a discussion with someone who it doesn’t matter. Not that it

doesn't matter, but it's not going to be a personal loss to you." Karen also explained, "I think Leanne made a good point, about being back in North Carolina and knowing when that's safe [to be out], though. I am also an advance practice nurse. And I have a patient who has head to toe—I deal with a lot of ex-convicts and street people, and this particular person had tattoos from head to toe. And he has a huge swastika on his arm. That's a particular patient that I would not come out to."

Carl offered another example. "My husband is on my insurance with the company. And he's on the healthy side of prostate cancer . . . we're in a good space right now. But, at work, when you are a contractor, if your client doesn't like you . . . they will ask someone else to come in. And, I have never really thought that I had a problem, with my clients that I work with . . ." Carl then explained that he is now working with a new department. He was in a situation recently where he needed to carpool with a new client, and when he saw the client's car, he noticed that it had a Tea Party bumper sticker on it. "And, you know—it didn't occur to me until that moment, should I edit myself if—? I am always thinking, are they going to ask about your wife? But in this case, should I edit? And I felt that I couldn't edit, but I have to be careful. Because I can't afford to get told, 'Well, you gotta go back to your company. We're going to bring someone else out.' Because your company will only hold you for a little bit. If there is no place to put you, then you are released. So, I have to be careful about the insurance. Because that insurance is really worth a lot. And so as far as silence goes, you know, not that it's a struggle, but I am conscientious of it at work."

These examples all connect back to the personal histories of loss or harm, and really illustrate ways in which choosing silence is sometimes preferred over choosing to engage, in order to avoid harmful consequences for the participants.

Tension of choosing silence; value of being out. However, the participants cautioned that choosing silence can also have harmful consequences. For instance, Leanne described how choosing not to make disclosures based upon one's perceptions of negative or unwanted consequences can incite tension. She felt that nondisclosure left a person or couple vulnerable to lower levels of social support. Leanne explained, "If you don't out yourself, you may be missing a chance for support later." She then explained that she works with a woman whose "female spouse" recently died of cancer. She recalled, "Because we all knew—because she was out about that relationship, everybody knew how to respond to her. What to say." "She is a widow, now," said Chloe. Leanne continued, "She is a widow now . . . and if we had just thought that was a friend that she hung out with, after work—she wouldn't have gotten the same response. Instead, you know—everybody is walking by, going, 'I am so sorry. Do you need anything?'" She went on to explain, "I [also] work with a man who is gay—and out. But, has not been out about the fact that he is actually married. And that relationship broke up. And there he is at work, and nobody is really offering him the support that he should have. He really should have a week off just to kinda catch his breath. So, if we are not out about our relationships, then when something happens, we don't then have the right to go, 'Why weren't you supporting me?' Because I didn't tell you where I was anyway."

Sam then recalled a recent experience of a weekend when Joel was ill with food poisoning. He explained that he had returned to work that Monday, and Joel took a turn

for the worse. When he told coworkers, who had inquired about his weekend, that Joel was ill, they were concerned that he was not at home to take care of him. He explained, “So, yeah, I did get that same kind of support that, you know, if they didn’t know about Joel—then, you know, I probably wouldn’t have even said anything. And I would have felt guilty about leaving him alone by himself.”

Steven also spoke about the benefits of being out. He believes it is limiting to choose silence in an attempt to avoid perceived negative or unwanted consequences. He explained that he currently works at a Fortune 500 company that he described as “very, very much into diversity and inclusion.” He explained that he is openly gay at work, and that he has been very intentional about that as he has moved up through the company over the years. He explained that his last boss had done “classic double take,” because at his interview, his boss asked him if he could be culturally sensitive in a position of leadership. “I said, as an openly gay man here for the last 10 years, I think I could be . . . and, it’s important, because you know what, I would want somebody to know about that upfront, rather than take the chance of working for somebody who is homophobic and have it come back to haunt me later on. So, I am really good about having the open discussion, saying this is who I am. You know, love me or leave me. But, you know what, even the people who are homophobic or highly republican, or highly conservative appreciate me and have treated me a lot better, because I am as open as I am . . . but, I am not hiding anything anymore. And you know what? I have much better relationships at work. People ask me about James. I am constantly being asked about how James is, and what we’ve done, etc. And, you know—it’s just made my life very different. And I am grateful that I did that.”

Gabe explained, “I think there is a real value, in certain circumstances, to being out intentionally.” He described that within his own large extended family, he felt like he was “the black sheep.” “In my own head, I am thinking I am probably the only gay person among all of these cousins.” He explained that when he finally became comfortable coming out to his extended family, that it felt “really good.” He then said, “One of my other cousins was struggling with telling his mother that he was gay. And I was already at a point where I was very comfortable about this. I was talking with his mother . . . and I said, ‘Well, let me talk to him.’ And so, one thing led to another, and finally he came out to his mother.” Gabe explained that his cousin’s mother responded in an affirming way. He went on to say, “So, there is a value to being out, because it gives other people an opportunity to say, ‘Oh, maybe I can share something with you that I didn’t think that I could share before. Or maybe you can help me with something.’ Because now, you have expressed yourself. Who you are. In that context. And it really seems to make a difference.”

Looking Back, Moving Forward

The participants willingly reflected on how their navigation strategies had evolved over time, both describing instances when they had used less effective strategies, and endorsing more effective strategies which made progress seem that much sweeter. Our discussion often centered around identifying and defining what needs to occur both personally and socially in order for LGBT rights and the wider acceptance of the extension of marriage to same-sex couples to move forward.

Sam said, “I can remember doing some really stupid things in my more militant days. I used to have a T-shirt that said *Gay* on it. And one of the most stupid things that I

did, which I could have easily gotten arrested for, is I had a *Safer Sex* T-shirt that had two muscle men, completely naked locked in you know—something. And I went to Costco. And the grocery store—and you know, wherever, wearing this shirt. And these are things that I certainly wouldn't do now.” He explained that he was confronted by two people who asked, “‘Why are you wearing a shirt like that?’ . . . and I told them it was advertising safer sex . . . and I walked away. And I heard them say, you know—‘Fucking faggot.’ And I turned around, and I said, you know, just ‘Arrgg!!!’ But they were big, and I was all alone. And I probably shouldn't have done that.”

Amy then said, “You know . . . there was a really important part of our history where being really out, and loud, and in the streets, and vocal, and marching—I don't [think] we'd have the national dialogue that we are in right now, if we had not had our Stonewall, not had our ACT UPS—” “Queer Nation,” said Sam. Amy continued, “Yeah, not had our stores where we did get bullet holes and rocks, and you know—whatever, thrown through the windows. I don't think we would be where we are now, if we weren't loud and obnoxious at one point.” Many in the group agreed with Amy's sentiments. She continued, “And it doesn't mean that we don't have the work that comes after that.”

Jonathan also spoke to the larger social shifts that have occurred, resulting in his feeling a greater level of support which he described as “significant.” He explained, “Since we got married, the [local and national] debate has grown more and more positive. And there are more and more people, people of notoriety and fame—TV shows—that's putting a positive or normal spin on the progress of this whole issue. And that is a significant change. To me. Since then.”

He later provided an example of seeing this progress played out on a more local level. Jonathan explained, “Gabe and I are generally around people who already know. And they were at our wedding when we were married. And we just don’t really use the term *husband* . . . between ourselves, or when we are with people who know that we are married.” He said that a few weeks prior, he had met with a certified financial planner at Wells Fargo. He described the certified financial planner as “someone who I didn’t know, didn’t know what his background—his beliefs, personality was, or whatever.” Jonathan said that Gabe had not been there at the time. And he admitted, “I hadn’t set the stage.” Everyone laughed, and Jonathan continued his story. “I just started with Gabe, Gabe, Gabe, and so he [the certified financial planner] says, ‘And Gabe is?’ . . . and I said, ‘My husband.’ And it just went right on, as if I had said ‘my wife.’ Right on through. I mean, I could see from his face, his reaction, that it was just, *Whoosh!* Just flew right on through. There was a significant thing for community support. Either through training, his personal background. Wells Fargo is a major equality supporter. So, they are doing—from my one experience, they are doing very good.”

Joe also expressed that he has seen quite a bit of progress. In many ways, he attributed it to generational shifts, a notion that was discussed several times throughout the focus group. “You know, and I think that’s very interesting,” Joe said. “The more we talk about those kinds of things, the more it sheds light on what the struggles have been, and I think it kind of changes peoples’ minds . . . but, I am—obviously, we [he and Jason] are fairly young—[and] in my perception—yes, the generational thing is a big deal. Because it tends to be older people who are very much against this sort of paradigm shift in society.” Joe then listed significant events that he felt represented this paradigm

shift: the passing of the hate crime bill, states allowing marriage and civil unions for same-sex couples, mainstream films and television such as *Brokeback Mountain*, *The Kids are Alright*, *Will and Grace*, and *Glee*, the repeal of “Don’t ask, don’t tell,” The No H8 Campaign, and the anti-bullying campaigns. He explained, “There’s huge support now in society. I think that is such a big deal. . . . And, for young people—I have never been more optimistic about their future—with regards to marriage, with regards to validation with their relationships. There is so much promise. And I think for older generations, you know—it may be harder to see that. And for younger people, I think that—well, they have more life to live. It’s refreshing to know that there is change going on in society. It may be slower than what we want, but it is happening, and I see it. And I hope that everybody can see it. Because it’s so important.”

Leanne then spoke to a tension that is a part of her day-to-day reality as a mental health healthcare professional. She explained, “I would have to disagree with you [Joe]. Of course, I work with different people—I see a different group of people . . . I deal with a lot of people who come in after suicide attempts. And the percentage seems to be going up, again. Of young people who are gay, whose families don’t accept them. Who think—that’s it . . . I am kind of stunned that it seems to be going up, again. And I don’t know if it is because of some of the anti-gay rhetoric in response to some of these changes. I don’t know why—but it’s really, really hard to see people coming in with the things that I thought were sort of changing. And to see those numbers going up.”

Steven offered, “But perhaps, maybe, there is a lot more of that coming up, because it is more open and people are discussing it more. Maybe people are admitting their own feelings rather than burying what’s inside of them And maybe more people,

more people are coming out and having to face the adversity.” Leanne replied, “Maybe it’s just more visible. Maybe you are right.”

James later concluded, “Well, I think that the key point is education. I think we need to bring everybody up to speed. And I think that Joe, you made a good point that there is [sic] going to be a lot of hiccups along the way. I think we have a long way to go, but it is important that we all stick to our guns. I work for a conservative company. And you know, they say they are inclusive, but 99% of them aren’t. So, we have a long way to go.” As this discussion illustrated, participants were keenly aware of both the evolution of their own navigation strategies and the fact that the contexts within which they exist are changing. Despite these changes, there was consensus with James’ sentiment that there is still a very long way to go in the fight for equality. Sharing personal histories, the evolution of the LGBT rights movement, and the larger social shifts that they have witnessed, gave participants both encouragement and strength, and a sobering sense of what lies ahead.

Focus Group Conclusions

Chapter Five presented the results of a focus group attended by 16 of the study participants. Through a conversation about the emergent theme *Support Shaped Lived Experiences*, the follow-up focus group yielded validation for the theme, as well as the other themes presented in Chapter Four. More specifically, through the process of the focus group, the participants spoke to three particular aspects of the presence of support that shaped their lived experiences in positive ways. First, the actions of supportive others spoke volumes to the participants: their recognition that anti-LGBT contexts were harmful to the participants, their participation in protests and rallies, and their support of

organizations that endorse marriage rights for same-sex couples. Second, for many of the participants, support came from surprising and unanticipated places, and that support was often demonstrated through their taking actions like those mentioned above. Third, building upon the convergence of unanticipated support and action, participants described support from key figures in their lives as evolving in preferred and meaningful ways. For example, the verbal and symbolic recognition of both Sam and Amy's mothers, Thomas's father, and Karen's daughter illustrated that they had come a long way in their support for their gay or lesbian family member's committed relationships.

Absence of support also shaped the couples' lived experiences. More specifically, they described the ways that they make sense of the juxtaposed responses and actions of supportive others, with the inaction, silence, or negativity of people conveying other messages. The participants then reflected on their decision-making processes, telling how they chose to navigate the silent, non-affirming, or negative actions of others. They described that frequently, strategies for navigating oppressive contexts were framed in terms of creating change which challenged the status quo. Education through dialogue was the most frequently discussed practice of navigating many heterocentrist contexts. However, if education through dialogue was deemed by participants to be unlikely to effect change, establishing presence through visibility was a frequently discussed practice of navigating such silent, negative, or non-affirming contexts, and would also have the effect of challenging the status quo.

The introduction of the topic of "navigating silence" quickly led to a discussion of tensions encountered by the group when engaging silent, non-affirming, or negative responses about sexual identity and/or marital status. This necessitated being out, even in

such unwelcoming settings. The discussion of silence then shifted from a discussion of others' silence to a discussion of the participants' own histories with silence. More specifically, the participants described that their decisions about the appropriateness of engaging with others in silent, non-affirming, or negative contexts were influenced by generational, geographic, cultural, and historical factors. Further, the extent and impact of these influences was shown to vary between each partner, among the study couples, based upon their personal history of exposure to, and interactions with, acute homophobic and heterosexist contexts.

In many instances, the participants' actions in unsupportive contexts aimed at effecting social change by challenging the status quo. But perceptions of danger or inappropriateness often incited the opposite strategy: choosing silence, which had the effect of maintaining the status quo. Participants also described tensions that they experienced when choosing silence based upon their perceptions of negative or unwanted consequences. Finally, the participants also discussed, with humor and maturity, how their engagement strategies had evolved over time. They indicated that the contexts within which they live and work are changing, but that progress still needs to be made towards the development of a more just and equitable world.

The follow-up focus group outcomes did illustrate that support played an integral role in shaping the lives of the participants, as first presented in Chapter Four. Further, the absence of support that manifested in silent, non-affirming, or negative contexts necessitated that participants engage in a complex and intentional decision-making processes about how they would navigate those contexts.

The outcomes of the present study, presented in Chapters Four and Five, are elaborated on in Chapter Six, with important implications for affirmative therapeutic practice. The mental health field has much to gain in creating supportive, empowering, and truly equitable practices for working with gay and lesbian clients. In addition to bringing conclusion to the dissertation, Chapter Six will provide the implications for therapeutic practice, research, education, training, and advocacy and social policy that emerged as a result of this study. The dissertation will then conclude with my personal reflections.

CHAPTER SIX

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

Introduction

One overriding narrative research question guided this inquiry: *How do the lesbian and gay couples and families who are among those who were legally married in California before the passage of Proposition 8 narrate their experiences of their marriages?* Situated within the scholarly literature, the current sociopolitical context of the debate on the extension of marriage rights to same-sex couples, and the results of the pilot study that I conducted, the dissertation was guided by these specific areas of focus:

1. How has the presence of legal status affected the couples' relationships?
2. How do anti-gay amendment campaigns affect same-sex couples?
 - a. How has the local and national debate about extending marriage rights to same-sex couples impacted the couples' experiences of marriage?
 - b. How have these couples navigated the experiences and challenges of the discriminatory ballot measure Proposition 8 and all of the ongoing legal battles connected to its passing together as a couple?
3. What are the implications for gay and lesbian affirmative therapeutic practice from this inquiry?

Chapter Six answers these questions by discussing both the narrative of Chapter Four and the follow-up focus group results from Chapter Five. This discussion of results then leads naturally to a detailed list of the therapeutic implications of the inquiry with specific suggestions for practice in multiple contexts including therapeutic practice, research, education, training, and advocacy and social policy. Lastly, Chapter Six closes

with my personal reflections on the processes, outcomes, and implications of this dissertation and is inclusive of a personal note of gratitude for insights gained into the agency and strength of the fourteen couples.

Discussion of Results

Chapter Four presented the narrative produced through the stories of the fourteen couples who were interviewed for this dissertation. The narrative was comprised of five emergent themes.

- 1. Our Commitments Have Rich Histories
- 2. Not a Simple Matter: The Complexities of Language Choice
- 3. The Battle Metaphor
- 4. Support Shaped Lived Experiences
- 5. Legal Marriage Shaped Individual, Relational, and Social Identities

Chapter Five then presented the results of the follow-up focus group which specifically addressed the fourth emergent theme, *Support Shaped Lived Experiences*. The five themes which constituted the narrative and the results of the focus group will now be discussed as they relate to the objective, overriding narrative research question, and the first two specific areas of focus which guided this dissertation. The third area of focus which relates to the implications of the inquiry will be explored further later in this chapter.

Narrative Discussion

Emergent theme I: Our commitments have rich histories. The first emergent theme, *Our Commitments have Rich Histories*, entailed the many symbolic and legal ways that the couples endeavored to bring definition to and commemorate their

commitments to one another in the absence of a nationally-sanctioned and collectively-recognized way to do so. For most of the fourteen couples who participated in the study, the recognition of their commitment to one another began many years, and in some cases decades, before their legal marriages.

The first relevant dimension which motivated the couples to formally bring definition to their commitment to one another was a desire for protection and legitimization of their relationship in the eyes of the larger institutions which influence and impact their day-to-day lives. Such steps often included actions that resulted in the couples having more rights, benefits, and protections, such as registering as domestic partners and obtaining legal documents such as power of attorney. Additionally, protection remained important to couples even after legal marriage. In fact, many of the couples have chosen to or indicated their intention to take additional steps to legally recognize their relationships after their legal marriages. Therefore, it appears that legal marriage has not made these couples feel that their relationships are protected or legitimized enough in the eyes of others; couples who felt fully protected by legal marriage would not need or desire to take such additional steps.

The second relevant dimension which motivated the couples to formally bring definition to their commitments was a desire to celebrate their unions through ritual. Such rituals were intended to privately or publicly affirm the specialness of their loving relationship and their ongoing commitment to grow and shape their lives with one another. Rituals such as private exchanges of rings, and public occasions such as commitment and Holy Union ceremonies, were imbued with significance by the couples as they privately or publicly shaped what such events meant to them in their lives. For

some couples, the relevant dimensions of celebrating commitment and legitimizing and protecting the relationship converged in a third relevant dimension, as they made meaning around particular steps that they took to formalize their relationships.

As evidenced by the above-mentioned legal and ceremonial occasions, the couples each created meaning as to the significance that the formal steps they took to recognize their relationships held in their lives. It became apparent that the amount of thought many of the couples put into the recognition of their relationships prior to marriage strongly influenced the process of how they decided to marry legally. This process was described by all fourteen couples as a simple one. They used phrases like *It was a no brainer*, *It was automatic*, or it was *inevitable* or *natural*. In fact, unlike the first, second and third dimensions—protecting and legitimizing their relationships, making meaning from legal and ceremonial events, and the convergence of the two dimensions, as described above—the fourth relevant dimension illustrated that a historic window of opportunity drove the decision to marry legally. This was largely because many of the couples did not stand to gain any legal protections or benefits for their relationships on the state level that were not already afforded to them through their registered domestic partnerships.

The couples viewed legal marriage as a real opportunity that they wanted to take while they had the chance. They also described how legal marriage provided them with the opportunity to have a level of partnering that they had not really ever thought possible in their lives. Further, the decision to marry legally provided them the opportunity to make history in that they were gaining access to a level of collectively-recognized

relational status from which gay and lesbian couples have historically been and continue to be excluded.

Although, as previously mentioned, the decision to marry was an easy one for all of the couples who participated in the study, the November 2008 elections imposed a window of opportunity in which they could do so. The fifth relevant dimension then described how the couples married legally. Some of the couples chose to celebrate their legal marriage in a historic way by obtaining their marriage licenses on the first day they became available to same-sex couples in San Diego. Others, who had previously celebrated their relationships symbolically with a ceremony attended by friends and family, chose to wed legally at the County Administration Building. Wanting to make their marriage as legal as possible, one couple chose to both marry at the County Administration Building and to have a formal ceremony attended by friends and family shortly thereafter. Additionally, because of the short time frame they had in which to prepare, some couples chose to marry legally at the County Administration Building and then had a larger celebration at a later date. Other couples chose to hold celebration ceremonies to mark their legal marriages, which were attended by supportive family, friends, and community members. Some occasions were small and informal while others were much larger in scale.

Finally, the sixth relevant dimension builds upon the previously described relevant dimension of celebrating commitment. The couples discussed many ongoing symbolic actions that they have taken to formally recognize their relationships after their legal marriages. Some couples did choose not to recognize their legal marriages

symbolically after the occasion, largely because they recognized other dates as more symbolic or meaningful to their relationship.

This first emergent theme spoke to the rich histories of the 14 participating couples, their narratives beginning to answer the overriding research question guiding the inquiry: *How do the lesbian and gay couples and families who are among those who were legally married in California before the passage of Proposition 8 narrate their experiences of their marriages?* In particular, the couples described their decision-making processes regarding taking the step of legal marriage, the events surrounding their legal marriages, and the decisions that they made pertaining to relationship recognition after their legal marriages. Further, this emergent theme spoke to the dissertation's objective of eliciting both narratives of strength and agency from lesbian and gay couples, and the strategies the couples enlisted in navigating non-affirming or anti-LGBT contexts. More specifically this emergent theme detailed how the couples navigated the lack of a nationally-recognized relationship status by taking actions to recognize their relationships in order to protect and celebrate them. Additionally, this emergent theme focused on the effects of legal status on the couples' relationships, showing that many have either taken additional steps or indicated that it was their intention to take additional steps to protect their relationships. Finally, with regard to this emergent theme, many of the participants described that the local and national debate about extending marriage rights to same-sex couples provided them the highly-valued opportunity to be married, although Proposition 8 influenced when and how they did so.

Emergent theme II: Not a simple matter: The complexities of language choice. Building upon the previously-described theme *Our Commitments have Rich*

Histories, which entailed the many symbolic and legal ways that the couples brought definition to and commemorated their commitments to one another, the second emergent theme, *Not a Simple Matter: The Complexities of Language Choice*, illuminated the ways in which the couples' language choices also reflected the absence of representative and collectively-recognized language options for their relationships, after their legal marriages. The 14 couples all had different ways of referring to one another and their relationships. The most common terms included *husband*, *wife*, *partner*, and *spouse*. Connected to one of the main focuses of the present inquiry as to how legal status has affected the couples' relationships, language choices were, for some couples, impacted by their legally married status.

This theme was comprised of three interrelated relevant dimensions. In the first relevant dimension, the couples described their language choices as intentional and contextually based. More specifically, the language choices that each of the couples made when referring to their relationships depended heavily on the context in which they were speaking and therefore tended to vary according to the context. These choices were often reflective of the heterocentrist or homophobic contexts with which the couples interfaced from day to day. In the second relevant dimension, the couples often described the process of making preferred language choices as an evolution, as the terms *husband* and *wife* did not feel like the natural way to refer to one another. Further, generational influences were described which impacted preferred language choices.

In the third relevant dimension, several couples expressed a limitation with the language choices that were available to them, because the terms *husband* or *wife* were understood by them as outside of the context of gay and lesbian lives. This was

sometimes approached with terms that the couples themselves created which felt more representational of their relational identities. For example, the terms *husbutch*, *my person*, and *spice* were created. These terms were more often used within the private realm of the couple's relationships and were seldom transferred into larger social contexts due to limits the couples felt would occur as others made sense of those terms.

The emergent theme *Not a Simple Matter: The Complexities of Language Choice* also spoke to the overriding narrative research question guiding the inquiry. This was illustrated in all three relevant dimensions which comprised the theme, as the couples described the complex and evolving ways that they approach the language choices available to them. Further, this emergent theme also spoke to the dissertation's objective of eliciting both narratives of strength and agency from lesbian and gay couples and the strategies the couples enlisted in navigating non-affirming or anti-LGBT contexts. For example, the couples often spoke about how their intentional language choices were made in order to claim definition of their relationships, even when it was possible or likely that the context would be non-affirming or negative.

Honing one of the main focuses of the present inquiry, how legal status has affected the couples' relationships, language choices were, for some couples, impacted by their legally married status in that some of the couples claimed the terms *husband*, *wife*, and *spouse* as a result of their legal marriages. Finally, with regard to how anti-gay campaigns affect same-sex couples, the context of the local and the national debate often shaped how others would respond to the couples' usage of the terms *husband*, *wife*, and *spouse*. At times, the couples were surprised that choosing those terms had a more positive reception than they had initially anticipated. Other times, language use incited

the couples to educate others on the process of Prop 8, including the fact that they were still married despite its passing.

Emergent theme III: The battle metaphor. In the months leading up to the 2008 elections, Prop 8 became a highly visible battlefield for individual, relational, and social definition of gay and lesbian lives situated within in the larger struggle for equality and human rights. For many gay men and lesbians, the battle was familiar, as they had been waging it throughout their lives. For others, the visible sea of yellow and blue signs and stickers raised a palpable awareness that their lives were being defined in the public realm, often in ways that were incongruent with their lived individual, relational, and social identities. The evening of November 4th, many of the couples rejoiced as they witnessed history in the making with the election of the first African American president of the United States. The couples awoke on the morning of November 5th to the reality that Prop 8 was the *law of the land*. In the nearly 3 years that have followed, the battle has continued to rage.

Prop 8 brought visibility to the ongoing battle of gay men and lesbians to claim definition of their individual, relational, and social identities. Metaphors of battle threaded throughout all of the couples interviews. *The Battle Metaphor* speaks directly to the areas of focus guiding the dissertation, providing insight into the questions that ask:

- How do anti-gay amendment campaigns affect same-sex couples?
- How has the local and national debate about extending marriage rights to same-sex couples impacted the couples' experiences of marriage?

- How have these couples navigated the experiences and challenges of the discriminatory ballot measure Proposition 8 and all of the ongoing legal battles connected to its passing together as a couple?

Insight into these questions evolves through several relevant dimensions which constitute *The Battle Metaphor*, the first of which was the polarized use of language and the visible symbols the couples described to illuminate their experiences. Participants also frequently spoke of polarity, as illustrated in the second relevant dimension, demarcating the division between “us” and “them.” The persons and institutions who supported Prop 8—who were against the extension of marriage rights to same-sex couples—were “them,” while “us” were all those who opposed Prop 8.

This fractious demarcation between “us” and “them” also carried internal tensions. For instance, tension occurred for the couples who said that they had witnessed and experienced responses from the LGBT community which seemed lethargic, complacent, or ineffective. Couples also spoke about how the Passing of Prop 8 caused them to feel a sense of separation from others in the gay and lesbian community. Further tensions were described when opponents in the battle included friends, family, or community, or when opponents were a part of the heterosexual majority so they didn’t have to comprehend the impact of the battle on the lived experiences of the couples.

The third relevant dimension of *The Battle Metaphor*, inequality, united all of the couples, who felt that the local and the national debate has shaped their experiences in ways that made them very aware of how their relationships are not treated equally under the law. Inequality was described with regard to a number of scenarios and was directly related to the area of focus guiding this dissertation related to the effect of legal status.

Legal marriage in California did not affect the couples on the national level, in that the couples' relationships are not recognized for federal purposes. The relevant dimension of inequality continued as many of the couples spoke about feeling unsettled, because they have felt or continue to feel that their rights are up in the air. The majority of the couples interviewed also described the tension that they experience knowing that they have access to something which other same-sex couples do not. This imbalance in access to legal marriage contributed to the strongly held attitudes about political action discussed in the fourth relevant dimension.

Specifically, many of the couples explained how the local debate around Prop 8 mobilized them politically. Further, in the fourth relevant dimension, couples discussed their change in political involvement. While in some cases, participation in the LGBT rights movement had already been a consistent part of participants' lives, for others, Prop 8 provided the impetus for their involvement. In situations where there were discrepancies between partners as to the degrees of their political involvement, participating in the fight against Prop 8 often mobilized the less politically-involved partner and even led to experiences where the couple felt closer because of their shared involvement. Political mobilization also became a source of tension as some of the participants described that their involvement, at times, took a tremendous toll on them emotionally.

Finally, the fifth relevant dimension of *The Battle Metaphor* illustrated the strategies the couples enlisted in navigating the legal and national debate on the extension of marriage rights to same-sex couples. The couples all reported that although they have experienced ongoing challenges related to the legal and national debate on extending

marriage rights to same-sex couples, their actual connection to one another has not been negatively impacted. When I inquired about the different ways that the couples had navigated those experiences, their responses fell into three separate yet interrelated domains: engagement, support, and perspective. Each domain had several specific practices and strategies which reflected those dimensions. Further, these strategies and practices took different shapes based upon the ecological level—individual, couple, relational, community, societal, historical—in which they occurred.

The first domain the couples described was engagement. Within the context of the strategies and actions that the couples have taken, the engagement domain included education, dialogue, humanizing the debate, visibility, and participation in the LGBT rights movement. Tension existed for some of the participants when engagement in the LGBT rights movement resulted in feelings that their participation had become harmful to them. The majority of the engagement strategies described by the couples were aimed at transforming the social context. However, silence was used as an intentional strategy of non-engagement when engagement in the above-mentioned ways would result in harm to the individual or couple.

Support bolstered couples, as described in the second domain, as they navigated the experiences and challenges of the local and the national debate on the extension of marriage rights to same-sex couples. Within the context of the strategies and actions that the couples have taken, the support domain include assessing the support of others, accessing the support of others, offering support to others, and building a supportive network.

The third domain that the couples described was perspective. Within the context of the strategies and actions that the couples have taken, the dimensions of the perspective domain include the following: accepting family members where they are, situating wins and losses within the perspective of the larger movement, locating the source of stress outside of themselves and their relationships, not buying into the lethargy of the LGBT community, situating the importance of the issue in relation to other social issues, turning the *Yes on 8* arguments upside down, drawing boundaries, creating balance, and offering solutions. When couples perceived the opposition as being irrational or not having perspective, they experienced tension, particularly when their opponents' aims sought to violate the separation between church and state.

The description of these three domains—engagement, support, and perspective—illustrates that the couples utilized active, intentional strategies and practices in order to navigate anti-LGBT and non-affirming contexts. The couples explained that these strategies and practices were helpful to them and had the effect of buffering them and their relationships from the ongoing challenges related to the legal and national debate on extending marriage rights to same-sex couples. The participants' descriptions of these intentional strategies and practices lends specific insight into the question: How have these couples navigated the experiences and challenges of the discriminatory ballot measure Proposition 8 and all of the ongoing legal battles connected to its passing together as a couple?

Emergent theme IV: Support shaped lived experiences. The first emergent theme, *Our Commitments Have Rich Histories*, described the legal, ceremonial, and ongoing symbolic steps that the couples have all taken in order to bring definition to and

commemorate their commitment to one another, despite the absence of a nationally-sanctioned and collectively-recognized formal designation for their relationships. The second emergent theme, *Not a Simple Matter: The Complexities of Language Choice*, described how the participant's language choices were also reflective of the absence of representative and collectively-recognized language options for their relationships after their legal marriages. This set the stage for the third emergent theme, *The Battle Metaphor*, which confronted us with both the acute and chronic experiences of polarization, division, inequality, and mobilization that these couples experience as a result of the ongoing local and national debate on the extension of marriage rights to same-sex couples. However, throughout the first three emergent themes, the participants also conveyed the profound support they had experienced from friends, family, and their community. Therefore, the fourth emergent theme that constituted the narrative is a powerful testament to the welcome and crucial reinforcement from those surrounding the couples: *Support Shaped Lived Experiences*.

Support shaped the couple's lived experiences in many rich ways. This was already evidenced during the actions taken to mark the occasions of the couples' legal marriages, which were characterized by the support of those in attendance including important persons that they cared for, the crowds outside of the County Administration Building, and those whose jobs positioned them in roles which facilitated the legal marriage process such as officiants and county employees. Second, as previously demonstrated, perceptions of support also influence the language choices that the participants make in speaking about each other and their relationships. More specifically, they experienced increased freedom to make language choices which were representative

of their relationships in supportive contexts. Third, providing, receiving, and building support helped the couples to navigate both the local and national inequalities of relationship recognition for same-sex couples in this country. Finally, participating in community contexts such as rallies, marches, meetings, church functions, and campaigning all played a reciprocal role as it bolstered support for the relationship and also supported the larger cause for marriage equality.

An area of tension did shape the lived experiences of the couples, when people whom they cared about or who held important or influential positions in their lives did not support the extension of marriage rights to same-sex couples. Not surprisingly, couples reported that such lack of support felt hurtful and limiting. The couples' ongoing navigation of this tension also enlisted the engagement, support, and perspective domains described within *The Battle Metaphor*.

Support Shaped Lived Experiences provides a greater description of the support that the couples experienced through three relevant dimensions. In the first relevant dimension, the couples largely described the responses to their marriages as positive and affirming from their friends, their family and their community. Consistent with *The Battle Metaphor*, many, however, did express that they had had negative or non-affirming encounters with important persons in their lives. Others discussed how responses from friends, family, or community members reflected the pervasive heterocentrism they experience on a regular basis. Further, the couples often described how important persons and institutions were silent about the event of their legal marriages in ways which made them feel minimized or invisible. There were also instances where participants described that it had been their choice to be silent about disclosing the event of their marriage,

because they either felt it was inappropriate to talk about, or because of the negative personal or professional ramifications that they felt the responses from friends, family, or community would have.

The second relevant dimension focuses on the supportive and affirming responses from families, friends, and communities throughout the couples' experiences of and the challenges presented by Prop 8 and the local and national debate on the extension of marriage rights to same-sex couples. *The Battle Metaphor's* polarized "us vs. them" divide continues here, with affirming supporters positioned in the "us" camp. Further, participants experienced meaningful support and affirmation when family members, friends, or community were verbal in their recognition of what the participants were going through and/or took action to convey their support.

The third relevant dimension described the impacts of family, friends, and community in response to the couples' experiences of being married. Largely, the responses of friends, family, and community members did not impact their marriages negatively. However, some couples provided examples of how negative responses from those they care about actually became a source of tension between the two. On the other hand, many of the couples explained that the support and positive responses that they experienced from their family, friends, and communities affected their marriages in positive ways. They used terms like *validating*, *reinforcing the value*, and *affirming* to describe these effects, and they often reported that the support had made their marriage stronger. Equality became another positive effect that the couples reported, coming from the support they experienced throughout the process of Proposition 8 and the ongoing legal battles connected to its passing. Couples described how the feelings of support from

those whom they cared about likely lowered their levels of stress. Other couples said the support that they have received from those that they care about has helped them feel insulated from harm. Finally, the couples described that support from others led to individual and relational shifts that were specific to their own circumstances.

The fourth emergent theme, *Support Shaped Lived Experiences*, illustrated aspects of the participants' stories which were of tremendous importance to them. The energy with which they detailed how support shaped their lived experiences demonstrates the power of "health and resilience" as valued by Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis (1997, p. 8). All of the couples interviewed elevated the importance of support given them far above the negative and non-affirming responses they received; interviewees prioritized the positive, in assigning meaning to and making sense of their lived experiences.

Emergent theme V: Legal marriage shaped individual, relational, and social identities. The final emergent theme which unified the narrative was *Legal Marriage Shaped Individual, Relational, and Social Identities*. Given that the couple's commitments had history (*Our Commitments Have Rich Histories*), their language choices were contextual (*Not a Simple Matter: The Complexities of Language Choice*), and their legal marriages were situated both within the discriminatory context of the debate over the extension of marriage rights to same-sex couples (*The Battle Metaphor*) and the overwhelming support that they received from friends, family, and community (*Support Shaped Lived Experiences*), the narrative concludes by considering how the experiences surrounding the newly gained right of legal marriage shaped the participant's identities. The couples all described shifts that occurred for them individually, relationally, and socially through the experience of being legally married.

In the first relevant dimension, identity was shaped on an individual level in that through legal marriage, participants' views of what was possible in their lives shifted significantly. Participants often reflected that they never saw marriage as a part of their futures. Additionally, for many of the couples, the meaning surrounding legal marriage shifted as they considered how to make sense of this new opportunity they now had access to in their lives. Further, some of the couples hadn't anticipated just how much legal marriage would mean to them or make a difference in their lives.

In the second relevant dimension, legal marriage shaped relational identities by increasing both the strength and stability of the relationship, as described by most study couples. The couples' social identities were also shaped through legal marriage, in the third relevant dimension, in that they saw themselves as having a greater sense of equality and legitimacy.

In the fourth relevant dimension, many of the participants evaluated their experiences by reflecting on the shifts that have occurred within the LGBT community in its attitudes towards marriage. The participants also described ways that they experienced the larger social landscape shifting and changing in favor of equality. While some viewed these shifts more positively than others, all agreed that continued progress is needed. Although the participants were able to comment on the larger social and historical shifts that are occurring in largely positive and hopeful ways, they also evaluated their experiences in terms of what they believe have been and will continue to be some of the effects of the battle for the extension of marriage rights to same-sex couples.

The fifth and final relevant dimension of theme five sees the impact of legalized same-sex marriage spreading outward, as couples' marriage experiences either further

reinforced or incited a shift in their social identities, positioning them as agents of social change. More specifically, the couples spoke of their commitment to be engaged in the fight for equality in order to play a roll in creating the shifts that they believe still need to occur. As previously described, in many circumstances, engagement came in the form of increasing visibility. In evaluating their ongoing commitment to be engaged in the larger fight for the extension of marriage rights for same-sex couples, many couples imagined that increasing visibility would remain an important and preferred strategy for achieving their goals.

The fifth emergent theme addresses the overriding narrative research question and the objective of the dissertation, speaking directly to the effect of legal status, though not in a manner that can be understood in isolation from the four emergent themes which preceded it. The analysis of the couples interviews made this quite clear: it was the process of legal marriage that had the greatest effect on participants' individual, relational, and social identities, not the gaining of legal status itself. That is, the couples' lived experiences of navigating this battle together, and the effects of the overwhelming support they encountered throughout the process, significantly shaped their lived identities.

Focus Group Discussion

The five emergent themes which comprised the narrative speak to the complex and multilayered lived experiences of the 14 legally married same-sex couples who participated in this inquiry. Chapter Five encompasses the results of the follow-up focus group, which explores further the emergent theme *Support Shaped Lived Experiences*.

Because of participant enthusiasm for the topic of support, it was chosen for follow-up discussion in order to gain the group's insights, opinions, and reflections on this key theme. As previously stated, within the context of the narrative, *Support Shaped Lived Experiences* was richly supported by the three themes which preceded it and contributed greatly to the theme that followed.

Methodologically, the focus group was designed for two purposes: first, as a further tool of validation for the emergent theme *Support Shaped Lived Experience*; and second, as a method of more richly describing the tension participants experienced when important or influential persons were silent about and/or did not recognize (a) the legitimacy of their legal marriages or (b) the impact of the discriminatory experiences/events surrounding their legal marriages. Couples discussed how their perceptions of the presence or absence of support had shaped and are continuing to shape their lived experiences, largely reinforcing the emergent theme of *Support Shaped Lived Experiences*. The participants spoke to three specific dimensions through the process of the follow-up focus group:

- 1. The Presence of Support Shaped Lived Experiences
- 2. The Absence of Support Shaped Lived Experiences
- 3. Looking Back, Moving Forward

The presence of support shaped lived experiences. Insights gained in Chapter Four were deepened during the focus group process, with participants' descriptions of support clustering into three dimensions. In the first dimension, participants described how the actions of supportive others spoke volumes to them. Second, for many participants, support came from surprising and unanticipated places. Often too, as

described in the Chapter Four narrative, unanticipated support was demonstrated through action. Third, through this convergence of unanticipated support and action, participants felt support from key figures in their lives was evolving in preferred and meaningful ways. In addition to reinforcing the emergent theme of *Support Shaped Lived Experiences*, these three dimensions make further contributions to the overriding narrative research question and objective of the dissertation.

The absence of support shaped lived experiences. The focus group also explored how participants made sense of the silent, non-affirming, or negative responses and actions of others. Several of the participants believed that others' discriminatory and intolerant beliefs and actions were learned. A tension existed as some considered the silence of others to be indicative of social progress, while others felt that silence placed them at greater risk, in that it left them unsure of where they stood in the eyes of others. Additionally, participants described the struggle to claim definition of their individual, relational, and social identities. This struggle to claim definition, which played out in the strategies that the participants enlisted when navigating anti-LGBT contexts, speaks to the effects of the local and national debate on the extension of marriage rights to same-sex couples.

Navigating the silent, non-affirming, or negative actions of others. The participants described the very intentional choices they made when navigating silent, non-affirming, or negative contexts. Ultimately, their choices reflected either positioning themselves to challenge the status quo or positioning themselves to maintain it, due to concern for harmful consequences. This created a context where standing up for themselves competed with the demand for preserving their safety, or prioritizing the

intended purpose of the interaction above making disclosures about their identities related to their sexual orientation or marital status. Many participants spoke to the level of awareness that goes into making informed decisions about how to move forward in such contexts. “Navigating” is an apt term, in that these couples sought a sure way through negative contexts, much as a ship navigates its way through difficult waters.

Frequently, the participants said the aim of their actions, in these challenging contexts, was to effect social change by engaging others in ways which challenged the status quo. More specifically, education through dialogue was the most frequently discussed practice of navigating many heterocentrist contexts. If education through dialogue was deemed by participants to be unlikely to effect change, establishing presence through visibility was a frequently discussed practice of navigating such silent, negative, or non-affirming contexts.

Of interest, our conversation about navigating silence quickly led to a source of tension for the group. Navigating silent, non-affirming, or negative responses through engaging others necessitates being out about sexual identity and/or marital status. A discussion of silence shifted from a discussion of others’ silence to a discussion of the participants’ own histories with silence. So, while many times the aim of the participants’ actions in these contexts was effecting social change by challenging the status quo, other times their perceptions of danger or inappropriateness incited strategies aimed at status quo maintenance.

The participants also described that their decisions about the appropriateness of engaging in silent, non-affirming, or negative contexts were not arbitrary or ahistorical and, in fact, were influenced by generational, geographic, and cultural factors.

Additionally, their choices were also connected to legacies of personal losses or harm that the participants had experienced due to oppressive beliefs, discrimination, or violence perpetrated against them because of their sexual orientation. Examples of these losses included fractured or severed personal relationships, incidents which threatened financial security, and physical violence and acts of vandalism.

Participants discussed choosing silence as a strategy, thereby maintaining the status quo, when they felt that engaging others through education or visibility would have one or both of the following undesirable effects:

1. The focus of the interaction would shift away from its intended focus to the participant's sexual orientation.
2. Fear or concern of negative or dangerous repercussions.

Further, while many participants described tensions that they experienced in choosing to be silent based upon concern over negative or unwanted consequences, other participants affirmed that, to them, choosing not to make disclosures left a person or couple vulnerable to lower levels of social support.

Looking back, moving forward. Finally, the participants enlisted perspective in order to reflect on their history, make sense of the progress that has been made, and continue to define what needs to occur moving forward. This illustrates that the strategies of perspective outlined in Chapter Four, as well as the strategies of engagement and support described therein, remain useful and effective as the focus group participants continue to navigate the ongoing local and national debate on the extension of marriage rights to same-sex couples, as well as other civil rights issues which impact gay and lesbian individuals, couples, and families. More specifically, the strategies enlisted in the

battle for marriage equality in California can also be employed in navigating anti-LGBT contexts in the fight for transgender rights, the inclusion of LGBT history in school curriculum, immigration equality, anti-bullying initiatives, hate crime legislation, and many other contemporary LGBT equality issues.

Focus group conclusions. The follow-up focus group allowed participants to move more deeply into subjects of great personal import: support and silence. This was the first time they met collegially, so conversations grew spirited and elicited strong responses from all 16 members. They all agreed that support had shaped the couples' lived experiences in positive ways, providing further reinforcement for the emergent theme *Support Shaped Lived Experiences*. Further, the dialogue around the decision-making processes and strategies enlisted in navigating silent, non-affirming, or negative contexts provided further validation for the theme. Additionally, this component of our discussion was also directly related to the navigation strategies outlined in *The Battle Metaphor*, and to the relevant dimension which chronicled the *Complexities of Language Choice*. The participants' language choices are indeed intentional and contextually based. Finally, the dialogue around the decision-making processes and strategies enlisted in navigating silent, non-affirming, or negative contexts provides us with a looking glass into the lived effects, day-to-day, on real people and families, of nonrecognition, hate, discrimination, and the social/political processes of anti-gay amendment campaigns.

Therapeutic Implications

What are the implications for gay and lesbian affirmative therapeutic practice from this inquiry? The previous discussion of the five emergent themes and the focus group outcomes described the participants' lived experiences in relation to the overriding

narrative research question, the dissertation's objective, and the first two areas of focus guiding the dissertation. The therapeutic implications will now be discussed in order to address the third area of focus.

The results of this inquiry lead to suggestions for practice in multiple contexts.

The needs of gay and lesbian clients must be better addressed in the following areas:

- Therapeutic Practice
- Research
- Education
- Training
- Advocacy and Social Policy

While some recommendations may more directly relate to only one of the above-mentioned practice contexts, most lend themselves to the multiple, overlapping contexts within which therapists work. Since many therapists occupy multiple roles in their professional contexts, as practitioners, supervisors, learners, educators, researchers, administrators, and social activists, the therapeutic implications from this inquiry will likely play out in varied ways in each practice context. Therefore, I have chosen to organize this section into **prominent themes** rather than compartmentalizing it according to practice context. The following implications for therapeutic practice are thus organized around nine prominent themes, each of which includes corresponding recommendations for practice.

1. **Familiarity:** First and foremost, the results of the current study provide students, therapists, researchers, educators, and policymakers with a storied account of the experiences of 14 couples who are among those who were legally married in

California before the passage of Proposition 8. As LGBT individuals, couples, and families exist within the larger heterosexist context which is also currently characterized by many anti-LGBT political campaigns, the above-mentioned audiences can utilize these participants' stories to become more familiar with LGBT lived experiences.

- In order to expand this familiarity, future research should also focus on the lived experiences of the family members of legally married same-sex couples who are navigating anti-gay political campaigns such as Proposition 8.
- Further, given that the study participants largely described themselves as white or Caucasian and all reside in Southern California, future research should address the lived experiences of a racially, ethnically, and geographically diverse sample of legally married same-sex couples.

2. **Commitment History:** Most of the 14 couples who participated in the present inquiry reported that they had taken symbolic and/or legal steps to formalize their relationships prior to and even after their legal marriages. These steps were intended to both celebrate and protect their unions. Further, the couples were together for years and in some cases even decades before legal marriage became an option to them to formalize their relationships. It follows that the couples have rich histories of commitment and connection which predate the event of their legal marriages.

- Rather than assuming that legal marriage was the most significant marker of a couple's relationship status, therapists working with a legally married

same-sex couple should understand which formal or symbolic steps the couple imbues with significance.

- Further, understanding the importance and significance of these steps also has applications for same-sex couples who are not legally married who may have taken legal or symbolic steps to formalize their relationships.

3. **Formal Recognition:** Same-sex couples (who may or may not have access to legal marriage as a means for formalizing their relationship) may wish to explore the options available to them, their readiness for, and the meanings that they associate with those options in the therapeutic context.

- Future research should address the applications of and the expansion of the existing premarital therapy literature to the lives of same-sex couples seeking to formally recognize their relationships.

4. **Legal Protection:** Therapists should have a working understanding of the terminology of legal protections available to couples in their state, as well as access to resources and referrals that they can offer to couples who wish to become further educated on their legal options.

5. **Language:** As both the second emergent theme *Not a Simple Matter: The Complexities of Language Choice* and the focus group outcomes illustrated, the couples' language choices and decisions around disclosure related to their relationships were very complex. Further, those choices were at times wrought with difficulty because disclosure put the couples in situations that could potentially have negative or unwanted outcomes. It is also important to note that

the couples experienced agency through claiming preferred definitions of their relationships, through their intentional language use.

- As many of the couples demonstrated in their encounters with health care professionals, therapists should work with same-sex couples to gain an experience-based understanding of the following:
 - a. The couple's language choices and preferences
 - b. What those choices and preferences mean to the couple
 - c. How those choices have evolved
 - d. Whether or not they remain consistent in all contexts
 - e. What, if any, tensions exist for the couple because of the limitations they experience with regard to the language options available to them.
- Therapists should speak to and about the couple using language which reflects the couple's language preferences, and understand what those language choices mean to the couple.
- The therapeutic context may be one of few contexts where the couple can further explore and reflect on their intentional language choices. Thus, the therapeutic context can become a space where couples assess how they would prefer to move forward in creating spaces and contexts which affirm their preferred language choices. This could become a significant way for a couple to build their social support network in a way that is consistent with the social constructionist premise that language constructs our lived realities.

6. **Support:** As described both within the literature and the emergent themes and focus group of this inquiry, most specifically *The Battle Metaphor*, non-affirmative and anti-LGBT social and political contexts are stress factors for legally married same-sex couples. The majority of the couples in the present inquiry either expressly stated or implied that social support from family, friends and communities which recognized and valued their relationships buffered their marriages from being adversely affected by non-affirmative and anti-LGBT social and political contexts. It's important to acknowledge that this may not be the case for couples who are more isolated, have fewer support systems, and/or live in cities with less visible LGBT communities. This has implications for both practice and research.
- As the lives of all same-sex couples are shaped in some way by the heterosexist contexts within which they exist, therapists should assess the level of social support to which a same-sex couple (whether legally married or not) has regular access. The therapeutic context can be utilized as a space for a couple to explore how to bolster and expand existing support systems. As illustrated both in the narrative and focus group outcomes, this support may be available from persons or contexts that a couple may not have considered previously. Further, the potential for support in unlikely places should be explored, particularly if the couple describes the absence of meaningful support in the areas that a therapist might be more practiced in or used to assessing.

- It is also possible that couples who experience a greater sense of support from family, friends, and community might be more likely to publicly enter into a legal marriage and/ or to go on record to speak about their legal marriage experiences in a study such as the present inquiry. Future research should address the experiences of legally married same-sex couples who report that they do not have access to the strong social support systems described by the participants in the present study, in order to understand their lived experiences and the strategies that they enlist in navigating non-affirmative and anti-LGBT social and political contexts. This research could address whether or not the navigation strategies described in Chapters 4 and 5 are relevant to their lived experiences.
- Many participants reported experiencing significant support from their faith communities. Therapists should not assume that this type of support is not available to the same-sex couples with whom they are working. Therapists should explore the couple's access to affirming faith communities, if that is an avenue that is of interest to the couple.
- Therapy involving multiple family members could assist those family members in becoming informed on the effects of their silence, negativity, or practices of support on a same-sex couple's lived experiences. The therapeutic process could assist the family members in evaluating if these effects are congruent with their value systems

and in line with what is most important to them with regard to their relationships with the couple.

- Therapists should have a working knowledge of and access to referrals and resources which could assist same-sex couples in expanding and bolstering their support systems. These resources may include local and national LGBT organizations, faith communities, online resources, the aforementioned legal resources, support groups, etc.

7. **Knowledge:** The couples' descriptions of their experiences navigating silent, non-affirming, and anti-LGBT social and political contexts reflect an unbalanced knowledge situation. More specifically, the couples were in many ways required to know about and make sense of those who were in opposition to them. Further, they often found themselves in situations which necessitated educating those who were unfamiliar with the impacts of the local and national debate on the couples' lived experiences, because the debate did not directly impact their listeners' lives. To help redress the above-mentioned imbalance, students, therapists, researchers, educators, and policy makers, who are routinely in positions of power in which they can work to directly influence this knowledge imbalance, must educate others on the effects of silent, non-affirming, and anti-LGBT social and political contexts including anti-gay amendment campaigns like Prop 8.
8. **Literature:** The existing body of literature on family therapy theory and practice has been largely heterocentrist, privileging heterosexual family constellations through the omission of the discussion of gay and lesbian family constellations (Clark & Serovich, 1997; Malley & Tasker, 1999). Further, the family therapy

literature has traditionally been based upon and contributed to modernist discourses on what constitutes normalcy and functionality with regard to family relationships. To story family following these parameters centers a heterocentrist construction of the purpositiveness of such relationships, marginalizes relationships not defined by legal marriage or biology, and seeks to legitimize the primacy of the nuclear family constellation. The outcomes of the present inquiry challenge this oppressive legacy by contributing stories of the experiences and the agency of legally married same-sex couples to the family therapy literature.

- When reading literature coming out of the mental health field (including the literature on LGBT affirmative therapeutic practice) therapists should evaluate the literature through a critical/social justice lens. When evaluating this literature, therapists should consider the following questions:

- a. Does the literature propagate a deficit understanding of a same-sex couple's experience?
- b. Does the literature interrogate the social context? As this dissertation illustrates, the experiences of same-sex couples are situated within the larger heterosexist context which is also currently characterized by many anti-LGBT political campaigns.
- c. Does the literature center the heterosexual relationship? If so, what applications would it have for a same-sex couple?

9. **Theoretical Orientation:** According to Rostosky et al. (2009), mental health professionals who work with LGB clients and/or train professionals in the field to

work with this population should carefully consider the social contexts that create, sustain, and exacerbate stressors which impact mental health and well-being.

Further, as the outcomes of the present study also support, therapists can collaborate with their clients in developing a critical consciousness that situates their experiences of distress within a context of pervasive homonegativity. It follows that therapeutic work with same-sex couples (whether legally married or not) in the midst of silent, non-affirming, and/or negative social and political contexts, can be facilitated through theoretical orientations which choose critical or decolonizing approaches to therapeutic practice. Two examples include:

- Narrative Therapy
- Cultural Context Model

Further, as illustrated by the participants' intentional and contextual language choices described in Chapter Four, and their navigation strategies described in Chapters Four and Five, LGBT individuals, couples, and families do enlist valuable strategies for navigating silent, non-affirming, or anti-LGBT social and political contexts. Some of these strategies specifically endeavor to challenge the status quo while other strategies seek to maintain it. Both Narrative Therapy and the Cultural Context Model offer therapists a framework within which they can collaborate with their clients in order to evaluate both the effects of their chosen strategies and their position in relation to those effects. These insights will impact their preferences for moving forward as they develop critical consciousness about how they position themselves in relation to oppressive contexts.

As these nine prominent themes and their resulting practice recommendations illustrate, many implications for gay and lesbian affirmative therapeutic practice emerged as a result of this inquiry. Further, these nine prominent themes are relevant to the multiple and overlapping roles and practice contexts that therapists occupy. As increasing practitioner competence is the overarching aim of this dissertation, these practice suggestions provide specific and practical applications for how to do so.

Personal Reflections

As described from the outset, my intention in writing this dissertation was first and foremost to accurately represent the lived experiences of the participants whose personal stories I have been entrusted to tell. It is my hope that I have been able to do so.

My life history intersects with the topic of this inquiry in multiple ways which expand beyond my professional role as a marriage and family therapist within the mental health field. Throughout the process of the inquiry, I was struck how time and time again, the stories of the 14 couples resonated so relevantly with the challenges and the strength and agency that characterize the lived experiences of the LGBT community, and certainly of my own understanding of those experiences based upon my own history and connections with the community. On a day-to-day level, throughout the course of this inquiry, I have been consistently aware of how my exposure to these stories has shaped the lens through which I understand and navigate my overlapping personal, professional, and social contexts. Conducting and organizing these interviews, in order to impact LGBT affirmative therapeutic practice, has been an inspiring process.

Further, with each interview, I found myself reflecting on what a privilege it was to be in the company of such committed, courageous, and strong relationships. As a

professional therapist and as a lesbian woman, I had never before experienced a context providing such fertile space to witness such care, connection, strength, and agency. This culminated in the follow-up focus group, where 16 of the 28 participants, most of whom had never met one another before, candidly discussed aspects of their lived experiences which had clearly, at times, been incredibly challenging. The group gave bold, honest testimonies. This is where the lived impact of history lies: in the shared stories of those who participated.

Just as this study reflects a specific time in both the LGBT rights movement and the nation's history, it has also been an important part of my own personal, relational, and social history. The opportunity to be close to the stories of the 14 couples who participated in this inquiry has had a tremendous impact, in that it has provided me with the opportunity to understand the lived experiences of persons within the LGBT rights movement on a much more personal level. Exposure to these stories has provided me with the opportunity to ground them within the history of the struggle for gay and lesbian rights—a history which I had previously been able to endeavor to make sense of only from an academic or intellectual space—in ways that were imbued with resonance. While I myself experienced and participated in the events surrounding both the brief window of opportunity for same-sex marriage in California, and the challenging circumstances surrounding Proposition 8, my understanding of the lived effects of these events has certainly evolved through the opportunity to know the stories of these 14 couples whose lives have been so directly impacted by them.

This direct impact is key to the value of narrative inquiry. For me, this study truly opened the door to the felt impact of profound historical shifts in ways that few outside of

the community, and even many within, have accessed. Further, the testimonies of the 14 couples illustrate that when the country is engaged around discussions of the rights of a minority, those discussions have real effects. When persons are excluded, those effects cannot be understood by polls or figures or slogans. To truly understand the effects of social discrimination, you must have access to the lived experiences of the persons who endure them. This has deepened my own conviction that through the exposure to and rendering of these lived experiences, here so deeply imbued with meaning, change can and does occur.

The meaning of marriage in Western culture becomes richer and more powerful when it includes the stories of the gay and lesbian community. The 14 legally married same-sex couples who agreed to go on record by sharing their lived experiences often expressed that they did so because of their desire to be a part of creating a greater visibility for the lives of LGBT individuals, couples, and families. They often reported that their lived experiences were unfamiliar to or misunderstood by persons outside of, or in some cases even within, the LGBT community. If a broader and more inclusive description of marriage is ever to gain wide public acceptance, we need to hear from couples just such as these.

Mental health professionals and leaders in the public health sphere can actively engage in reconstructing marriage for all of us. Educating themselves by attuning to and really listening to the experiences of gay and lesbian couples makes an important start, a crucial step in creating a LGBT affirmative therapeutic context. Like the 28 people interviewed for this dissertation—who frequently expressed hopes that their participation in this project would in some way incite a larger public knowing of their lived

experiences and thus help others to understand and relate to their lives—I argue that their stories are worth knowing. I argue as well that barriers crumble when they are named and challenged, thus inciting social change. LGBT individuals, couples, and families are not “other.” We are wise, experienced, caring people who, through living our lives and telling our stories, will promote social justice and enrich the fabric of marriage worldwide.

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APPENDIX A

Couples Interview Informed Consent

Researcher: Erin C. Falvey, MA

Doctoral Student, San Diego State University/Claremont Graduate University Joint Doctoral Program in Education

Title of Study: Narratives of Agency: The Experiences of Legally Married Same-Sex Couples in California

Faculty Advisors: Karen Cadiero-Kaplan, Ph.D. and Phil Dreyer Ph.D.

Hello, my name is Erin C. Falvey, and I am a student at San Diego State University and Claremont Graduate University completing my doctorate in education. I am conducting a qualitative study which focuses upon the experiences of same-sex couples who are legally married in California. The results will be reported in a doctoral dissertation that I am completing as a requirement of my graduate program.

I would like to invite you to be a research participant. Before you decide whether you would like to participate in this study, I would like to explain the purpose of this study as well as what will be expected of you as a participant.

This consent form will provide you with information about the study that will also be discussed with you in person. Once you understand the study and agree to participate, you will be asked to sign this consent form. You will be given a copy to keep for your records.

The purpose of this study is to construct a greater understanding of how legally married same-sex couples describe and navigate their experiences as a married couple. I will interview you and ask questions related to your experiences. This may include questions about your family, friends, and community. The interview should take approximately 45 minutes to 1 hour to complete.

I will be videotaping our conversation as well as taking notes to ensure that I have accurately documented your story. In order to ensure the accuracy of my report, I will provide you with a draft for you to review and provide feedback or corrections to the content prior to its completion.

The study will also include a brief demographic survey which will ask questions regarding your history and background. Space will also be provided for you to include any further demographic information that you would like to include about yourself. This survey will take about 10 minutes to complete.

Your participation in this study is voluntary. If you decide to participate, your responses will be confidential—that is, recorded without any identifying information that is linked to you. I will use a pseudonym in my final report when referring to your responses.

Risks and Benefits to Your Participation:

Risks: While it is possible that some areas of the interview related to your personal experiences may generate some discomfort, I do not foresee any risks associated with your participation in this study. I will protect your confidentiality by using a pseudonym.

Benefits: A potential benefit of your participation in this research is that this study may further mental health professionals' understandings of the experiences and strengths of same-sex couples and enhance their ability to work with lesbian, gay, and bisexual individuals, couples, and families.

You are under no obligation to participate in this study. You may skip a specific question if you are uncomfortable answering it. If you wish to discontinue your participation at any time during the completion of this interview you may do so. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me:

Erin C. Falvey, MFT
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San Diego, CA 92108

e-mail: erin@narrativetherapysd.com
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Faculty Advisors:

Karen Cadiero-Kaplan, Ph.D.
San Diego State University
(619) 594-5155

Phil Dreyer, Ph.D.
Claremont Graduate University
(909) 621-8000 ext: 71239

For any questions related to your rights as a participant in research, please contact the San Diego State University Institutional Review Board Office at (619) 594-6622 or the Claremont Graduate University Institutional Review Board Office at (909) 607-9406.

I, _____ understand that I will be participating in an interview with my partner and the researcher discussing our experiences as a legally married same-sex couple in California. I also understand that my personal identity will remain anonymous in any published report or presentation of the results of this interview. The interview will be video recorded for the purposes of transcription and will only be viewed by the research team. The video recording will be stored in a locked filing cabinet in the researcher's office. Within one month of the conclusion of the study, the video recording will be destroyed.

Your signature below indicates that you have read the information in this document and have had a chance to ask any questions you have about the study. Your signature also indicates that you agree to be in the study and have been told that you can change your mind and withdraw your consent to participate at any time. You have been given a copy of this consent form.

Signature of Participant: _____ Date: _____

Signature of Researcher: _____ Date: _____

APPENDIX B

Demographic Questionnaire

Thank you for completing the following questionnaire. Your responses are confidential.

Gender: _____

Age: _____

Race/Ethnicity: _____

Please select the employment category that best describes your employment situation:

____ retired

____ unemployed

____ work/profession _____

____ other _____

What is your highest level of education completed? _____

What is your annual household income? _____

Length of time as a couple together: _____

Please check below any formal recognition of your relationship previous to legal marriage in California:

____ Registered domestic partners (in California or elsewhere)

____ Marriage in another state or country

____ Commitment ceremony

____ Legal documents (such as power of attorney or will)

____ Other _____

Did you have any type of formal recognition of your relationship subsequent to legal marriage in California (for example marriage in another state or country, registering as domestic partners, obtaining legal documents such as will or power of attorney)? Why or why not?

Optional: If you would like to include any additional informational about yourself, your history, or your relationship please include it here.

APPENDIX C

Narrative Interview Protocol

1. What can you tell me about your experiences as a legally married couple?
2. Tell me about the process involved in your decision to marry legally.
3. Had you taken any steps to recognize your relationship symbolically or legally previous to your marriage? Afterwards? Why?
4. In what ways did you mark the occasion of your marriage?
5. Did anything influence the date of your marriage?
6. How has the response to your marriage been from your family, friends, and community?
7. What language do you use to refer to one another?
 - a. Did this come as a result of your marriage or were these the terms you used for one another before? How did this evolve?
 - b. Does this vary by context?
8. Describe your understanding of how the local and national debate about extending marriage rights to same-sex couples has impacted your experience of marriage.
9. What are some of the ways that you have navigated the experiences and challenges of Proposition 8 and all of the ongoing legal battles connected to its passing together as a couple?
 - a. Can you tell me a story about a time that would help me to understand that better?
 - b. Can you tell me why that particular moment stands out?

10. What have the responses of friends, family, and your community been like through the experiences of Proposition 8 and all of the ongoing legal battles connected to its passing?
11. How have those responses impacted your marriage?
12. Is there anything else you would like to tell me about that would help me to understand your experience of being legally married?

APPENDIX D

Focus Group Informed Consent

Researcher: Erin C. Falvey, MA
Doctoral Student, San Diego State University/Claremont Graduate University Joint
Doctoral Program in Education

Title of Study: Narratives of Agency: The Experiences of Legally Married Same-Sex
Couples in California

Faculty Advisors: Karen Cadiero-Kaplan, Ph.D. and Phil Dreyer Ph.D.

Hello, my name is Erin C. Falvey, and I am a student at San Diego State University and Claremont Graduate University completing my doctorate in education. I am conducting a qualitative study which focuses upon the experiences of same-sex couples who are legally married in California. The results will be reported in a doctoral dissertation that I am completing as a requirement of my graduate program.

I would like to invite you to be a research participant. Before you decide whether you would like to participate in this study, I would like to explain the purpose of this study as well as what will be expected of you as a participant.

This consent form will provide you with information about the study that will also be discussed with you in person. Once you understand the study and agree to participate, you will be asked to sign this consent form. You will be given a copy to keep for your records.

The purpose of this study is to construct a greater understanding of how legally married same-sex couples describe and navigate their experiences as a married couple. I will interview you and ask questions related to your experiences. This may include questions about your family, friends, and community.

You are being invited to participate in a follow-up focus group of participants who also participated in the interview portion of this study. The follow-up focus group will be approximately 1.5 hours in duration and will take place a few weeks after the completion of your interview. The purpose of this meeting will be to share and discuss the themes which emerged from the interviews in order to get a more in-depth understanding of your experiences. Participation in the follow-up focus group is not a mandatory component of your participation in the study, and one or both of you may choose to participate in this portion of the study. I will also be videotaping the follow-up focus group conversation as well as taking notes to ensure that I have accurately documented the meeting.

Your participation in this study is voluntary. If you decide to participate, your responses will be confidential—that is, recorded without any identifying information that is linked to you. I will use a pseudonym in all publications or presentations resulting from this study when referring to your responses.

Risks and Benefits to Your Participation:

Risks: While it is possible that some areas of the interview related to your personal experiences may generate some discomfort, I do not foresee any risks associated with your participation in this study. I will protect your confidentiality by using a pseudonym in all publications or presentations resulting from this study.

Benefits: A potential benefit of your participation in this research is that this study may further mental health professionals' understandings of the experiences and strengths of same-sex couples and enhance their ability to work with lesbian, gay, and bisexual individuals, couples, and families.

You are under no obligation to participate in this study. You may skip a specific question if you are uncomfortable answering it. If you wish to discontinue your participation at any time during the completion of this study you may do so. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me:

Erin C. Falvey, MFT
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For any questions related to your rights as a participant in research, please contact the San Diego State University Institutional Review Board Office at (619) 594-6622 or the Claremont Graduate University Institutional Review Board Office at (909) 607-9406.

I, _____ understand that I will be participating in a focus group with the researcher and other study participants discussing our experiences as legally married same-sex couples in California. I also understand that my personal identity will remain anonymous in any published report or presentation of the results of this focus group. The focus group will be video recorded for the purposes of transcription and will only be viewed by the research team. The video recording will be stored in a locked filing cabinet in the researcher's office. Within one month of the conclusion of the study, the video recording will be destroyed.

Your signature below indicates that you have read the information in this document and have had a chance to ask any questions you have about the study. Your signature also indicates that you agree to be in the study and have been told that you can change your mind and withdraw your consent to participate at any time. You have been given a copy of this consent form.

Signature of Participant: _____ Date: _____

Signature of Researcher: _____ Date: _____

APPENDIX E

Focus Group Protocol

Introduction

First and foremost, I want to thank all of you for your time and for sharing your stories with me. It has been very meaningful for me both personally and professionally to be connected to your lives over the past few months. I am really excited about the ways in which the stories of your experiences may create an impact as they reach a larger audience.

Background on the study. With the aim of increasing practitioner competence, the purpose of this dissertation is to provide Marriage and Family Therapists (MFTs) and mental health service providers with the following information:

1. Insight into the experiences of legally married same-sex couples.
2. The resilience and resistance strategies that the couples employ when navigating oppressive circumstances such as anti-gay amendment campaigns.

Focus of the inquiry. The overriding narrative research question guiding this inquiry asks the following question: How do the lesbian and gay couples and families who were among those who were legally married in California before the passage of Proposition 8 narrate their experiences of their marriages? Situated within the scholarly literature, the current sociopolitical context of the debate on the extension of marriage rights to same-sex couples, and the results of the pilot study that I conducted, this dissertation was guided by three specific areas of focus:

1. How has the presence of legal status affected the couples' relationships?
2. How do anti-gay amendment campaigns affect same-sex couples?

- a. How has the local and national debate about extending marriage rights to same-sex couples impacted the couples' experiences of marriage?
 - b. How have these couples navigated together the experiences and challenges of the discriminatory ballot measure Proposition 8, and all of the ongoing legal battles connected to its passing?
3. What are the implications for gay and lesbian affirmative therapeutic practice from this inquiry?

Process of the study. Last year, I interviewed two couples as a pilot for this study. The results of those interviews helped to strengthen the rationale for this study. In the month of April (conveniently close to tax time), I interviewed 12 additional couples. I am also going to include the narrative of the two couples who were interviewed last year. This makes a total of 14 couples who participated in the interview portion of the study. All of the interviews were transcribed word for word, and then ordered into a narrative draft which I sent to each of you for your review.

You each described your marriage experiences to me in the interviews. All of your marriages have existed in the context of the discriminatory ballot measure Proposition 8 and the ongoing legal battles which ensued from its passage. Marriage amendments and anti-LGB campaigns are understood as acute prejudicial events that can certainly be considered a significant stressor in the lives of gay men and lesbians.

Throughout the interviews, you all described the multiple ways that you navigated that time period as well as inequalities which continue to exist as a result of both the local and national debate on extending marriage rights to same-sex couples.

Follow-up Focus Group Introduction

The purpose of this meeting is to discuss selected themes from the interviews with all of you in order to gain your insights, opinions, and reflections. This discussion will last approximately 1.5 hours.

Because such a large number of you demonstrated an interest in participating today, I have narrowed the discussion down to one specific theme that emerged from all of your interviews.

The theme that we will be exploring in this group context today has been tentatively titled *Support Shaped Lived Experiences*. You largely described the ways in which family, friends, and community responses to your marriages, and also throughout the experiences of Prop 8, were largely positive and that in many ways this support shaped your experiences of marriage. Here are a few examples of the relevant dimensions of this theme:

1. The actions that were taken to mark the occasion of your legal marriages.
2. The language choices that you make in speaking about one another and your relationships.
3. The language choices that others make when speaking about your relationship with one another and their relationships to each of you.
4. Support and validation for your relationship often showed up in surprising places.
5. Both providing and receiving support have helped you to navigate the local and national inequalities as far as relationship recognition for same-sex couples in this country.

6. Examples of community participation in rallies, marches, meetings, church functions, and campaigning.

An area of tension that existed for you which shaped your experiences occurred when people whom you cared about or who held important or influential positions did not support the extension of marriage rights to same-sex couples.

Why this theme? I have chosen this theme specifically because I believe it is an integral component of providing insight into the questions guiding the inquiry. In particular, my hope is that today's discussion will provide valuable insight into my final area of focus which, again, asks the crucial question: What are the implications for gay and lesbian affirmative therapeutic practice from this inquiry? What I mean by that is—on a practical level—what should therapists or health care service providers be looking for, exploring, or strengthening when working with couples who are experiencing challenges in their relationships which do exist in anti-LGBT discriminatory political and social contexts?

Focus Group Questions

Question 1. We discussed many ways in which you each demonstrated support for one another within your relationships. On many occasions, you described that accessing support systems, participating in community, and providing support to others were ways that the two of you together as a couple navigated the experiences of Proposition 8 and both the legal and national debate on extending marriage rights to same-sex couples.

- What are the most significant ways that the family, friends, or community showed their support, thus mitigating the effects of anti-LGBT politics including the local and national debate on extending marriage rights to same sex couples?

Question 2. You each spoke of some of the ways that you handled negative responses either to your marriage or to the local or national debate. You also spoke about silence. You spoke about experiences with important or influential persons or organizations who did not say or do something negative per se, but also did not show recognition or support.

- What are some of the ways that you have made sense of the “silence” or non-recognition of important or influential persons or institutions?
- How do you navigate the “silence” of loved ones, friends, or community members?

APPENDIX F

Derek and Scott

Introduction

Couple 14: Derek and Scott were the second couple interviewed in the pilot study. At the time of their interview for the pilot study (which occurred in November 2010), they had been a couple for 10 years and 9 months. Both report their household income to be \$143,000 annually. Derek is a 45-year-old Filipino/ Pacific Islander male. He works in commercial property management and holds a Bachelor's degree. Scott is a 39-year-old white male. He is a programmer/analyst and holds a Master's degree. Derek and Scott gave their consent for their interview from the pilot study to be used as data for the dissertation study.

Formal Commitment Before Legal Marriage

Previous to their legal marriage in 2008, Scott and Derek had been a couple for nearly 9 years. On the occasion of their marriage, they had not taken previous legal or ceremonial steps to formalize their relationship.

The Decision to Marry Legally

When I asked them to tell me about the process that was involved in their decision to marry legally, Scott looked at Derek and replied, "I guess we kinda heard the news right? That it was legal." Derek agreed, "Yeah, we (laughs). Well, the story is that there was no romance, there was no walk along the [beach]. Because it became legal, we just started thinking, 'Well, we should do it,' and I, we kinda looked at each other like, 'Really?' Because we had never talked about it before. We didn't have the domestic thing

or anything. It just—kinda came up, and we just said, ‘Sure.’ And from that point on we just kinda ran with it and planned the full-on wedding with reception.”

Scott added, “Yeah, someone asked us that, and we said, ‘Yeah, I texted him—Will you marry me?’” Derek laughed and added, “Yeah, we just said, ‘I IM’ed him, on my computer, while he was sitting next to me,’ and [he] said ‘Sure!’” We were all laughing at this point. “It was different then [sic] a lot of marriages, where the proposal is where, you know a guy proposes to his wife, I mean. For us we have been together for so long. I mean, it’s definitely different. It suddenly became legal, so it was different than where it was already legal,” added Scott.

Derek stated, “But there was no convincing. It was kinda like we both thought, well, it’s a given right now, so let’s take advantage of it, and you know, ‘Do you want to do this?’ and we just went, ‘Sure.’ We know probably like, what, four, five other gay couples that have all been together at least 10 years, and they did the same thing.” Derek explained that they hadn’t spoken with the other couples about each of their decisions to marry at the time. “You know, as you talk to them, and you find out that they got married, too. It was like, *wow*, so you know, everybody else had the same feeling. It was like, ‘It’s legal, Let’s do it!’” And then, Derek explained, “We went to a wedding of theirs, and we met new friends. And then through them, you know, you meet other couples who had been married. And then, the next thing you know, you know, we know like, what (looks at Scott), 5, 6 couples that are legally—so we all have the same sort of stories, like we have all been together at least 10 years or so.”

“All of the long-term gay friends who have been in long-term relationships, they all got married, pretty much,” added Scott. “We don’t know anyone who was in a long-

term relationship that didn't get married during that time." Derek agreed, "That's right, so it was like we waited, you know. The opportunity came and we all did it. It was like automatic. And I don't think the world has changed because of it, and I don't think society has collapsed. So I don't know what the big deal is."

I was curious about what influenced their decision on what date to marry. Scott looked at Derek and asked "Oh, when it was available right? Whatever days—because we had to do it by the election, right?" Derek replied, "Yeah, it was October." Scott added, "And it was whatever days were available at [venue]. And they were like, 'Oh, we actually already have something booked for that day. Can you switch to a different facility?' We were like, 'No, we really want that one on the cliff,' you know. So, they pushed the other one earlier in the day and pushed us back later in the evening. It worked out OK." "Yeah, so it worked out. So that was it, we just wanted to get it before the election. Everybody did," added Derek. Scott asked, "Well, and I think we were also like, let's wait for good weather too or something?" Derek replied, "It was October, it was perfect. The weather was perfect." "We figured early October would be good, then it rained the night before and we were freaking out, but then it was a beautiful day," said Scott. Derek concluded, "Yeah, so it was perfect. I couldn't ask for anything . . ."

The Day of Legal Marriage

I asked, "So, you said that you had a ceremony? What was that like?" Derek replied, "It was great, it was about 65 people, cliffs of La Jolla. Our families were there and it was, how we did it was we just told people we were going to have a celebration. That we were getting married the next day." "At the courthouse," added Scott.

Derek continued, “At the courthouse. But what we did, we actually got married that night, that day when we invited people and we had our neighbor and good friend do the vows, you know you call it the, (looks at Scott) what is that? Uhh, Pastor in a Packet or something (laughing).” “Priest for a Day,” added Scott. “Priest for a Day, and he did it. So, um, it was a surprise. So we got to do it in front of all of our families and family and friends,” said Derek.

Scott then added, “It was casual which was nice. It was really laid back, it wasn’t stuffy. It’s just at this little facility up near where I work, a nice view of the ocean, and it was a beautiful day. And it was really awesome. A really great day,” he said, nodding and smiling. I asked, “Had you wanted to surprise everybody? Or did that come later?” Derek responded, “We did.” “It was your idea,” said Scott. “I just thought, ‘We should just do it there instead of doing it at the courthouse alone,’” said Derek. Scott agreed. Derek added, “And we said, ‘Why don’t we just invite everybody and then have this.’ Only two people know about it there, out of the 60. So it was a complete surprise, and I think it was kinda nice for everyone.” “Some people still thought, you know, they had misunderstood it and thought that it was an actual wedding and so they weren’t that surprised. But that was just a few people,” added Scott.

Derek agreed, “That’s right. But there were still some that said ‘OK, we’ll be coming, can we come tomorrow to the courthouse?’ And we were like ‘Sure . . .’” “Yeah, and my mom was like, ‘Well, I’ll wear my nice clothing the next day to the courthouse when they’re going to take pictures there, right?’ And I was like, ‘You know, why don’t you just wear your nice stuff today to the party.’ (laughing) You know. She

didn't know," added Scott. "It worked out. It was a nice, a nice, nice time," he said, nodding *yes*.

I asked, "OK, then, so you had the ceremony, did the two of you mark it with vows or—what did it all look like?" Derek replied, "Yeah, we did, we did. We just kinda wrote our own." Scott added, "Oh, that's true, we did write our own vows, yeah. I forgot about that part." Derek added, "What we did, we just did the traditional. We just had the two of us, and then the person marrying us, and then our families kinda to the side and everybody was just kinda there (gesturing in front with his hands). In addition to our thanking people for coming, we just said, 'Well, and also, and there is an added bonus, then we did it like that.'" Scott added, "and I remember just sitting down trying to think about what [to] write for my vow, you know. I don't even know if I can remember right now." Derek laughed. "I can't even remember, we have it on video, you know." Scott added that he wrote about "just how much we care about each other, you know, and what a great person I think you are (looks at Derek and puts his hand on his leg). And how much, how happy you have made me."

Derek responded, "Yeah, just your typical run-of-the-mill, you know. It was good (smiling and looking at Scott). Scott replied, "Yeah, I mean, some people were crying weren't they?" Derek agreed, "Yeah, I was surprised." "Yeah, I guess it was an emotional moment for some people. Oh, you cried (looking at Derek). You choked up," Scott added. Derek offered, "I cried, I couldn't finish my sentences." Scott agreed, "Yeah, yup. It was good (laughing). It's all on video." Derek joked, "Well, you know, my makeup ran in the veil you know, so." "He wasn't wearing a veil," Scott laughed. Derek, also

laughing, said, “No, I was not wearing a veil. So please, don’t put that in your study, ‘He was wearing a veil and cried.’”

Laughing, I asked, “But it was really emotional for the two of you and for the friends and . . . ” Scott replied, “For his mom.” Derek responded, “My mom, and you know here they thought, probably, when will I ever get married? And now I have, someone I will be with.” Derek had explained earlier that the decision to get married legally had prompted his decision to come out to his parents. I asked, “And they had just found out pretty quickly before that?” Derek offered, “Yeah, like three weeks ago. So talk about giving them a heart attack, you know. Um, but they were, from the moment on . . . it’s funny because I thought that my dad would have the worst time and, uh, he was actually the one who was fine with it.” Scott agreed, “He was fine with it.” Derek agreed, “They were fine.” “And then it was, ‘Oh, I have got a long-lost gay cousin,’ and all of a sudden it all came out of the woodwork,” added Scott. Derek said, “Oh, my aunt said all these gay people are in my family and it was just kinda funny. Like, ‘Why the hell did you tell me all this now?’” He went on to say, “But yeah, so, it’s been good. I can’t say that there is anything negative that came about this happening.” I reflected, “So, it sounds like it opened up conversations in your family?” Derek agreed, “Yeah, yes. Definitely.”

Formal Recognition After Legal Marriage

I inquired whether or not Scott and Derek had taken any steps to formalize their relationship after their marriage. Scott replied, “I don’t know if we have done much. Um, I have legal coverage through work. We may have, I may have done some will stuff, but I think that I did that beforehand, actually. I don’t think we have any paperwork, no.” Derek added, “No, I haven’t changed anything.” Scott offered, “Probably should look

into it, you know. See where we are covered and where we aren't. Taxes are always fun, 'cause we have to do like three different forms." "Right, but I think you said now we can file together, right?" asked Derek. Scott replied, "Oh for the state, yeah, but then we have to like—you probably understand—it's like multiple forms. But no, we haven't done any kind of legal, additional legal steps."

Language Choices

Curious about the words that Derek and Scott used to refer to one another, I asked, "So, what language do the two of you use to refer to one another? Do you call one another *husbands*? Or, how do you call each other?" "*Husband* has been hard to adjust to," said Scott. Derek added, "It's interesting." "We talk about that sometimes. I still say *partner*. It just—when you are like, out in public and it is such—like a bomb-dropper to say *husband*, 'my husband.' Because it really—people don't expect to hear that. Especially if they don't realize that you are gay at first, it hasn't come up. Uh, so sometimes I will use *partner*. But we call each other *husband*," said Scott, reaching over and puts his hand on Derek's leg.

Derek offered, "I say *husband*." He continued, "If we introduce people or something, um, yeah. *Husband*. I guess it's just hard to say that." Scott added, "If we are around our friends we say *husband*." Derek agreed. Scott stated, "We try to say *husband* more frequently now when we are around straight people. But you kinda just make a quick judgment, like 'how is this going to go over?' You know." Derek added, "Yeah, but it's OK. We're prepared for a . . . he's not a small guy, so I'd like to see who's gonna—you know."

Scott laughed, “You kinda enjoy— shocking people sometimes.” Derek added, “He likes the shock value of it. Like, girls, you know. Girls will come up to him or whatever and, um, and then when he just—actually, we both tell each other stuff like of a story, or an incident that happened that day.” He went on to say, “Like, I went to the doctor, and the nurse, she was talking to me. And she just said, ‘Oh, your wife must be blah, blah,’ and she just went on about *wife*, right. So I finally had to say, ‘You know Sarah, I have a husband.’ This is a lady I have been goin’ to, and she was shocked. And of course she was jumping for joy, because she just thought that was great. But, there are plenty of instances where they just assume that, you know, you have a wife or something. So then you just kinda have to feel it out and say, ‘Ok well, you know. I have a husband.’ We just kinda laugh. We always tell stories like, ‘Oh, I had to drop the bomb today.’ Because there is always, you know, you’re at the store and they’re like, ‘Oh, your wife will love that.’ You know, do you say something? Or?”

Scott added, “When I was at East Village Tavern and Bowl, I think the day after we got married? Or was it that night? I forget. Um, [the waitress] she was like, ‘How was your day?’ and I was like, ‘Oh, I got married.’ And she was like, ‘Oh, that’s great! Who’s the lucky girl?’ or something like that. And I am, like, ‘Actually, it’s a guy.’ And she was just like, ‘Uhhhhhh’ (drawing back in horror). You know, I said, ‘It’s my husband.’ And she was just like, ‘Ohh’ (uncomfortable, drawing back in horror). ‘Get me out of here.’” He continued, “It’s kinda funny when you just, I mean. I don’t care what her reac . . . I don’t care what she thinks.” Derek agreed, “I don’t care.” Scott continued, “So, you know. I am past that now. For a long time I did really care what other people thought, but

it's our life and, you know, we need to be caring about ourselves first, then about the reactions of other people to our relationship."

I inquired, "Is it your preference to use the word *husband*? You said it's been evolving?" Scott replied, "With each other we call each other *husband*." "That's a good question," said Derek. He added, "You are going to make us start using it after this (smiling and nodding). Right."

Scott offered, "I think that I did use *partner* last time I said it." Derek agreed, "I think I might have said that, too. But I think *husband*, we are entitled to that so, you know. Scott added, "But, we are workin' on it." "I think we just have to put it in the mainstream more. Just so, yeah, we should probably start using it more. But you are right, we do kinda say *partner*," said Derek. Scott agreed, "We have said *partner* for so long, too, so there is kind of an adjustment, too." "Yeah, it's kind of automatic," said Derek.

"But it has been two years now," said Scott. "Alright, *husband* it is," said Derek. I clarified, "So you hadn't used *husband* at all previous to the marriage?" Scott and Derek agreed that they hadn't. "Because we weren't married," said Derek. "We weren't husbands," said Scott. Derek added, "That's why it is so new, you know how, I think it's similar to—married couples, the woman changing her name when she gets married. It's kinda that used, getting used to—it's kinda catching yourself going 'Oh, yeah, I guess, I am married. I can say *husband*.'"

I reflected, "So you said that in some contexts you will sort of evaluate before saying *husband*, but are there other contexts where it wouldn't bother you to say it at all or you wouldn't make that quick evaluation?" Scott offered, "If we are around gay people." Derek added, "If we are around other gay couples or at a gay party. It's just.

There is no, you know, you don't have to. You just assume that they know what we are talking about. But it's for, say we go to a Christmas party or something, like I got invited to one, which we are going to, by the way. But I am sure that time, we are going to probably be confronted with a lot of, you know, they will see the ring and ask, 'Where's your wife?' and—this is it, this is the perfect opportunity.”

Scott made a proposition: “Let's just say *husband* from now on. What do you think?” (Looks to Derek.) Derek replied, “Yeah, that's good. Deal.” (He shakes Scott's hand). Scott concluded, “Alright, deal. We are saying *husband* from now on.” Derek agreed, “No more *partner*, we got it on film.” Scott agreed. Derek added, “So, you know, so we'll be doin' that. There's parties, all straight.” “Alright,” said Scott. “So, here we go, gonna use this,” Derek concluded.

Reactions to Marriage from Family, Friends, and Community

When I asked about how the response has been to their marriage from family, friends, and community, Scott replied, “Good, my mom and dads, they had already accepted me being—I was out to them for a long time. And, um, let's see. Friends were fine. You know, we kinda made some requests, like, ‘Please vote *no* on Prop 8.’ We were gonna have a *No on Prop 8* thing at the wedding but then we decided not to do that. And then, you know. I heard later that, like, certain people who were there still voted *yes* on Prop 8, and I was just like, ‘That's kinda lame.’” Derek added, “So you almost kinda want to nix them.” Scott continued, “I know, but it's hard because we like them. What are you gonna do?” Derek posited, “They went, so. Maybe it just opened up their eyes. So, hopefully all it takes is—even if you get one.” “Not going to change their vote, though,”

Scott interjected. “Yeah, but you know, if you can affect someone. Then, that’s a start,” replied Derek.

“I guess that was difficult on a personal level, though, was that. It was like, ‘You came to my wedding, and you witnessed this whole thing. And you saw that, you know how much we care about each other and yet you still went and voted for Prop 8,’” said Scott. “And we didn’t verify it, but we heard it through the grapevine,” added Derek. Scott agreed, “We heard the deal.” Derek added, “But it’s enough even to hear that, you’re just thinking—”

“Maybe we’re putting ourselves at the center of their universe, right, but when you know someone, you kinda care about their best interest. So you know, you care about them, you want them to be happy. Isn’t that what we would do if the shoes were reversed? So—but they’re probably looking at other things like, you know, they’re concerned about their kids being taught it’s OK to be gay in school, and that’s a big taboo,” Scott explained.

I asked, “So then, how about with your community?” Scott responded, “Ahhh, Ooh. A good one is that we had the people from—when you say community do you mean like the neighborhood? Our neighbors and—? We are good friends with a lot of people in our neighborhood, on our street. One of the assistant pastors for The Rock Church lived across the street and there were four *Yes on 8* signs on our street. The most of anywhere in Kensington. And it’s like, they knew we’re gay and we live together. Its like, I don’t know, it was like what if you had an interracial couple living across the street and there was a proposition to ban interracial marriage? And you had the nerve to put a sign on

your thing saying, ‘Your marriage is invalid.’ It’s like the whole thing of, like, love thy neighbor, sorry.” (Looks at Derek.)

Derek replied, “Yeah, no. He’s right. They are hypocrites, they’re hypocrites. It was very hypocritical. It was almost like everybody—our street was unusual in that there were as many *for* Prop 8 signs as *against*. So everybody prominently put them out. And Kensington is a very, is a liberal area. But these were the only ones we could see in our whole neighborhood. And it happened to be four of them on our street—within eyeshot. You know you can just walk, stand in front of our yard and there are four there. So it is like a big battle. But what happens is towards the, (looks at Scott) what, just last year? We ended up meeting these neighbors who had the against. And they seemed very fine, they hung out at our house.”

Scott agreed, “Yes, they hung out at our house.” Derek continued, “But the subject never came up. They didn’t ever ask. And we didn’t bring it up. Because it was a block party thing. So everybody was kind of minding their, um, p’s and q’s at the time. But, it was very civil. But, you know, we knew that they were a part of The Rock Church and what Carrie Prejean was about during her—we know their beliefs so—we just thought. I told him, ‘We gotta meet them.’ Because I want them to meet a gay couple and realize . . .” Scott agreed, “Yeah, show them we are not so evil.” “Realize we are just like them. And that was my method. I’m like, ‘We gotta go,’ you know, introduce, you know, meet them. Maybe they have never met any [gay people], or that were out. Maybe now they’ll be able to tell stories and say, ‘Oh yeah, they are . . .’ So, it’s just that little chopping block. And it’s gonna take time but—they were very nice to us. Can’t deny that.”

Scott then said, “And then people, like at work, were very friendly about it. They were very supportive about our marriage. Like when I told my boss that I was getting married, he and his wife, we all went out to lunch one day at work. I think they signed a card didn’t they? (Looks at Derek.) And then they passed it around and everybody, all my coworkers, signed it and stuff, so. That was pretty nice.” He continued, “Yeah, and beyond that. I mean, I have a blog, and I put on there that we had gotten married and I mean nobody wrote anything nasty on there. We didn’t really have any negative consequences among our friends, our family, or community.”

I reflected, “So it sounds like in the immediate area there was the tension of, or you called it a battle of the signs.” Derek said, “It was, it seemed to be.” Scott agreed, “There was that.” Derek then offered, “And we met, during that time, we also met other neighbors who were against Prop 8 and now they are good friends of ours. Because that kinda draws you in.” “Solidarity,” Scott commented. Derek continued, “And come to find out, her sister is a lesbian. So that is why she and her husband were so adamant about it.” Scott added, “She couldn’t believe the *Yes on Prop 8* signs. She was like, livid about it. Our neighbor who’s straight, with the gay sister.” Derek added, “Yeah, so it, it was an interesting time.” “It brought us together, it really brought people together. You know, that were on the same side of the issue. And probably on the other side, too,” Scott concluded.

Impacts of Proposition 8 and the National Debate on Extending Marriage Rights to Same-Sex Couples

I then asked the couple to describe their understanding of how the local and the national debate about extending marriage rights to same-sex couples has impacted their

experience of marriage. Derek replied, “I just think it has made me more aware and knowledgeable, because, you know, you have to kind of know your enemy, and see why, why they feel—or what’s the whole *Bible* thing. God this and that. You know. So, it just has made me more aware. And I am actually very interested in—like, we have gone to festivals at Balboa Park. And he [Scott] walks away. But those people who have, they have something to say.” “With the big signs,” Scott added.

Derek continued, “But I want to talk to them, without yelling. And try to be as intelligent—and I just want to see and break them down. And I can’t accept—‘The Bible says’ isn’t good enough for me. And I tell them, you know, I grew up Catholic, but I tell them, ‘OK, so if I don’t believe in your *Bible*, or god or whatever, so how are you going to tell me that I am not like you? Or, you know, as equal as you?’ And it always comes back to the *Bible* and—” Scott added, “There is no not-believing in their beliefs, is the thing.” Derek continued, “Well, that’s just it. But I want to—I want to make them see how ridiculous it sounds for them to say that you can’t have this. And I pay taxes too, I contribute. Keep up my property and everything else. Just like you do. And we all strive to. And it always goes back to—” “The *Bible* says,” said Scott. “The *Bible* says,” agreed Derek.

Scott clarified, “So the question was, how does the national debate affect our?” I asked, “How does the local and national debate about extending marriage rights to same-sex couples, how has that impacted your experience of marriage?” Scott replied, “Impacted our experience of marriage? Um, I mean, it is a bit hurtful. I think. You know, you kinda say, ‘Well, our marriage is valid.’ Right, in our eyes. But you see all of these other people saying it’s not valid. And it makes you kinda say, ‘Well.’” “What are we

doing differently than you are?” Derek asked. “Yeah, why aren’t we valid? You know,” Scott added.

Derek then offered, “You know, we have a relationship, too. You know, the way people will judge. And again, you just try to figure out why. You know. Why do they care so much? When there are already gay couples that are married, and the world didn’t stop. Our kids aren’t coming home from school doing this or that. So I don’t see what they think is so degrading to society.”

Scott proposed, “Not to paint it all in a negative light, though. It’s also very encouraging just to see how the numbers have changed in favor of gay marriage over the years. I mean, it is just really amazing to see the shift in opinion. I mean, it’s like another major civil rights issue, it feels like. And I think it’s great, you know it’s really affirming to hear people who are straight and who are on our side on this issue.” Derek added, “It’s cool, too, to be part of this right now. You know, to see it. And I see, even though it is still in the news, and I think, it’s just a matter of generat—you know, a few years and no one will care.”

Scott added, “I know, younger kids really don’t seem to care . . . except in the South. They really don’t seem to care.” Derek said, “So, you know. It’s not as depressing as it once was—because I think when people, as time goes. The news or just day to day. You just realize *wow*. People don’t care anymore. Which is all we want. Don’t care. We don’t care about you, you know.”

Scott added, “And we are fortunate to live now, when these things are happening. I mean, who would have thought that gay marriage would become legal during our lifetime?” “Or a black president. I mean all of these things,” added Derek. “Yeah, some

big changes happening,” said Scott. Derek added, “I am just going, ‘Wow.’” Scott said, “Yeah, it’s really pissing a lot of people off.”

Derek stated, “So it’s cool. And I have said it before to him. I like being gay. I think it’s great. You know, just because. It just gives more character and stuff because of the struggles that—and I don’t know, it just, it’s a nice, it’s cool.” Scott continued, “It’s definitely a fairly unique thing. I mean there was only what—18,000 gay married couples during that time. And it’s probably going down pretty quickly right? So (looks to Derek) we are in a pretty small minority.” Derek agreed, “Yeah, so it’s kinda cool. I wish there was a big a—they should have like a big website of registered. Because eventually, who’s gonna be the last of the Mohicans? (Laughing.) Because if it’s anything like divorce on straight marriages, holy crap. You know.” “Yeah, there is some more hypocrisy there,” Scott added.

I reflected, “You spoke to some different complexities. Some confusing pieces and some disheartening pieces, and some encouraging and hopeful pieces.” Scott and Derek agreed. “You know, like I was saying earlier. I kinda like, I don’t know what you want to call it, but I kinda like where we are now just because it’s still in the news and people have to talk about it,” added Derek. “Yeah, it is still being fought,” said Scott. Derek concluded, “And we’re part of it. So, it’s just kinda this really cool thing to be able to say. ‘We were there!’ You know. So that’s how I see it. I just think it’s kinda. We are setting the path and making a path for future, but you know. I feel qualified to be part of the first to (laughing).” Scott commented, “Yeah, you know, I hadn’t really thought about it, because we are living it now, but—well, but when you look back 30 or 40 years from now. I mean, it might be like really unique.” Derek agreed, “I know, we are going to be

like, drinking out of colored water fountains. It's the same thing." "Well, I guess they already had it in Massachusetts and stuff. So, they were really the first. But, anyway," said Scott.

I reflected, "So there is also a piece of thinking about the place you are in history." Derek and Scott agreed. "Yeah, definitely for me it is," said Derek. "The more we think about it. Yeah," said Scott. "I have always thought that. I have always thought. It's great. This is it, it's setting it up. You can see where it's tilting. Just eventually. And I can wait. We have waited this long. And, um, you know eventually it will just be mainstream and we probably won't even have to talk about this in the near, you know for another study or anything, hopefully just part of it," said Derek.

Scott added, "What's weird is that gay marriage has been legal for a while in Massachusetts and the world hasn't ended, right? And it didn't end here in California." "Or Europe," chimed Derek. "It still doesn't matter," said Scott. "Because the *Bible* says," said Derek. Scott continued, "I know, but it's like all irrational things. You know, you kind of like observe things and say, 'OK, maybe it's not that big of a deal.' But there's no observing and there's no rational approach to it on the other side. It seems like it is just 'my way, and that's it. My beliefs, that's it.' And I think the particularly frustrating thing is to hear that we are enforcing our beliefs on other people when it was sort of like—well, you are taking your religious beliefs and overturning a court decision that looked out for the rights of the minority. So really, you're the one who is enforcing your personal beliefs to take away a state-established right from us."

Derek added, "But then, it's separation of church and state. Don't talk about your god. And, you know. Let's talk about government and equal rights for people. So that's

where I get so (shakes head) you know, when I hear people just talk about the *Bible* it just drives me crazy. I am not saying, they're wrong or I am right. You just got to keep things separate." Scott added, "We are not taking their rights away. We are not saying, you know, 'Close down the churches.' We are not saying, 'Force the churches to marry us. Uh, that you can't read the *Bible*' or any of that stuff. We are not telling them to do anything. But they are the ones who are taking away our right. Again, that was granted by, through a legitimate court process."

I then asked, "So what are some of the ways that the two of you have navigated the experiences and challenges of Proposition 8 and all of the ongoing legal battles connected to its passing together as a couple? Like how do you talk about it, or how do you handle all of the sorts of ups and downs together?" Derek replied, "He's (pointing at Scott) definitely more into the news. Like you always say, 'Did you see—?' or 'Something's coming up.'" Scott added, "And I will text him." Derek continued, "And then I get into it. He is way more news savvy I guess. And then once he tells me about it, then I will look into it and I will follow it." Scott stated, "Oh, and he will read every comment on the discussion boards." Derek agreed, "And I will read all the comments, he doesn't do the comments." Scott agreed, "Every antigay comment. I can't read them any more. They're just so . . . " "He ignores them and I am the guy who tries to like break them down saying, 'Why do you think?' you know. It's just ridiculous. So when I have too much time on my hands, I guess. No, but um, I think that we just roll with the punches or whatever," said Derek.

Scott introduced a new topic, saying, "Yeah, I saw that December sixth is when they are having the next hearing on it. And the first hour is going to be whether or not the

defendants, or whatever, the Prop 8 supporters have a right to even do it in court because the state has said they are not going to try and defend it, so. It's going to be interesting. And does it get kicked up to the Supreme Court, which is very conservative right now. We just hope for the best, but you feel like it's totally out of your hands and out of your control. So it makes you feel a bit powerless. But also, we have kinda been grandfathered in so our, selfishly, our marriage is probably gonna last, but whether that—we want to see other people be able to get married too.”

Derek stated, “Be able to have the same right, you know. But I will say, remember when they did the last hearing. When they overturned it. We were watching it, I was watching it from work, like glued to the live coverage. And when they announced it. I mean that was a great, that was a great moment.” Scott agreed, “When we thought they were going to make it legal and people could start getting married again.” “We were just like, ‘That’s so cool,’” said Derek. “And it wasn’t,” said Scott shaking his head. “And then, you know. It stopped,” said Derek. “It was really disappointing,” said Derek.

Derek then said, “So that was part of the ups and downs. We were like, ‘Oh, cool!’ But it wasn’t as hard, as gut wrenching as like, I don’t know . . .” “As the night of the election,” offered Scott. Derek said, “I guess we knew what was expected. OK, you’re not surprised but you’re hopin’ for the best. So then, ‘Oh, great!’ and then ‘Oh, well.’” Scott added, “I guess. When it lost on election night, it was like, it definitely sucks, right. Or when Prop 8 passed. Um, but we still have each other (puts hand on Derek’s leg) and we have a lot of things in this world to be grateful for. And I try to always take that perspective when something really negative happens. Just focus on the positive things, you know. I just can’t get down or depressed about it.” Derek agreed.

I then asked, “Is there a specific time that you can remember, maybe it’s the election night, maybe it’s another time, when, you know, something in the national or the local debate was going on where the two of you relied on one another or somehow handled it together?” Scott replied, “Probably election night, right? (looks to Derek) We were in Mexico City and we were watching on vacation. And watching returns come in. And we were all excited about Obama. And then California came in and. Yeah, I remember laying there in bed that night with you and we were just talking about it.” “And just goin’, ‘Awe,’” added Derek. “So, if we hadn’t been there for each other it would have been hard. To just sit there and stew about it on your own,” Scott explained. “Or had we not been married. It might have been harder,” Derek posited. “Uh huh, what if you had nobody to talk to about it that night, all of your frustrations, you know?” Scott asked. “So yeah, man, you are bringing up all of those memories. I just forgot about all those times where, you know, following the elections and stuff, but,” Derek added.

I clarified, “So when you were following it, I mean, there has been so much that has continued to go on, the two of you turned to one another to talk about it?” Scott agreed, “Yeah, we definitely talked about it.” Derek added, “Oh yeah, we talked about it. Rehashed and—woulda, shoulda, coulda and what will or whatever. I think what we kept saying was like ah, ‘It’s just a matter of time.’”

Scott stated, “Yeah, I mean, just yesterday, or last night did we talk about it? You know, about the next hearing. I was telling him about it. Yeah, we definitely stay on top of it.” Derek, agreed, “Yes, even Don’t Ask Don’t Tell. We are following that. That’s another one where you are just goin’ *wow*; there is something, it’s kinda breaking down. And then there is another stay and stuff. So it’s just, we are just so used to it. But uh, but

the fact that it's still being talked about in the news. I just feel like, it's not going to go away. And, you know, anyone with common sense knows that you can't discriminate against—so clearly it is discrimination. Again, you know, the time will eventually come.”

Later in the conversation Scott questioned, “What if we hadn't gotten grandfathered in? I mean, wasn't there still one judge who voted to . . .” “Oh, yeah, they were going to talk about taking it away,” said Derek. “They wanted to take it away,” said Scott. Derek explained, “We were pissed about that. I was really, I told him. I was like, ‘If they take it away then we are going back and demanding a refund on our fifty dollar license because if it's void . . .’ You know, so that was an emotional part.” “That was, I forgot about that part. That was stressful,” added Scott. Derek explained, “Because we were still like going, ‘Are they going to take this away?’ and that was really—we got pissed. Scott commented, “That was tough.” He explained, “And part of, when people voted on Prop 8, I think, in their mind, was to take it away. I mean, our neighbor across the street, basically that sign said, ‘We want to take away your marriage,’ and it just, you know. On a certain level you just couldn't think about it that much because it was really infuriating.” “Yeah, but then when they said that we were safe. It was like a huge relief,” explained Derek. “Relief,” Scott agreed.

Reactions to Proposition 8 and the National Debate from Friends, Family, and Community

Curious about the responses of others, I asked, “What have the responses of your friends, your family, and your community been like through the experiences of Proposition 8 and the ongoing legal battles connected to its passing?” Scott answered, “Well, people have been supportive in our family. You know, I will hear the news and

say, 'Oh, you know, it's a bummer, we thought they were gonna resume marriages today.' Like Lisa was kinda staying on top of it. Uh, Sarah and Jack especially, across the street, our neighbors they have always been really, you know, they've got our backs." Derek agreed, "Oh yeah, she's got the bumper stickers and we don't. She must look at us and go, 'Don't you guys care about this?'" Scott explained, "My coworker Susie is also really supportive and she's always on top of it. We were just talking about "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" tonight actually. Um, so yeah, I think they have. And in terms of negative, no not really."

Derek agreed, "I can't think of any negative." He added, "I mean, they don't say it to our face." Scott added, "Yeah, people who disagree with us on it that we come in to contact with don't really bring it up with us." Derek explained, "So it's never, we have never had to get into heated debates or conversations with family or friends that I can think of."

Derek continued, "Which I am thinking . . . is that right? There's got to be someone. You know, I am sure that there is other. I mean I don't know other families—I have friends, like Bob. His parents. He's got way more drama." Scott explained, "Yeah, I think you just don't want to bring it up. You go to an event where, like when Shaun is there I just don't feel like making a scene. It's like when you go to places and you don't talk politics. You know, what are the things you don't talk about? Politics and religion. It's kinda like that. You know, you just don't bring it up in diverse company." Derek cautioned, "If they bring it up, I am ready. I am not backing down, you know. So, I am not going to ruin someone's night or day. But, I'll—If I hear it in earshot, I certainly ain't going to ignore it."

“And how about in the gay community?” I asked. “What have their responses been like?” Derek replied, “They are all aware of it. We are all in the same boat. We are all educated too . . .” Scott agreed, “Everyone is on top of it.” Derek continued, “Knowledgeable about it, so we are ready. It’s funny, its kind of a given, too. I don’t think any of our gay friends are unaware of what’s going on.” Scott added, “Yes, and there is a lot of stuff on Facebook. You know, someone will post an update on a news item about it and there will be a lot of supportive messages. Yeah, and that feels good. To see those things.” Derek added, “And they are all gay, yeah, mostly gay. Most gay people, we’re just, we’re on top of it because it involves us, you know. So I can’t say—I have never met anyone who is like, ‘What’s goin’ on?’”

“Well, but you know we are not in touch with like the younger generation and a lot of them I think, didn’t follow it,” added Scott. “I did some canvassing, a little bit for the Proposition 8 thing. And, you know, you go out to the bar. We went to Bourbon Street. You know, and these kids just want to drink. I mean, I don’t blame them. I was the same way at that age. And they don’t care about gay marriage really. It didn’t seem like.” Derek countered, “I think they do.” Scott explained, “Some of them didn’t care. I’m sorry. Some of them did.” Derek said, “They just haven’t, well, they’re young.” “Different priorities,” said Scott. “Yeah, their priorities. But you talk to people our age and they are certainly aware,” said Derek. Scott agreed, “Yeah, we’re older. So we’re more involved.”

Impacts of Family, Friend, and Community Reactions on Marriage Experience

I asked, “How would you say that those responses have impacted your marriage?” Scott responded, “It’s good, it makes us feel better. It’s more affirming.” Derek added,

“Yeah, more affirming and also there is just no riff. There’s no. Like, it would be one thing if his mom or my mom was against it. But, the way it is, he comes over for the holidays. And they come over. So there is no, you know. It sounds boring but there is really no drama.” Derek provided an example of a friend they know whose circumstances were not so supportive: “I have a friend got married to his partner, and his parents refused to come. I can’t even imagine that. They refused to come and he basically wrote them off. He has written off friends. He is more abrupt.” Scott added, “Good for him.” Derek then provided a story which illustrated his friend’s attitudes towards people he knows who don’t support his marriage. Derek explained, “A woman that he was friends with, she wanted to borrow something for the holidays. I think like a pot or something. Something to cook. And came to his house and asked if she could borrow it. And he said, ‘Sure, but I just want to ask you something, how did you vote on the election?’ And when she said that, ‘Well I voted for Prop 8,’ he actually flat out said, ‘Well you are not going to use my, you can’t use my casserole dish.’”

Scott recalled, “Didn’t he slam the door in her face, too?” Derek continued, “He basically just said, ‘Sorry, if you don’t support me I can’t help you.’ And that. I thought that was the best. And we just laughed at the same time. He made a point. Like, he was like, ‘Screw her, she was honest, you know I asked her, and she was honest enough to answer, and I just said well I don’t want you in my life.’ And, so there it is.”

Scott added, “So I think hypothetically if we were in the same situation we might take similar steps.” Derek inquired, “Jack?” Scott replied, “Yeah, but Jack has never asked for anything from us.” Derek added, “Yeah, but we see him. It’s just an acquaintance of his brother.” Scott replied, “Yeah, but we don’t like bring[ing] it up

‘cause it doesn’t come up.” Derek agreed. Scott continued, “But if he wanted something from us then . . . ” “I just thought that was just classic when he said that. And he just said, ‘Well then you can’t.’ I just thought, ‘Wow, she will never ask again.’ And he could care less if he sees her again. But he is quicker to cut people out like that. Which is great, so see, that is someone else’s reaction to the negative. And that’s one whose also parents don’t acknowledge his husband. So he’s got a lot. His family situation is a lot more tense.”

I asked, “Is it your guess that the experience of it being tense impacts his marriage?” Derek replied, “Um, from what he told me, they have thrown in the towel. Because now they don’t even think of inviting the parents over for Thanksgiving. I just talked to him and they are hosting, and he is a great cook and everything. But the parents aren’t invited.” Scott then asked Derek, “Do you think it brings them closer together though, as a couple? In terms of how it affects their marriage.”

Derek replied, “He obviously, his loyalty is to his husband now. So usually there is always a family part you want to keep happy. And I guess he is like, ‘I am done.’ And I always think, ‘Man, how sad.’ You know. And his parents live here locally. So it’s not like he has to fly.”

“And so conversely in our situation, I think it, the support we have had from family and friends makes our marriage stronger, too,” said Scott. “Better, because of the validation,” added Derek. “And in his case, maybe the negativity makes their marriage stronger. I don’t know,” Scott added. “Yes, no that’s true. He had to choose,” Derek commented. “There is an interesting dichotomy there,” Scott proposed. He added, “But we’ll say, ‘Isn’t it so nice that our parents get along and that everything worked out?’

Because for so many years, his parents never even met mine. Because you know there was never that confirmation of our relationship and now by having the marriage . . . ”

Derek chimed in, “Right, they acknowledge each other. They will ask about each other. Even though his parents are in New York and Florida and mine are here. But at least they ask. Like when your dad comes in. So it’s just kind of a nice, ‘Well, how’s you know, they’ll ask. So it kinda makes it what, I will use the word *normal*.”

Scott proposed, “Yeah, but we should probably mention Gene and Kerry. I don’t know, is that relevant at all? This is kinda going back to your earlier question about family and friends’ reaction to the marriage. Derek’s niece and nephew have definitely kinda asked us about our marriage.” Derek added, “Yeah, they are 6 and 10. So right at that age where—so, they are like ‘Why do you guys have the same rings?’ So I am not the one, I don’t want to be the one. That’s kinda their parents’ thing to do. So, we just kind of, I don’t know for me I just kind of. Who’d have thought that a six year old would make me shaky? I can talk to anyone else but when he starts asking I just go—you know.”

Scott added, “I think they have seen the video.” Derek continued, “I have heard them ask. I have heard my nephew ask my brother if we were married and my brother has said yes and then he will just kind of laugh.” “Hehehehehe,” Scott demonstrated. “Hehehehehe,” Derek illustrated. “Yes, and he said it to me,”” Scott offered. Derek proposed, “You know, at 6 years old they don’t really—so maybe as they get older.”

Scott stated, “I don’t know, he, it didn’t seem like that good of a thing to him when he brought it up with me. So, maybe I was misunderstanding or too sensitive about it.” “He is 6,” said Derek. Scott replied, “I know, but he is probably, at school he

probably hears its not a good thing. He is in Orange County, it is a conservative area.”

Derek replied, “Oh, I don’t know.” Scott continued, “And, it’s just sad that you have to fight those battles again with a six-year-old, you know, I mean. Hopefully we’ll, you know. I just feel like maybe things are a bit more strained between them and us now because they know about our marriage, I just have that lurking suspicion.” Derek responded, “You are looking way too into that. I don’t know, it’s OK. I am not going to tell you how you feel. But, for me. I don’t see anything. I see them more.”

I asked, “And then Kerry is your 10-year-old niece? Is that right?” Scott and Derek confirmed that this was right. I inquired, “And has she asked questions, too?” Scott replied, “Yes. We had the sign in the window for *No on Prop 8*. And she said, ‘Is this so you can get married to Uncle?’ or something like that.” Derek said, “Oh, you said that, she asked you that? You did not tell me that.” Scott continued, “So two guys can get married?” And I was like, ‘Yep.’ I am not going to lie.” Derek responded, “No, I am glad you didn’t. She asked. You don’t lie to kids, right?”

Scott added, “And then I think she had mentioned—I heard her say something about, that she had seen the video, or part of the video of our marriage. Or a picture of it maybe.” Derek responded, “I don’t know when she would have seen it. Maybe pictures. But yeah, she doesn’t bring it up.” “No, I think that she knows now and she doesn’t bring it up. Whereas for Gene it is still like a novelty,” added Scott. “Yeah well, he is five,” concluded Derek.

Evaluations of Experiences

At the onset of the interview, I had asked the couple what they could tell me about their experience of being a legally married couple. Derek replied, “We have been

together for eleven, almost eleven years now and married two. So, it was kind of the same as when you talk to other couples and they have lived together, and then got married. But it has been great. Feels a little more um—everything just feels more legit now. So the feeling for me actually is just that it's, uh, I don't know, there is something there that you can't explain that. But at least I know that someone my equal does not have anything more than I do. It's been great." Scott added, "Yeah, like Derek said, we had been together for nearly eight—nine years when we got married. So there wasn't a huge change in terms of our relationship after we got married, but one of the key things when we got married was that you (looks at Derek) came out to your parents. So, I think it kind of legitimized—the fact that we were able to get married made it more legitimate in their eyes, you know."

Derek continued, "Yeah, I was a late, uh—I came out late to my parents. Everybody knew so it wasn't—but it was just one of those, uh, unspoken things that they knew. We had been living together this long so it just never, you know. I just never—" Scott added, "They kinda already knew anyway, right?" Derek replied, "They knew." Scott continued, "But it was just, that was the way we were officially doing it." Derek elaborated, "But, I thought with this, getting married, I thought, well this is a perfect time. My parents, I am willing to take the—if they reject me or accept me. And fortunately, they kinda looked at me like—AND? So it was good. So everything was good."

I asked, "Did that help them to sort of understand the framework of your relationship? That there was a legal—" Derek replied, "I think so, 'cause they're, I am first generation, I'm Filipino. So they are from the Old World. So for them, you know

it's—they're coming here and realizing. They're kind of adapting to the American ways and how it has changed. So, I think it kinda gave them something like, 'OK, you know it's—' I don't know, for me it just made it a little more, perhaps more accepting because it is was legal (nodding). So, I think that did."

Scott then spoke about what the experience has been like for him. "But yeah, I think that it felt good. Because we didn't have a domestic partnership beforehand. We just had never bothered to do it. And then when it became legal we just said, 'Hey, let's do it.' You know, we had been together that long and still couldn't get officially married and yet like my father had met a woman and married her in like a month or something or two months." "For a green card," Derek added. "Yeah, so she could get a green card, so it just, ehh," Scott said. Derek explained, "Yeah, so he would be really upset about that because all of a sudden, here's someone, his dad, who can just say, 'I am going to marry her for, you know, this and that,' and here we've been together for this long and we still couldn't so. So it just kinda made everything a little more whole."

Earlier in the interview, Scott had said that he had come to a place where caring about people's reactions to him and his relationship had lesser importance to him. I asked, "Did the marriage change that at all do you think? Or do you think that had changed earlier on in the relationship?" Scott replied, "I think just maturity, getting older. You know, when I was younger I was always concerned with what do people think." Derek added, "I also think, for me—being able to say, 'I am married,' it kinda gives me more power than just to say, 'I have a boyfriend.' 'Cause, like, I can tell you (points to Erin), 'I am married,' and you can say, 'Well, I am married,' and I am like, 'So am I.'"

Scott proposed, "Puts you on equal weighting." Derek agreed, "Yeah, you know.

You have your issues and we have ours or whatever.” Scott continued, “It’s not this second class—civil union thing—oh, yeah, separate but equal.” Derek said, “There is no ‘Oh, one of those (fingers in quotes) domestic or civil union.’ I have got what you have, so. What? There’s nothing, you can’t say . . . ”

Scott explained, “And I think that was the best argument when I was doing the phone polling, calling people up to do *No on Prop 8*. People would say, ‘Well you already have all of the rights of married people, why can’t you just go with that?’” Derek interjected, “Oh, that pisses me off.” Scott continued, “And I think that the key argument to make is, ‘Well, that’s kinda what they said about black people during the civil rights era.’ They’ve got, you know, everything is the same. It’s just separate. Well, that’s not equal.” Derek continued, “So, yeah, for me I think being able to—being married, and talking to people. There is no—you can’t put me down. Or you can’t say, ‘You guys are’—no, I have what you have. So, you know. Let’s talk about it, or whatever, but I have (shaking head). I am not backing down on, you know. I have nothing, nothing to—we are even—and I will outsmart you. (Laughing.) Typically, because I never lose a battle, which is what I always like to say.”

Derek continued, “But, I think that being married is great. And I tell my straight friends. I joke with them, ‘So this is it?’ You know, ‘So overrated,’ and I am like, ‘We are just as miserable as you are now’ (laughing). But no . . . it’s funny because I never thought I’d be—get married, you know.” Scott agreed, “Me either, yeah.” Derek explained, “That’s one thing. I thought, ‘I will never get married,’ you know, and ‘everybody wants to get married’ (fingers in quotes) or that’s their thing. You grow up

and you want to, and I thought, well, prior to being married, ‘I’ll never be married.’ So here I am married. So it’s kind of a nice.

Scott agreed, “Yeah, and part of it I think is part of that whole stigma of well, like you are a lesser person, you can’t get married, you are not as stable.” Derek added, “Yeah, even if you have a domestic partnership, that’s not marriage.” Scott continued, “People, some people look down on people who never get married like, oh, well, you never reached that—that thing in life where you got married, and there was—like a mark of your success. Oh, you are successful, you found someone to spend your life with. And because gay people couldn’t get married it’s like, ‘Oh, well, you’re gay and you, you know, you’re unstable. And you can’t be in a long-term relationship.’ So I think it’s nice to be on equal footing—at least at the state level.

Derek added, “Yeah. And if, at times, you know I may sound cocky about it to others. I am not, I am just letting them know that . . . ” “We’re proud,” Scott said. Derek continued, “I have what you have. So, we can talk about anything because we are on level ground. But it’s the people who haven’t been able—gay couples who can’t get married now. Those are the one’s that I feel for because if they knew what we have, you know, then it would be fair.” Scott explained, “It’s a historical thing and we are really excited to be a part of it and grateful that we are, you know, married.”

Derek later concluded, “Being able to say *married*, it’s huge. To be able to walk down the street and be equals with the people—like I was saying earlier, I like being gay. I like being, even though it would be great if we wouldn’t even have to talk about this. But there is something about right now, to be part of this and know that we are at the

forefront of—we can do this. I feel like, I am, well not just me but the people that we also associate with, we are all just very ready for the battle.”

APPENDIX G

Desiree and Sue

Introduction

Couple 5: Desiree and Sue were the fifth couple to be interviewed. They have been a couple for 23 years. Both report their household income to be \$214,000 annually. Desiree is a 67-year-old white female. She has two Master's degrees and is retired. On the optional information portion of her demographic form, Desiree reported that she had been previously married to a man for five years and has one daughter. After divorcing, she was married to a man with two sons for 17 years before meeting Sue and falling madly in love. Sue is a 64-year-old white female. She is retired and reported that her highest level of education completed was 48 units of doctoral coursework. On the optional information portion of her demographic form, she also indicated that Desiree had been married to two men before meeting her. She also indicated that they were both retired educators and that they had served as media spokespersons for San Diego's *No on Prop 8*.

Formal Commitment Before Legal Marriage

Desiree and Sue have been a couple for 23 years. They formalized their relationship with a commitment ceremony in 1992 and later registered as domestic partners. Sue and Desiree's discussion of their commitment ceremony and domestic partnership experiences was so intertwined with the details of their legal marriage, that they will be described in greater detail in later sections of this narrative.

I asked Sue and Desiree to say a little about the different ways that they had recognized their relationship symbolically and legally previous to their legal marriage in

2008. Sue explained, “So, we had the commitment ceremony in 1992. We did not enroll as domestic partners in San Diego Unified’s benefits, because we both worked for the school district, so we were covered and didn’t. So that’s the only thing I can think of that we didn’t do. But, we had living trusts and every piece of paper you could ever hope to have that our lawyers said that we needed to have, so we did that early on also. Like in 1992, I think. After our commitment ceremony. And then, I think it was 2001 when we registered as domestic partners and then got married in 2008.”

Desiree added, “And one of the kind of fun things that we did when we were in Boston—we were going on a cruise—an Olivia Cruise [cruise company that caters to lesbian clientele]. And they were doing a commitment ceremony in Boston. And so we had a commitment ceremony there. It was really lovely.”

Sue explained, “Well, there was a commitment ceremony on all of our Olivia Cruises that we went on, so we participated in all of those.” “But that one was especially important because some of the people who had been fighting for marriage in Massachusetts were there,” said Desiree. Sue added, “And they did get married. And then those of us who weren’t getting married did a commitment ceremony.”

“And then when you’ve been in places that were also holding commitment ceremonies, like the cruises—you’d also participated in those?” I asked. “Yes,” said Sue. Desiree added, “We would. Just because we like each other. And we want to do it as much as we can.”

Sue then recalled, “Well, and it was really precious. Because on those cruises, there’d be this big room and all of these couples and—young to in their 80s—and maybe more. So, it was real interesting. They would go around and they’d say how many years

they'd been together. And it was just so amazing to hear women have been together 35, 40 years." "And that one couple were together 60 years, weren't they?" added Desiree, "And I just couldn't—and, you know, what's so wonderful about doing a commitment ceremony in that group like that?"

"You have women from parts of the country that it would be dangerous to do that. That's the only place they had that wonderful freedom to do that. And the joy and the fun—and the lightness that you would see with those women was just—it was worth going through another commitment ceremony just to see—" Desiree said with a laugh. Sue added, "And there's always cake and champagne." "Oh yeah, that too!" said Desiree as we all laughed. "And you didn't have to dress up anything special," concluded Sue.

The Decision to Marry Legally

Early in the interview, I asked the couple to tell me about the process involved in their decision to marry legally. Desiree started by describing her relational history. She explained, "Well, we had had a commitment ceremony and we knew that we were going to be together. [Previously] I had been married for five years and had a birth baby. Then I divorced and remarried again to a man who had two children. So I raised those children." Sue added, "And you were with him for 20 years."

Desiree confirmed, "I was with him for 20 years." She then explained, "So, when I fell in love with Sue and we couldn't get married, it just didn't seem like a complete thing. You know, you just do not have the legal rights. You don't have the same emotional—quite the same emotional thing—although we were very solid as a couple. It's a slightly different emotional security."

Sue then described, “So, Desiree first brought up in 1988, you know, since we can’t get married, can we do something else? And so we had our commitment ceremony on the spring of 1992. Oh, so in 1991 she started talking about this. Not in ‘88—‘88 is when we got together. And I couldn’t believe that she wanted to do something like marriage because—well, I did have the fear that she would want to be with a man and that I was a passing something. But this was now four years into the relationship. But it still meant so much in that she became aware of what we didn’t have. That I was not—I mean I knew it academically, you know, I knew the 1000—whatever 83 things that we don’t have federally. I think at that point I knew some of them anyway. So it was a learning experience for me.”

Sue then described, “Our commitment ceremony was very small because we only wanted to include people that we’d had a one-on-one supportive relationship [with]. And, we wanted people to be safe—our family and friends—so that was—where do you do that? And so that was a very meaningful day. And I thought that was the happiest day of my life. And it was at that point. I mean, the whole day was just perfect.”

Sue then explained, “And then as our church—I brought forward requests for our church to vote against a DOMA initiative—amendment. And things and people at church were very supportive of us. I just kept getting involved with the marriage equality fight and interfaith organizing. And so once it was seeming—I mean—it seemed like we were going to get married no matter what. And we had talked about getting married in Boston when we were there, or going to Canada, because we had those options. But we hadn’t really looked into the legal things as far as Desiree’s social security and things like that, so we didn’t want to mess up anything like that.”

“So, we really thought that we wanted to get married here. When it became possible. And because of the work I was doing and Desiree was doing with *No on Prop 8*—I was the faith sub-committee chair for the *No on Prop 8* campaign here in San Diego—it was just, we knew we would marry. We didn’t realize we were gonna have to plan our marriage in such a short timeline while fighting for Prop 8 and while attending so many weddings of our friends,” said Sue.

Desiree laughed, “It was such fun!” Sue continued to explain, “While it was fun, it was very busy. And I mean, there’s never been a doubt that everyone in our church and in our families have considered us the same as married, all of this while. But, it was just the evolution of things. I mean, we did the domestic partnership. Desiree was afraid to do that for a long time because she didn’t want to be a name on a list somewhere that somebody could get to. But I asked for it as a birthday present one year.” “I couldn’t resist!” Desiree said laughing.

Sue then explained, “So we did that. And it just was like—everything that I can do to make sure that I can be with Desiree wherever. And that people know that we are in a strong, loving, committed relationship, and we can be treated with respect. I’ll do whatever it takes to get that.”

“OK, so when it became legal in June, had you known for some time that that was going to happen?” I asked. Sue responded, “Oh, oh yeah. I mean we were media spokespersons all up through that date. So we received training—you know, I went—we went to all sorts of kinds of events. So we knew the days it was happening. We were asked to be there in the first day. Marriage licenses were given and we were one of the first . . . maybe we were the first couple, I can’t remember. The first day—”

“I think that we were the first couple,” said Desiree. “And, even though by getting our license that day, we couldn’t—we had to get a second license,” said Sue. Desiree laughed, “We had to get two licenses! Because it expired.” Sue explained, “Because they expire in 90 days. And we weren’t having our wedding until October 4th. So that was outside of that 90 days. So we had to go back and do it again.”

Sue then added, “But we have been involved—for a number of years—on Valentine’s Day, in the protests when gay and lesbian couples would go and ask for marriage licenses. So, we did that year, and we were one of those couples.” “So, it was just—we knew exactly what—I mean, we were in the know,” she laughed.

I then asked Desiree if she had anything to add. Desiree replied, “Just, you know—part of this, too—is that Sue is much more *out* and much more *active* than I am. I am much more comfortable to quietly be with her or to support her at home by doing whatever I need to do at home. I am not—I was never as comfortable—though I did speak and though I did—she’s always been the impetus for us doing that. And I am really pleased that she is that way, because I would not do that on my own.”

Desiree went on to explain, “It upsets me. It distresses me. It makes me angry. It makes me sad. So, I have such a roiling of emotional experiences with that whole fight, that it was better that I not be as involved as Sue is. Was—is. And the other side of that was that I really wanted to be supportive, because I believed it was the right and just thing to do. And so if you don’t stand up for the right and just thing, who’s going to do it? And so we have slightly different takes on that. Emotionally.”

Desiree then said, “There were times, too, that we found ourselves snippy with each other. And we had to examine what the underlying feelings were. And sometimes if

we'd been in a really difficult interview—like we were on television with a priest and two of his parishioners, and then our minister and us. And, it's really hard to hear some of that stuff that people who don't agree with us have—”

“Like, ‘We love our dogs and cats but we don't allow them to get married,’” Sue interjected. Desiree continued, “So we would find ourselves really kind of angry with each other. And snippy and we would have to extricate ourselves from the feelings that were coming from the outside so that the inside of our marriage could be solid. It's very easy to—when you have the waves of negativity—it's really hard for me to stand firm. So probably if I couldn't stand besides Sue, I would just—it would be really hard for me.”

I later asked the couple, “Did anything influence the date of your marriage?” Sue replied, “Yeah, we wanted to have both of our ministers there. And the church needed to be available—and that was the main thing. And we needed to have enough time to plan it. So we didn't want to have it in June because—late July would have been fine—and then, all of our friends were getting married. So we had to find a date that—” “A date between all of the people who were getting married,” said Desiree. “Or at a time of day that doesn't conflict with somebody else. So there were people who left our wedding and I know went to other places. So that was pretty much how we picked the date,” Sue explained.

“Did the November elections influence the date?” I asked. Sue replied, “Well, we knew it had to be before November 4th or by November 4th.” Desiree agreed, “We knew, yes. You know, I think the saddest thing for me is that we had a friend whose partner had died very shortly before that, and she had met somebody else that she was dating. They

just weren't ready to get married. And, you know—I just—it makes me sad when people have this great love, and that's not going to change, but that legal marriage—" "Well, they could—one could die—it's just tragic what families have to go through," said Sue. Desiree added, "There's just too much. It's too much. That could happen." "While we don't have this right," concluded Sue.

The Day of Legal Marriage

Early in the interview, Desiree explained, "I think that one of the things that surprised me was when we had our service—our wedding was at the church. And we've been very active in the church since our commitment ceremony." So, 16—17 years. 15?" she laughed, "So, we knew how many people we were going to invite, and people kept coming up and saying, 'Oh, we're so excited about your wedding! We're going to get an invitation aren't we?' And so it grew from 200 to 300. And that was heartwarming. And that was wonderful because we have all of the support systems."

I later asked the couple to tell me more about how they had chosen to mark the occasion of their legal marriage. Desiree exclaimed, "Oh my gosh! Well, we had a *huge* wedding. So first we had the rehearsal dinner and—" "Well, we had family dinners," said Sue. "My nieces got into town first, and then—well, first we got our license on June seventeenth. And we were on the news and yada, yada, yada. And then, we stayed outside for hours while everybody else was doing their things. We had organized a minister's supportive clergy to be there. And so there was all of that. And then we went and got our second license." "We went with our best friends because they were getting married too," added Desiree.

Desiree then recalled, “But we did beautiful invitations and we invited all of our friends over. And we made handmade invitations. So everyone loved doing that. I guess there were about 10 women there. And we were sitting there putting those together. So that was great fun.”

“We went cake tasting,” said Desiree. “For the second—we did it before for the commitment ceremony,” Sue added. “For the second time,” Desiree laughed, “but we didn’t want to miss that. And then we met with the guy that does our hair and makeup and talked with him. And we went shopping for dresses. And we were just going to have something really simple and short—and just not too formal. And well, that didn’t work. So we got two beautiful long dresses. Which was so much fun.”

Desiree then explained, “And then when we had our commitment ceremony, we had written our vows, and spent a lot of time at the beach just talking about what we really wanted our relationship to be so that we had a really good foundation of what we believed we wanted to say to each other. And it wasn’t just, oh, a vow that would come out of a book, it was really carefully thought out—carefully written.”

“Well actually, we wrote the entire ceremony. Not just the vows,” added Sue, “we wrote the whole thing. We were in control.” Desiree smiled and exhaled. “You might be getting a control issue theme going on here,” she said, laughing. “But when we were going to get married, we looked at those [vows] and looked at the ceremony that we’d written to make sure that we were pretty much still on the same page. And so, I think that we changed very little.”

“Well, in the concept, we changed a little,” said Sue. “Our commitment ceremony was at First UU Church of San Diego because we stumbled upon it and it was welcoming

and safe. And they said we could, you know, use their—we could rent their room and we just had to talk to a priest—or a minister.” “And we went, ‘I don’t think so,’” said Desiree.

Sue continued, “But once we talked with her, we knew that we wanted her to help us through the thing. So, after that we joined the church. So now we—so we had had the commitment ceremony before we had this large group of hundreds of church family. And so that change was different. We now had two ministers that we were very close to.”

Sue continued to explain, “And so we used some of the same songs—mostly the same songs—we used all of the same songs. And um, and the same florist we had.” Desiree added, “So, we got to spend some time with the florist. Who’s just—he and his partner are just sweethearts. So, if you ever need a florist call us. And, we hired a wedding coordinator. A planner. And she was invaluable because, you know, as Sue said we were just so busy with everything we were doing.”

Sue recalled, “And I was president of the church at the time, so that was another big deal—because everybody—if they didn’t know me at church because they hadn’t been around long, they knew me because I was the president and Desiree was my *spice*—at that time.” Desiree added, “And we had a glorious time planning for the wedding. It was so much fun.”

Sue then explained, “So, we had the family dinners, and then we had the rehearsal dinner. And we had the wedding. And we were having a reception for our families with a dinner and everything. But, we didn’t want to—once we started realizing that the attendance at the wedding was growing like leaps and bounds, we were like—we didn’t

mind, I mean—we wanted everyone to come, who wanted to be there. I mean, we didn’t even send out invitations. People just came out.”

Sue then said, “So, that was OK, but we knew that we needed to have something there—at the church afterwards. So that was a whole new and different. I mean, we’d had a reception at our commitment ceremony, but there weren’t so many people and it was pretty much a reception line, and going inside and having one toast. So, we had to figure out what we would do that wasn’t going to break our bank. Which it already was going to break our bank. And how we were going to accommodate all of those people—what to serve.”

Sue continued, “And then we had my brother, and his family—my brother would not come to our commitment ceremony—” “Which was really painful,” said Desiree. Sue continued, “Because he didn’t want to talk to his young daughters about what was going on. And I offered to come—and I had been involved with PFLAG and working on non-discrimination in the schools based on sexual orientation yada, yada. And there was no way that I could get him to come.”

Sue continued, “So he and his family came. And his granddaughter was in the wedding. So we asked him—he did a toast. And our best friends, Dina and Sophie, did a toast. And they had stood up with us at our commitment ceremony. And then the—San Diego’s *No on Prop 8* coordinator did a toast. And we had pictures with everybody from *No on Prop 8* that had worked with the church there. And so we had cake and hors d’oeuvres and champagne at church. And then we went to the family dinner. At a restaurant.” “It was such great fun. I wish you would have been there,” said Desiree.

“So, it sounds like there was a lot of planning that had to go in to it, but that it was helpful to have the wedding planner because the two of you were so active in all that was going on throughout those months,” I said. Desiree and Sue agreed. Sue explained, “Yes, so she really put together how we were going to do it—outside. And then, I mean—we knew who [we] wanted to speak but she orchestrated—you know, what kind of tables and all of that stuff so that was great.”

Desiree added, “And then, you know, I am never really too sure how people are going to react, so we went to this photographer, and—was that the first one she’d ever done? That was the first lesbian wedding—first gay or lesbian wedding she’d ever done. She was so excited about it. She was just thrilled. And she and her husband were there doing pictures. And she did the most wonderful job. So, you know—this whole thing was very exciting. And gay people and straight people were very, very, very, very supportive.

Sue then explained, “And we continue to provide flowers for Sunday services. Like we will do one for our anniversary. But I did one for March—whatever the Sunday was before March 21st which is our commitment ceremony anniversary. You know, thanking the church for being supportive of us back in 1992. That allowed us to have a ceremony. So, we—that’s another way that we reconfirm our relationship and the marriage.”

Formal Recognition After Legal Marriage

Once the couple had described the multiple ways that they had recognized their relationship symbolically and legally, previous to their legal marriage in 2008, I asked them if they had taken steps to formally recognize the relationship in any way afterwards.

Desiree responded, “Well, we did go back in and had all of our—our will, our living trust—all of those documents were reviewed by the attorney. And, you know—that’s really important even if you are married, because there’s still so many loopholes in the law.”

Sue added, “So we had—everything that we needed to change because we were now married was done. But that’s the only step.” “So, for the two of you, it was important to make sure that all of that was updated?” I asked. “Oh, yes,” said Sue and Desiree in unison. Sue said, “There are children and grandchildren.” Desiree then explained, “Her brother, and nieces and nephews. I really trust that everyone would be respectful, but I also want to have that backup, because I don’t want Sue to ever be taken advantage of by any of my children. And I don’t want to be taken advantage of by her brother or family.”

Desiree continued to explain, “And so we’ve got all of our property protected. We hope. You know, you always—you’re never sure. But that was important to us too. To make sure that—because still federally we’re not married. So, there are some loopholes.” Sue agreed, “Right. And the thing that I think that has always driven that aspect was we saw a movie. And I think it was called *The Sum of Us*—but I don’t know—and it was about a gay man, but he remembered dreaming about—he would visit his grandmother and, in the flashbacks, it was two women and they’re these two older—old women in their bed. And then you see one of them being taken away because she needed care. So they split these two women up.”

Sue continued to explain, “And that caused such fear and anxiety. And those anger and snippyness things when we got to it—that was our biggest fear, that though we

trusted our families and knew they loved us, and knew they respected our relationship—we just needed to be 100% sure that we—” “We were in control,” said Desiree. “That we would never be separated that way. To never be together again,” Sue said dropping her voice almost to a whisper.

“So, it was very important to make sure that everything that you possibly can do to assure that you have done it,” I reflected. Both Sue and Desiree nodded in agreement. Sue then explained, “And, we have carried around—papers on our travels for years. Never knowing what we might need if we were somewhere—even in the United States or another country and something happened to one of us. What we would need to be able to go into a hospital and get—you know, be there with our loved ones. So—”

“So you—whenever you’ve traveled you’ve carried those documents with you?” I asked. “Oh yes,” said Desiree. “Yes. I think we only need to carry—now that we found out—the medical power of attorney, but still,” said Sue. “We’ve got it all,” Desiree said, laughing. “Just to be sure,” said Sue. “It might be a little overly cautious, but it’s important,” Desiree concluded.

Language Choices

Early in the interview, Sue explained, with tears in her eyes, “I have so enjoyed saying that Desiree is my wife. And introducing her that way. And it just makes conversations—and makes things so easy—so much easier. I don’t sort of have to stop short and wait for a reaction to see if the understanding is there that we’re in something more than just—we’re not sisters, we’re not friends, we’re not business partners. What does life partners mean? And so that’s—it’s just been a whole lot easier. I feel more light. And that I don’t have to be so defensive about our relationship because people understand

what wives mean—and the commitment level and underlying love, and wanting to be together that surrounds those terms.”

I later asked Desiree and Sue, “What language do the two of you use to refer to one another?” “*Wife*,” said Desiree. “You mean now? Oh. Definitely *wife*,” Sue confirmed.

“OK, did that come as a result of your marriage? After the commitment ceremony? How did that evolve?” I asked. Sue explained, “Before our commitment ceremony—we, for whatever reason, considered—Desiree was *my spice* because she couldn’t be my spouse. So, that came out of something—I mean that’s not how I normally introduced her. But I would say ‘my life partner.’ Or no, at first we started using *partner* and then they’d say, ‘Well what business are you in?’ So, you know—that whole thing. And so then, it was *life partner*, and in our commitment ceremony, we were—in our vows in the pronouncement we were *Beloveds for Life*.” “I love that,” said Desiree.

Sue explained, “And then after we were married it was definitely *wife*. I can’t remember any other terms.” Desiree said, “No, I think that we’ve just used *wife*. And I think that there’s still some confusion on that. Like last Sunday at church, somebody said, ‘Now what do you call yourself? What are you and Sue?’ I said, ‘We’re both *wife* and *wife*.’”

“OK, the consistent use of *wife* and *wife* came from the marriage?” I asked.

“Yes,” said Desiree. “Oh yeah, never before the marriage,” said Sue.

“And does it vary by context for you? Is there ever a time when you would say *partner*? Or does it—across the board do you use the word *wife*?” I asked. Sue explained,

“I would use the *wife*—the word *wife* always. Unless *partner*, maybe would slip out. But it wouldn’t be what I’d choose. I am pretty much—and I am, I can be in Texas or I can be in Indianapolis like we were at the Final Four. Those women have almost no protections. Um, and around the town, I would just say, ‘This is my wife’s seat’ or whatever. It’s across the board for me.”

“For you Desiree, is it across the board?” I asked. Desiree replied, “I kind of don’t make a reference. If we’re out, I am much more fearful than she is. So I often times just say like, ‘Oh, that’s Sue’s seat.’ I don’t say *wife*. I don’t use the title. Now, when I introduce her to somebody that I feel fairly safe with, I will introduce her as my wife.” “I thought you introduced me always as your wife? I mean it’s felt that way. I can’t even—” said Sue. Desiree replied, “Well, maybe I have. Introducing. But, you know like—if we’re in a restaurant and I don’t know who’s around me, I will say that’s Sue’s seat. I won’t necessarily say, ‘That’s my wife’s seat.’ But I might have done that with a husband, too. “Oh, that’s Tony’s seat.’ I might not have said, ‘That’s my husband’s seat.’ I don’t know. I’ve never thought of that. I’ll have to think about that. But I do call her *wife*.” “OK, so it’s possible that sometimes if there’s less comfort you might refer to her by her name as opposed to saying ‘my wife?’” I asked. Desiree nodded in agreement.

Reactions to Marriage from Family, Friends, and Community

Early in the interview, Desiree explained, “I think that I have noticed a difference in how my daughter introduces us. And she will introduce Sue as my wife. I think it does make a difference in the family structure.” Sue then added, “Our families—at the reception—they were talking and exchanging birthday information. And I mean, we have been together 23 years and our families have known each other and you know, whenever

somebody was in town, um, you know—we would all try to get together. So, it was very surprising to me that they felt so much more family-like. And um, so there was that kind of connection.”

I later asked the couple, “How has the response to your marriage been from your family, your friends, and from your community?” Desiree replied, “Fabulous. Both of my boys were there with—my one son who’s married had his wife there. They didn’t bring their little children because they were at the age, like 3 and 5 or, 5 and 7—something . . . And then there was my son and his two daughters, and the one daughter’s boyfriend. And my nephew, and his two children flew in from Colorado and Idaho. They were thrilled. They were so excited about this marriage. And my nephew said, ‘Well, it’s about time that Sue made you a legal woman!’ (Laughing.) You know, he’s got all of this wonderful humor. And the church was absolutely fabulous to us.”

Sue explained, “Everyone was just so happy. And, I mean so many people knew—know us because of having been on TV and the newspapers and all of these other things. And been around in the gay and lesbian community for so long and the interfaith community.”

Desiree then added, “Here’s what I think is really fun. We go to aerobic dance twice a week. And the women in there are older than we are. And, they’re Catholic.” “Very Catholic,” said Sue, “Every day masses, Catholic.” Desiree continued, “*Very Catholic*. Mass. I mean, that kind of Catholic. So, we decided that, you know, we’re with these women—we really like them . . . we’re going to invite them to the wedding. And I thought, you know—this may be where they will draw the line. No, we’re not going to go

to the wedding. But, everyone who could, came. Isn't that exciting! I mean, these very fundamental Catholics came. Well, whatever you call Catholics that are—"

"Well, I don't know—they are very accepting of us as individual people," said Sue. "They are," Desiree agreed. Sue continued, "But, to invite somebody to your marriage—my father didn't come to our commitment ceremony either, even though he and my brother had had us in their lives. We visited their homes, stayed in their homes. Did things together on holidays. The commitment ceremony was just like (holds up hands like a stop signal) uh—no. Too much. So marriage, seemed to be so different. I mean it is—lots of years passed."

"Many years passed," said Desiree. "But still, everybody was just thrilled for us and so excited," said Sue. Desiree continued, "I don't think we have had one negative. I can't remember one single negative from anybody. Family, friends."

Sue then recalled, "Well, except those Catholic people on that—" Desiree said, "Oh, on that television show. That was very painful. But they didn't know us." Sue continued, "Well, but they sat there with—I mean, they sat there, and we were right there. And they could see us. And they—"

"I wonder if their marriage is still together?" Desiree questioned. "We probably ruined it," said Sue. "They were just sure that if we married," said Desiree. "Well, we were already married," Sue interjected. "Oh, it was going to ruin the institution of marriage. I was so sorry for them that we were going to ruin their marriage," said Desiree. "No you weren't," said Sue. "No," Desiree laughed.

Sue recalled, "You were very angry. We were just so angry. And upset. Our minister was angry. The person who had put together the show called and left two

messages about how sorry she was. Sorry she was that things had turned out that way. She had tried to put it together so—I mean—we were not on at the same time, but we were in the same room. Waiting for each other’s things to happen.”

Desiree then added, “Well, and you know, there is always the kind of weird people that hang out around the edges of the county office with their signs. But, somehow, you know—we just threw love back to them. You know, no negative. And if you don’t accept a negative, you don’t get it. If you just—if you throw out enough love, and enough positive, and enough joy, you can’t catch that other stuff.”

“So, it sounds like the responses from family, friends, and community was largely really, really positive,” I reflected. Desiree nodded. “Uh, huh. That would have been a way to say it real simply,” joked Sue.

Impacts of Proposition 8 and the National Debate on Extending Marriage Rights to Same-Sex Couples

I later asked the couple to describe their understanding of how the local and national debate about extending marriage rights to same sex couples has impacted their experience of marriage. Desiree replied, “You know, for me. Because I had been married, before—to a man. Having been not able to get married, that was a big impact for me because I didn’t realize how much I was giving up—you know, financially, and taxes, and health and all of those other things. So that was an impact for me when we were first together. And then, the whole thing on the Prop 8—oh, why don’t you [Sue] answer that for right now.”

Taking a deep breath, Sue began to explain, “Well, it’s made it more precious. I mean, I never. I understand now that I never expected to marry. I mean I knew as an 8-

year-old, that I would never walk down the aisle with my father. So, marriage from that time on was somehow—I mean, it was just nowhere. And when we were planning our commitment ceremony and I went to try on dresses, I mean—I just sobbed. Because I just couldn't believe this was a possibility,” Sue said with tears in her eyes.

She continued to explain, “So, knowing how many people can't do this, it's just such a precious gift that I am living in a state that had the opportunity for this little—this brief amount of time . . . is just amazing. And all of the people that don't have this right, yet feel this love and commitment—and have children or grandchildren—and, it's um, so that's—I've been very involved in supporting work in Maine and Iowa and other places. And keeping in touch with that. And doing whatever I can to make it happen here again. And I think it's because of the preciousness. I mean, it's something I fought hard for.”

Desiree then explained, “Well, I think for me, it's, um—that whole debate, kind of slammed me in the face with, ‘You don't have this. And you are never going to have this if you don't fight for it.’ And that whole debate, also helped sharpen my own thinking. Because I think that sometimes you roll through life and you live—from day to day doing your job, and living, and all of—you know, just progressing. So, when Prop 8 and that whole debate came along, it was like—bringing to the forefront of my thinking—the inequalities.”

Desiree continued to explain, “And I had worked in race relations for years, to bring equality to people of different races. And I thought, wait a minute, I don't have equal rights. I don't have equal rights. Even though—you know that you know it. Until the public debate is there, I don't think it really . . . and then, this is not going to sound generous, but there are some really stupid people. And I found myself feeling less

generous towards some people than I might. And I just kind of wanted to be mean to people a couple of times. And that's not my nature to be mean. But I just—so, we'd snip at each other. We'd snip at each other. So, I think that one thing that that whole debate also did, was strengthen our ability to navigate through very difficult emotional times."

Desiree continued, "And, we had a therapist—I went to Jaime during Prop 8. I don't think you ever went to Jaime during Prop 8 did you?" "I don't remember doing that. I don't think so," said Sue.

Desiree continued, "I don't think so. So I went to Jaime to just kind of process that. Because Sue is so strong, and so committed, and so determined—that it's going to happen for people. So for me, that whole debate was just in my face, and in my house, and in my space constantly. So, it was hard. It's almost harder having—well, no that's not right. Sometimes it felt like it was harder having all of that in my space than it would have been to just leave it alone. But, we have very different experiences."

Sue recalled, "And I found after Prop 8 passed, I was—people would ask me things—or they would, you know why this happened. Or they'd be angry because the *No on Prop 8* campaign, 'Why didn't you do this or this?' And then there were people that were grieving because they—you know, they no longer had the right. And so, I was trying to take care and respond to everybody and I didn't realize how depressed I became as a result of that. And you know—"

"She really withdrew," Desiree explained, "and that's not her style to ever withdraw. I think that you—that whole debate and that whole outcome really affected our relationship in that she went into this really major funk after the election."

Sue added, “And I didn’t realize what it was—I didn’t care whatever we did, you know—we went to a friend’s place outside of Santa Fe. You want to go—I don’t care. Just take me. And I just couldn’t listen to it. And I find that I do get angry now still, when people [ask], ‘Well, why didn’t they?’ or you know, as if we didn’t give our hearts, and our times, and our money. And—‘and what did *you* do? Oh! You are just complaining now. OK.’ And so there are times when I still can’t deal with that. Although they’re much less now than it was right after Prop 8 passed.”

“So, right after, it took a pretty heavy emotional toll on you,” I said. Sue replied, “Yeah, I was defending the *No on Prop 8* campaign, I was defending—I mean, people still say, ‘Well the churches should have gotten involved.’ I was like, ‘I was the faith subcommittee chair. We had hundreds of people at many churches here in San Diego involved. And if you didn’t know about it, where is your church?’ So but, yeah—that was really very emotionally crushing.”

Desiree added, “And the other thing, too. You know, you have so many church-damaged gay and lesbian people who are very church-damaged. So Sue has played a really critical part in that whole debate in bringing the faith communities together. Some that would surprise you. And, I don’t know, maybe we just didn’t pray enough. That’s a joke,” she whispered.

“So, what are some of the ways that the two of you navigated the experiences and challenges of Proposition 8 and all of the ongoing legal battles connected to its passing together as a couple? Because it sounds like it was pretty challenging for both of you,” I queried. Sue replied, “Right, so—we first started participating in the *Decline to Sign*

trying to get people not to sign so that Prop 8—to get Prop 8 on the ballot. And that was the first time either of us had done that. And pretty quickly, Desiree, this was just not—”

Desiree shook her head, “Standing out in front of Target asking for a signature.” “No, we were trying to prevent signatures at that. Oh, but we did ask for—we asked for peoples’ support,” said Sue. Desiree explained, “We asked for peoples’ support, and asked them not to sign. And I just couldn’t do it. I mean, I don’t want to be around a lot of people. I don’t want to have to go up to people and say, ‘Do you support gay marriage? You do, oh—well that’s good. Would you sign this so we know that you support?’”

Desiree continued to explain, “Or they would say, ‘Oh—no.’ ‘Well, we hope that you will decline to sign’—well I just did not like doing that. And that was—then I felt guilty because Sue was so good about that. I mean, she was probably the best of all of the hundreds of people that did it. And I was just—it was just too painful. I could do that for an hour and I was emotionally drained. So, I had guilt. From that. And so I did what I could. And then Sue was at the *No on 8* headquarters all of the time. Well, maybe not all of the time. It just seemed like all of the time.” Sue explained, “Well, I was there or I was out on the street. Or I was visiting at churches on Sundays.”

Desiree explained, “So, it was like more than a full time job. And so, um, I occasionally would feel really resentful that she was gone all of the time working. Or I would feel—” “So how would we navigate that?” asked Sue. Desiree replied, “Well I don’t know, I don’t know how we navigated it. Except out of just deep respect for what you were doing. And so I was able to let go of some of that, knowing that I respect my

strengths and I respect your strengths. And, you can do things that I can't do and I can do things that you can't do."

Sue agreed, "Right. And you did a lot of things that would support the work. She would get materials together so that there would be stuff so that if parents came to volunteer and their kids—they needed to bring their kids with them, that there was stuff that the kids could do."

"I brought food or water or—" Desiree added. "She—you did make phone calls too. After a while—" said Sue. Desiree agreed, "I did make phone calls. I finally reached the point that I could make those terrible phone calls. And I think that, in some ways I grew from that because I did things that—I forced myself to do because Sue was doing it so very well. And I think that—I think that deep respect, and that deep appreciation for our differences, and an understanding of—once I got over feeling quite so guilty—that deep respect for I am who I am and she is who she is. And, it's good. We don't have to be alike."

Sue then explained, "And I think we—we had a lot of support. Not only from our ministers, and the rest of our church community, but then because of the interfaith work that I was doing, and Desiree was there at the interfaith meetings where we had all of the clergy come down together. We had incredible support—I mean, to have—to work with the Episcopal priests and Lutherans." "Christian and Jewish," Desiree added. "And other people," said Sue.

"Buddhist," said Desiree. "There were no Buddhists," said Sue. "We had one Buddhist there one time," said Desiree. Sue replied, "Really, huh. Um, so—anyway, to know that these folks have become friends and were very supportive and would—you

know, when Prop 8 passed, we would get—I would get emails, you know, ‘How are you?’ And so that was all very helpful to me. And it wasn’t just to me but it was to us together—that they were concerned about. So that was another way that we navigated.”

Sue then explained, “We’re very—we work very differently, so throughout our relationship we have had to—you know, we’d get to a point of something—whatever, and then we have to deal with it and have to figure it out. So, we’ve had a lot of practice in doing that. It hasn’t touched such a deep core, um—most of the times. But we have had a lot of practice.”

I then asked, “Is there a particular instance that stands out that maybe was a particularly challenging or difficult time related to Prop 8 passing or any of the stuff that has happened since then, that the two of you came together and really supported one another—something that just really stands out as a time that was really helpful for the two of you?” Desiree replied, “You know, I just think we do that so much every single day. It’s woven in little bits throughout our whole relationship.”

She continued to explain, “For me, there isn’t one—oh, this happened. But every day, it was ‘I love you, I appreciate you. Thank you. What can I do? How can we make this better?’ So, I think that just those little bits every single day.”

Sue added, “So, you know—we’ve just—we have our individual and our common support groups as well as our 23 years of togetherness.” Desiree explained, “I think that’s really helpful because I have a group of wonderful friends and she has a group of wonderful friends. And then, you know—we have many friends in common.”

Desiree then recalled, “You know, the other interesting thing about this whole Prop 8 thing is how we saw young people working. And, kind of the love they generated

around that office. It was really wonderful for me because I have some young friends now that I would have never had. And, I think that just being able to talk with them and we have those friends in common—I think that was one of the ways that we navigated it, too. Young people see things so much differently. For me. So, I don't know. I just can't think of one specific thing. It was forming new friendships. It was forming new support systems. It was continuing to talk with each other. And affirming each other's actions."

Sue added, "And I think it was also seeing. I had forgotten about all of the *No on Prop 8* organizers. These wonderful young people that are still our Facebook friends and still find ways to support us and remind us that they care for us a lot. And how much we taught them about—I mean it was such simple things like, well, you know, if you are going to photocopy these signature pages, you oughta not use black pens on the originals because then you can't tell the originals from the—and they'd be like, 'Oh my god!' you know."

Desiree recalled, "It was just precious because a lot of the things that you know, were just well of course you do this. . . . They just didn't have the experience. And they were so eager. So enthusiastic. So, I think that you don't navigate really difficult times if you don't have a broad base. And if you don't—I think we just were extraordinarily fortunate to have all of these new people in our lives and then have our faith community."

Sue then explained, "And all of them—you know, it was OK to cry with them. Or it was OK to be angry. And it was OK to be whatever. And then, you know, move on. And to know that there are so many people there for us." "So, really accessing resources of support networks outside of the relationship also really helped to strengthen the two of you during that experience," I reflected. Sue and Desiree both agreed that it had.

Reactions to Proposition 8 and the National Debate from friends, Family, and Community

I then asked the couple, “What have the responses of friends, family, and your community been like through the experiences of Proposition 8 and all of the ongoing legal battles connected to its passing?” Sue responded, “Well, they continue to be—you know, our church is very socially justice active, and you know, the amicus briefs that have been written on the behalf of faith communities have been written by a member of our church. Including the most recent one about DOMA and chaplaincy and things like that. So, there’s been just great levels of support, and I’ve continued to coordinate with the supportive clergy around this issue. So there’s always that group of folks.”

Desiree offered, “I think that the other thing for me, too, that’s been interesting is because we’ve been in some of these circles for a long time, straight people feel comfortable coming up to us and saying things like, you know, ‘Tell me about—you know, what do we call you?’ Or they’ll say, ‘Now, what do I say to my boss when my boss says this?’ And of course, Sue and I have had all of this training so it’s been wonderful to be able to say to people that are concerned: Are they saying the right thing? Are their responses appropriate? How do they navigate it being in these very conservative work spaces and still stay true to themselves? And so, that’s—I don’t think we’ve really ever had a negative. It’s more of a ‘Tell me about this. How do I navigate that?’”

“So, people have sought you out for guidance?” I asked. “They have. Yes,” said Desiree. Sue explained, “And I think they’ve also asked for our support for issues that they are concerned with. And that’s given me—or us an opportunity to participate in other things with immigration reform and so then bringing our relationship into that—it

doesn't have anything [to do] necessarily with LGBT immigration but we can bring that aspect of it forward or just be in the presence of people who may not have ever had access to a married lesbian couple—who have grandchildren.”

Sue continued, “And so, that’s another thing that I think is a benefit because it also brings me to new places. Because right now, we are sitting and waiting for marriage equality stuff so there’s nothing in that area to do specifically but wait. And that doesn’t mean I am not going to be working on other social justice issues. So, people seeking us out because either of our organizational skills or what we know or just two bodies to help—whatever.” “Or bring food. I can always bring food,” said Desiree.

I then asked the couple, “What have responses of family been like through the experiences of Proposition 8? And how it’s been ongoing?” Desiree replied, “My boys haven’t said a whole lot about it. My daughter has written emails, and emailed her friends, and all of those kinds of things. And, but you know—they are—my children are so busy with their own children and making a living and, um, my daughter is very supportive. But she also is a very, very busy mother of two.”

Sue replied, “My family lives in Arizona so they don’t have any specific relationship to *No on Prop 8* except for me and the terrible things that are going on in Arizona—in their own state.” “Theirs is worse than ours is,” agreed Desiree. Sue continued, “So, you know—I don’t think they’re involved in any of the aftermath of *No on Prop 8* except, you know, right at the beginning when we were just so devastated and there were all of the questions. ‘Well, so does that mean you are still married?’ And all of those things. So once that was sorted out—”

Sue then added, “My nieces have been totally supportive of me and Desiree forever. So, I am sure if I asked them to or if there was a way they could help they would. I mean we had asked for donations to one of four organizations instead of wedding gifts, and so family and friends gave—you know, I think over \$9,000 total to those organizations as wedding gifts. So that was really—”

“And it sounds like initially they had some questions, like what does this mean? If Prop 8 is passed what does it mean for the two of you?” I asked. “Right, definitely,” said Sue.

“And then it sounds like the church community has been very involved in the process after Prop 8 passed and before. And then are there other ways that you define community? And how were the reactions of those people?” I asked. Sue replied, “Well, I think everybody—I mean, we were so open. Everybody knew what side we were on and that we got married. And so I think after Prop 8, generally people were concerned and wanting to know—whether it was at aerobic dance or our friends from our school district lives or, or whomever. Really wanted to know what’s what. And certainly if something came up that anybody could do, I would be sending an email about that. (Laughing.) What the next steps were and how they could help. What they could do.” “She is the queen of emails—you can help this way,” joked Desiree.

Impacts of Family, Friend, and Community Reactions on Marriage Experience

I then asked the couple how they felt the responses from friends, family, and community had impacted their marriage. Sue replied, “I think that just the continual interest and willingness to be supportive and know that there’s more work to be done,

because there are people that weren't able to get married. So I think that's the thing I can think of."

Desiree added, "I think the other thing for me, too, is—I was a child of an alcoholic. And so I was the high achiever. I was the problem solver. I was the all of those things. And you move forward—and you kind of deny that anything is going on over here. So, I am really good at that. So, we've had all of this incredible support. And in some ways, I really don't care what anybody else thinks. At some level. Because when you are a child of an alcoholic, you can't care too much because you've got to move on with your life. And, so Sue and I have—no matter what the response was—if it would have been negative—we are still a unit. And nothing is going to change that. No matter what's on the outside. It's kind of like, I had to live my life and move forward, no matter what was going on. So, in some ways—for me, I really don't care what someone thinks. Because you have that internal core of strength, and you know who you are—and I know what this relationship is. So, how can anybody change that? They can't."

I then asked, "So is there anything that either of you want to add about how the responses from community, friends, or family impacted the marriage?" "I just wanted to say one thing about the \$9,000. We didn't need another toaster. A toaster oven. We didn't need one," Desiree replied with a laugh.

Evaluations of Experiences

Earlier in the interview, when I asked Desiree and Sue to tell me about their experiences as a legally married couple, Desiree explained, "We still love each other. After all of these years. It [the wedding] was wonderful. The whole thing has worked out really, really well."

In evaluating their experiences, Desiree later explained, “It just seems like we’ve been—it really feels like we have been abundantly blessed with incredible people, incredible family, and incredible faith community. And, having years to work out some of the things that might have been more difficult for a newly established relationship.”

Sue added, “Or, a relationship that decided to marry because it was now or never. Rather than having the time to evolve and be as deliberate. I mean luckily, we had all of this time to be in a relationship that was like marriage before getting married. And, you know—that wasn’t by our own choice, but I mean, it was really beneficial for us. You know, now that we can look back on it. So, I think our situation may be a lot different from a lot—and I don’t know how many of the 16,000 couples—you know, I don’t know what their relationship lengths were, but for somebody who—you know, just said—‘Gosh, I love you, and we’ve got to do it now because it might be taken away from us,’ and, um—you know, that’s a whole different ballpark.” “I would be anxious to find out how different a new couple is from us. Who have been established for many, many years. And have learned how to negotiate and work through pain and sorrow and disagreements,” added Desiree.

At the conclusion of the interview, I asked Desiree and Sue if there was anything else that they would like to tell me that would help me to understand their experience of being legally married. Sue replied, “The only thing that I can think of is, since we didn’t bring our albums to show you, are pictures from the two, from our commitment ceremony and from the marriage.” While she showed me photos she had brought, of both occasions, she explained that she carries them with her always “because people are interested, once they hear how long we have been together.”

As we enjoyed the photos, Sue explained, “It’s just incredible to me how different it is. And not the level of love—it’s such an intangible difference. Just making me feel whole and—a total person. There was always—you know, when you don’t have the rights—you’re not whole. Somehow. There’s always something missing. And, there isn’t anything missing in my life—because I am allowed to—I was allowed to marry the person that I love. That’s you honey. I love you,” she said in a whisper.

“Oh, it better be me!” Desiree laughed. Sue recalled, “And really, I think—the best thing that we did in our commitment ceremony was each of us to promise to challenge each other always. And we did that—that was still a part of our marriage vows. And that helped us navigate and helped us when one of us gets or when we are both—(straining with hands). *Well, I promised to challenge you always. And I am doing a good job—we’ve done a good job.*” We all laughed.

Sue concluded, “Yeah—so here we are. And, but really—she’s the love of my life, and my soul mate. And there is no way that I could be the person I’ve become without having had her in my life these last 23 years.” “And I swore I would never marry again after having been married twice. I was never going to do that again. But it is so much different with Sue. I just love her so very, very dearly. It just seems like the right and complete thing to do,” said Desiree.