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Citizenship, Normativity and Well-being: an Exploratory Analysis of the Life Narratives of Men in Civil Partnerships in the UK

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Thesis submitted for the degree of PhD in Public Health

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Abstract of the thesis

Countries around the world provide various forms of legal recognition for same-sex relationships. In the UK, legal recognition for same-sex relationships first became available in 2005 with the introduction of civil partnership (CP) which remained the only option until 2014 when same-sex civil marriage legislation was passed in England, Wales and Scotland. In a context of heated debate and speculation, this thesis contributes to emerging literature on individual's experiences of legal forms of same-sex relationship recognition by exploring how CP is experienced, given meaning, and situated biographically. The thesis draws on personal narratives elicited through qualitative life story interviews with 28 men from across the UK. Interviews covered the life course, but were thematically focused around CP to provide insight into: motivations for entering CPs; experiences of planning, constructing, and participating in CP ceremonies and celebrations; and meanings and impacts of becoming and being civilly partnered. The resulting co-constructed narratives were systematically analysed using narrative methods. Minority stress theory, along with other relevant theories and concepts, were employed to further illuminate, analyse, and interpret participants' narratives. Two generational core-narratives were identified in participants' biographical accounts. Older participants told stories of struggle and resilience, and younger participants told new narratives of normality. Despite some generational differences, all participants reported experiences consistent with minority stress, including coping and resilience mechanisms, arising from their gay social identities which remain subject to residual stigma. Participants' accounts of CP revealed that becoming and being civilly partnered was largely, but not wholly, a positive experience which can be understood in terms of the overarching, and overlapping themes of citizenship, normativity and well-being. With regard to citizenship, participants welcomed the legal rights and recognition of CP which was seen to offer varying forms and degrees of equality. In terms of normativity, some participants reported that CP confirmed their perceived normality while others thought it was a normalizing process granting them normative identities. Furthermore, while some engaged in, or were compelled to engage in, arguably normative marital practices, others felt they were resisting these. Regarding well-being, becoming and being civilly partnered seemed to mitigate minority stress and contribute to well-being. Overall, the knowledge generated from the personal narratives presented in this thesis enriches debates, contributes broadly to the social sciences literature, and provides new perspectives on, and representations of, gay men's identities, lives, and relationships.

'The opportunity to [...] form a chosen committed relationship is fundamental to the health and **well-being** *of an individual and to the expression of full* **citizenship.***'*

-Riggle, Thomas & Rostosky (2005: 221).

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'There is no doubt that the civil partnership and related legislation carries with it the danger of [...] imprinting new **normativities** *on to the gay community.'*

-Weeks (2007: 192).

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'There will be no civilization as long as marriage between men is not accepted.'

-Michel Foucault[1]

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[1] According to Didier Eribon (1991: 154), Michel Foucault said this at a dinner party he attended in the 1960s.

Chapter 1: Introduction to the thesis

The Civil Partnership Act of 2004 (CPA) extended legal recognition to same-sex couples across all four constituent countries of the UK. Civil partnership (CP), albeit based on civil marriage, is a new legal institution and a new social form in the UK. It also represents a new life course option for gay men, and same-sex couples generally, groups previously denied a legal framework within which to formalize their relationships.

This thesis is, first and foremost, a qualitative exploration of the lived experiences of 28[2] individual men who chose to legally formalize their same-sex relationships via CP in the UK. The thesis draws on the personal life narratives generated by life story interviews with these men to provide a rich description and interpretation of their lived experiences generally, and their experiences of CP. This empirical analysis enriches and extends the existing but, as yet, emergent literature on the lived experiences of individuals and same-sex couples who have entered CPs in the UK context.

The thesis is not only an empirical analysis but also an important historical document. Participants' narratives can be understood as situated stories arising out of a unique historical moment in which CP was the only available option for same-sex couples in the UK who wanted to legally formalize their relationships. Furthermore, the study captured the views of participants with regard to the impending introduction of same-sex civil marriage and possible retraction of CP. Indeed, during the course of the research, including the data collection period[3], legislation to extend civil marriage to same-sex couples was proposed and subsequently passed in all constituent countries of the UK apart from Northern Ireland, which rejected a proposal for same-sex marriage for the third time on 30 April, 2014 (Kelly, 2014 in Attitude, 30 April 2014). In England and Wales the Marriage (Same Sex Couples) Act 2013 was passed in July 2013 and the first same-sex marriages began in late March 2014. The Scottish parliament passed similar legislation on 4th February 2014 and it is expected that the first same-sex marriages there will occur in the autumn of 2014 (BBC News, 4 February 2014). While these legislative moves were generally celebrated, they also introduced uncertainty regarding the future of CP as a potentially redundant institution. Indeed, in anticipation of the implementation of civil marriage in England and Wales, the Government published a consultation paper in late January 2014 regarding the future of CP in England and Wales. At the time of writing, the results of the consultation were yet to be published meaning that the future of CP remained uncertain.

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[2] 28 individual men were interviewed but this represents 24 couples because in four cases both members of a couple were interviewed.

[3] Interviews were conducted from late November 2011 to August 2012.

In this introductory chapter I first provide a contextual overview and then, in light of this, outline the research aim, question and objectives. I also briefly outline the methodology and methods used to generate and analyse the data. I then introduce the theories and concepts informing my interpretation of the data, including the three concepts in the title of the thesis which recur throughout. I also reflect on why I chose to study CP. Finally, I provide an overview of the structure of the thesis which includes a summary of each of the three findings chapters.

1.1 Contextual overview

For thousands of years marriage has been a revered institution in cultures across the world. It is imbued with centuries' worth of religious, social and cultural meaning and has come to encompass legal rights and responsibilities. As such, marriage is a 'complex, multilayered institution' that has symbolic meaning and legal implications and confers a range of economic, social and psychological benefits to those who marry (Badgett, 2009: 117). Over many centuries marriage has been an 'adaptable, resilient institution,' weathering challenging and changing contexts (Badgett, 2009: 201). It has continued significance even if prominent contemporary theories of modernity posit that the importance and meaning of marriage, and intimate relationships generally, are in flux as social actors are faced with unprecedented choice in constructing their personal lives (Giddens, 1992; Beck, 2002; Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, 1995; 2002). Socio-demographic data indicate that growing numbers of individuals are choosing to delay or omit the milestone of marriage in favour of singlehood, cohabitation or other alternatives. Despite these theories and trends, however, romance, coupledom and marriage are widely practiced and remain pervasive ideals that shape expectations and guide action in personal lives. Marriage remains a significant personal aspiration for many people. It also continues to be a popular way of organizing relationships and personal lives as evidenced by the fact that significant proportions, if not the majority, of people living in Western countries marry at some point in their lives.

Some scholars claim that 'homosexual marriages' have 'always existed in a variety of forms' although they were often 'euphemized' (Sullivan, 1995: 183), and almost certainly outside the purview of law. Boswell's (1994) account of Same-sex Unions in Premodern Europe, for instance, brings together a range of historical documents and artefacts to demonstrate that same-gendered ceremonies and rituals of union occurred in premodern and medieval cultures across Europe. For most of recent history, however, marriage was preserved as a heterosexual institution in the eyes of the law[4]. As such, for many gay men, the idea of

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[4] It was only in 2001 that The Netherlands became the first country in the world to implement same-sex marriage legislation, a precedent which increasing numbers of countries have followed since.

marrying another man (at least legally) was inconceivable as a life course option; many gave up the idea even if they harboured aspirations for that particular 'heterosocial life goal' (Herdt & Boxer, 1992). For others, marriage (legal or otherwise) was potentially undesirable given the fierce critiques of marriage arising from the gay liberation and feminist movements (Weeks, 2010 in Heaphy, Smart & Einarsdottir, 2013: 2). Outside the purview of marriage gay men lived their lives and formed and sustained an array of lifestyles, intimacies, relationships and 'families of choice' (Weston, 1991; Weeks, Heaphy & Donovan, 2001).

While the existence of same-sex intimacy, love and relationships has been documented throughout history and across cultures (Herdt, 1997), these forms of relating have generally been taboo or stigmatized in (what is known as) the West since at least the beginning of the nineteenth century (Hammack, 2005). It was at this time that homosexual behaviour was labelled and characterized by medical doctors and psychiatrists, thus making 'the homosexual' a 'personage' and a 'species' – a category which could be stigmatized even as 'gay' came to replace 'homosexual' as the preferred label (Foucault, 1979: 43). In any case, gay men continued to be stigmatized and plagued by stereotypes which misrepresent gay identities, relationships and lives. They were socially marginalized as deviant and abnormal, they were 'outsiders' rather than ideal or normal citizens (Seidman, 2005). Furthermore, with regard to the law, they were often penalized for their sexual behaviour and disenfranchised from rights that others enjoyed. Overall, gay men have persisted in relatively adverse social contexts characterized by prejudice, discrimination and stigma (Meyer, 1995; 2003).

Stigma not only has social consequences but also has implications for health and well-being, and when an entire social group is stigmatized, stigma may become a fundamental cause of population health disparities (Hatzenbuehler, Phelan & Link, 2013). Indeed, epidemiological studies indicate that lesbian, gay and bisexual (LGB) populations have higher rates of mental health issues when compared to heterosexual populations (e.g., Meyer, 2003). A common explanation for this disparity in mental health and well-being is minority stress theory which posits that LGB individuals, given their stigmatized social identities and minority status, experience an excess of social stress which, in turn, has deleterious effects on mental health and well-being (Meyer, 2003). Another contributing factor may be institutional discrimination in the form of exclusion from full and equal civil marriage rights (Herdt & Kertzner, 2006). This exclusion is not only a symbol of discrimination but also disadvantages same-sex couples by barring them from the many documented benefits of marriage (discussed further below) (Herek, 2006).

While gay identities and relationships continue to be marginalized, there have been significant advances in terms of social tolerance and acceptance. Media representations

increasingly portray gay men as more ordinary than dominant stereotypes would suggest. These changes in social context coincide with significant advances in terms of rights and equality measures for LGB individuals, couples and families, including the legal recognition of same-sex relationships. Beginning in the late 1980s an increasing number of countries (or jurisdictions within them) across the globe, but predominantly in the West, enacted some form of legal recognition for same-sex relationships. With these new legal provisions in place same-sex couples are obliged to decide whether to, and how to, formalize their relationships. Some same-sex couples are reticent about state regulation and/or adopting heteronormative relational models. Others value legal recognition for pragmatic reasons or see marriage and its legal and/or semantic variants, such as CP, as important markers of inclusion and equality and as a desirable and socially intelligible way to demonstrate their love and commitment to each other, and to their families and communities. Therefore, many same-sex couples are re-configuring their life scripts to enter such institutions.

In the UK context, over 60,000 CPs have been formed since the legislation was implemented in December 2005 and up to the end of 2012 (ONS, 2013a). Among male couples, there have been 32,765 CPs formed since the legislation came into force, and less than 700 of these have been dissolved, although the rate of dissolution is increasing (ONS, 2013b). These figures far exceed the estimated 11,000 to 22,000 civil partners expected by the Regulatory Impact Assessment on the Civil Partnership Act 2004 (Ross, Gask & Berrington, 2011).

As increasing numbers of same-sex couples formalize their relationships, albeit in the forms available to them, there has been much speculation about the potential impacts for individuals, the LGB community, children, and society writ large. These speculations predominantly focus on access to rights and responsibilities, notions of equality and citizenship, the potential for same-sex relationship recognition to normalize, regulate or transform gay people and gay culture, or the potential impacts on mainstream culture and marriage itself. A less common, and perhaps 'overlooked,' argument is the public health benefit of same-sex relationship recognition (Culhane, 2008).

Several scholars argue that same-sex relationship recognition is an important public health issue (e.g., Meyer & Northridge, 2007; Buffie, 2011; Fingerhut, Riggle & Rostosky, 2011; Wight, LeBlanc & Badgett, 2013). While public health research into same-sex relationship recognition is emerging, and 'still forming' (Meyer & Northridge, 2007: viii), decades of research on heterosexual marriage has resulted in a voluminous empirical literature demonstrating that marriage confers a wide range of economic, social, psychological and health benefits (Herek, 2006). It is argued that these benefits of marriage will likely translate to same-sex couples resulting in similar health and well-being outcomes for LGB people who formalize

their relationships. This is seen as particularly salient given the mental health disparity between LGB and heterosexual populations. A few studies from the US have begun to examine links between same-sex relationship recognition, health, and well-being (Fingerhut & Maisel, 2010; Riggle, Rostosky & Horne, 2010; Wight et al., 2012; Wight, LeBlanc & Badgett, 2013). These studies find that LGB individuals and couples who have formalized their same-sex relationships report higher levels of well-being and reduced minority stress as compared to LGB individuals and couples who have not. To the best of my knowledge, similar empirical evidence from the UK was lacking when I began this study through to the time of completing this thesis.

As the next chapter demonstrates, in the last two decades there has been plenty of public and scholarly debate, speculation, and media attention surrounding the legal recognition of same-sex partnerships (see section 2.5). It has been echoed throughout the literature, however, that there is very little empirical evidence of the 'actual' lived experiences of LGB people who have legally formalized a same-sex relationship (Heaphy, Smart & Einarsdottir, 2013: 8; see also, Alderson, 2004; Mitchell et al., 2009). Furthermore, relative to the international corpus of literature on various forms of same-sex relationship recognition available across the globe, there is a dearth of research on LGB individual's and same-sex couples' experiences of CP, as a geographically and historically distinct legal (and social) form, in the UK. Moreover, while the available research on CP has documented a range of personal experiences of CP, it has either been sociological (Heaphy, Smart & Einarsdottir, 2013), psychological (Goodwin & Butler, 2009), or commissioned to inform service provision (Gavin, 2007) or to evaluate the impact of the legislation (Mitchell et al., 2009). As such, the potential public health and well-being implications of CP were largely unexplored. The exploratory and interdisciplinary approach I adopted in this study, however, meant that while I did not have explicit hypotheses regarding well-being (or anything else), I was open to all dimensions of participants' experiences, including well-being. Furthermore, my interest and background in public health, an inherently multidisciplinary field (Carlisle & Hanlon, 2008), informed and influenced my interpretation of participants' experiences.

1.2 Research aim, question and objectives

The aim of the study was to document and explore the lived experiences of men in CPs in the UK with the view to elucidate the meanings and impacts of CP, and provide new perspectives on, and representations of, gay men's lives, their relationships, and the gay life course in light of expanded legal rights and new life course options. The following research question and objectives were developed to operationalize this aim.

Research question:

- What are the lived experiences of men in CPs and what meanings do these hold?

Objectives:

- to recruit a diverse sample of men in CPs;

- to explore how their lives unfolded in context to include CP;

- to explore their reasons for entering CPs;

- to explore how they experienced, and made sense of, CP in light of their own biographies and in relation to wider socio-cultural discourses, normative expectations and relational models;

- and, to map the range of financial, domestic and sexual arrangements in their relationships.

1.3 Methodology and methods

In line with the research aim and question, I adopted a qualitative methodological strategy consisting of an integrated narrative-life course approach (Hammack & Cohler, 2009), underpinned by phenomenology and social constructionism. Within this methodological framework I used an adapted form of the life story interview method (Atkinson, 1998; 2001) to generate personal narratives. These narratives were a resource to document and explore participants' lived experiences and associated meanings. To analyse the narrative data I combined aspects of explicated procedures for thematic narrative analysis (Riessman, 2008) and socio-cultural narrative analysis (Grbich, 2007). I then interpreted narratives with the theories and concepts outlined next. Chapter 4 further discusses the methodology and methods employed to generate, analyse and interpret the data.

1.4 Interdisciplinary interpretations: concepts and theories

I approached this study with openness to drawing from multiple disciplines in my analysis and interpretation of participants' narratives. Indeed, I drew on a range of theories and concepts from public health, sociology, and anthropology to illuminate various aspects of the data. These include rites of passage (van Gennep, 1960; Meeks, 2011), ritual (Imber-Black & Roberts, 1992; Lewin, 1998), the cultural power of law (Hull, 2003; 2006), bricolage (Duncan, 2011), and stigma (Goffman, 1963). These theories and concepts are discussed further where relevant, typically within the pertinent findings chapters. Here, however, I outline minority stress theory (Meyer, 1995; 2003). Given participants' social identities and minority status as gay men, this theory was particularly relevant and useful in framing my understandings of participants' lived experiences generally, as well as their experiences of CP.

1.4.a Minority stress theory

Minority stress theory is concerned with the social stress experienced by minority groups. It is most commonly applied to sexual minority groups including gay men. As will be outlined in the thesis, minority stress theory has also been utilized by researchers, predominantly coming from a public health perspective, to examine the mental health and well-being implications of same-sex relationship recognition (e.g., Wight et al., 2012), or the lack there of (e.g., Rostosky et al., 2009).

Minority stress theory is derived from several theories and concepts from sociology and social psychology including social stress theory (Pearlin, 1999) and social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979), stigma (Goffman, 1963) and prejudice (Allport, 1979). Minority stress is defined as 'the excess stress to which individuals from stigmatized social categories are exposed as a result of their social, often a minority, position' (Meyer, 2003: 675). Like general forms of stress, minority stress impinges on well-being and health outcomes. Indeed, the theory is the 'preferred explanation' for the relatively high rates of mental health issues among LGB people, as compared to their heterosexual counterparts (Meyer, 2003: 674).

The assumptions of minority stress are that it is 'unique', 'chronic' and 'socially-based' (Meyer, 2003). It is 'unique' because it is experienced only by those who are stigmatized, and as such, is an additional source of stress which is additive to the general stress that all people endure. It is 'chronic' because it stems from 'relatively stable underlying social and cultural structures' (Meyer, 2003: 676). Lastly, it is 'socially-based' because 'it stems from social processes, institutions, and structures beyond the individual rather than individual events or conditions that characterize general stressors or biologic, genetic, or other non-social characteristics of the person or the group' (Meyer, 2003: 676).

Minority stress is the result of stressors including: internalized homophobia; and, expectations and experiences of prejudice, discrimination, violence and/or rejection (Meyer, 1995; 2003). A further component of minority stress theory is coping and resilience. Indeed, Meyer (2003) draws attention to the following 'ameliorative coping strategies': minority group solidarity and cohesiveness; adopting, developing or establishing alternative self- and group-enhancing structures and values which counteract minority stress; family support; self-acceptance; and, concealing one's sexual identity to avoid stigma, prejudice and discrimination. However, the latter coping strategy of concealment can also take a toll on a person's psyche and can, therefore, also contribute to minority stress.

1.4b Recurring concepts: citizenship, normativity and well-being

Three concepts recur throughout the thesis: citizenship, normativity and well-being. These concepts are invoked in the debates about same-sex relationship recognition (see chapter 1), the findings of previous studies (see chapter 2), and also feature in my analysis and interpretation of participant's narratives (see chapters 4-6). Here, I outline the various conceptualizations and meanings of these concepts.

Citizenship

Citizenship is a contested concept with a range of meanings (Plummer, 2003; Richardson & Monro, 2012). The term citizenship is often preceded by another word which serves as a descriptive label designating the scope and/or locus of said citizenship. Some examples of these descriptors are 'sexual,' 'intimate,' 'relational,' 'cultural'. Given this range of conceptual labels, and the nuanced meanings of citizenship they are meant to signify, I start with what is regarded as the classic conceptualization of citizenship by T.H. Marshall and then move on to discuss some of the 'new citizenships' of relevance to this thesis.

In 1950 Marshall defined citizenship as: 'a status bestowed on those who are full members of a community. All who possess the status are equal with respect to the rights and duties with which the status is endowed' (Marshall & Bottomore, 1992: 18). These rights and duties are supposedly 'uniform' and bestowed on 'all' simply 'by virtue of their membership of the society,' with 'society' demarcated by the boundaries of a nation-state (Marshall & Bottomore, 1992: 8). Clearly, this was not, and is still not the case. In any case, this classic formulation identified three elements of citizenship: the civil, the political, and the social. The civil element includes the rights to 'individual freedom[s]' such as 'liberty', 'freedom of speech, thought and faith', and the 'right to justice' on 'terms of equality with others and due process of law' (Marshall & Bottomore, 1992: 8). The political element had to do with rights to participate in the political process either as a politician, lobbyist or voter. The social element included rights to basic social welfare and security, as well as 'the right to share to the full in the social heritage and to live the life of a civilised being according to the standards prevailing in the society' (Marshall & Bottomore, 1992: 8).

Marshall's classic model of citizenship is predominantly concerned with the public domain. More recently citizenship has been conceptualized to span the public-private divide, and hence conceptualizations of 'sexual citizenship' (Richardson, 2000) and 'intimate citizenship' (Plummer, 1995; 2003). Intimate citizenship, according to Plummer (1995), is 'a cluster of emerging concerns over the rights to choose what we do with our bodies, our feelings, our identities, our relationships, our genders, our eroticisms and our representations' (17).

Similar to intimate citizenship is Pakulski's (1997) articulation of 'cultural citizenship'. Cultural citizenship involves claims to 'the right to symbolic presence and visibility (vs marginalisation); the right to dignifying representation (vs stigmatisation); and the right to propagation of identity and maintenance of lifestyles (vs assimilation) […] claims for cultural rights can be seen as heralding a new wave, a new breed of claims for unhindered representation, recognition without marginalisation, acceptance and integration without 'normalising' distortion' (Pakulski, 1997: 80). In other words, claims for cultural citizenship rights are concerned with overcoming marginalization and stigma of identities and lifestyles, and for acceptance and integration into wider society without necessarily having to assimilate according to prevailing norms.

For the purposes of this thesis, I find Richardson & Monro's (2012) seemingly integrated definition of citizenship most useful. They write that citizenship can be conceptualized broadly as: 'a set of civil, political and social rights, as social membership of a nation-state and also belonging conceptualized more broadly, [and] as cultural rights' (Richardson & Monro, 2012: 65).

Well-being

Like citizenship, well-being is a 'contested' concept which is both 'elusive' (Seedhouse, 1995) and 'challenging' (Dodge et al., 2012) to define. Despite a lack of clarity or consensus on its meanings, the concept and term 'well-being' is commonly used - in policy and academic discourses and contexts as well as in everyday settings. Furthermore, it is a recognized domain of research and multiple constructs and scales have been developed to 'measure' well-being quantitatively, although qualitative studies also employ the concept. Two dominant traditions of research on well-being, which are 'related-but-distinct', are psychological well-being and subjective well-being (Keyes, Shmotkin & Ryff, 2002: 1007).

The psychological tradition draws on theories of human development and is concerned with an individual's perception of how they have dealt with a range of 'existential challenges of life' (Keyes, Shmotkin & Ryff, 2002: 1008). According to this model of well-being, individuals 'strive to function positively' along the following six dimensions: self-acceptance, positive relations with others, environmental mastery, autonomy, purpose in life, and personal growth. Individuals struggle and succeed to varying degrees in their efforts to achieve 'optimal resolution' of these six dimensions, with higher levels of psychological well-being accruing to individuals who feel that they have 'successfully negotiated' these existential challenges.

The subjective tradition focuses on the 'emotional and cognitive evaluations' that individual's make of their lives and is primarily concerned with positive and negative affect,

happiness and satisfaction (Diener, Oishi & Lucas, 2003; Diener 2009a; 2009b). These evaluations can be based on current circumstances or can be retrospective; they include individuals': 'emotional reactions to events, their moods, and judgements they form about their life satisfaction, fulfilment, and satisfaction with domains such as marriage and work' (Diener, Oishi & Lucas, 2003: 404).

In addition to the psychological and subjective traditions, Keyes (1998) has also developed a notion of 'social well-being' which is defined as: 'the appraisal of one's circumstances and functioning in society' (Keyes, 1998: 122). The concept is constituted by five dimensions including: social integration, social contribution, social coherence, social actualization, and social acceptance. One summary of the multi-dimensional concept of social well-being is:

> *'Social well*-being encompasses the extent to which individuals feel they make valued social contributions, view society as meaningful and intelligible, experience a sense of social belonging, maintain positive attitudes towards others, and believe in the potential for society to evolve positively' (Kertzner et al., 2009: 500).

According to Keyes' (1998) original formulation, socially integrated individuals feel they 'belong to their communities and society' (122). This aspect of social well-being seems to overlap with the concept of social exclusion which is linked to well-being and health (Marmot & Wilkinson, 2003). Although social exclusion is used differently in different contexts, 'the key underlying premise' is that those who are socially excluded cannot participate fully in society (Badgett, 2011: 317-8). Marmot and Wilkinson (2003) claim that such a lack of participation in society may arise from poverty or disability which inhibit action in the labour market, but also from racism and, of particular consequence to LGB people, from discrimination and stigmatization. They conclude that whatever its cause, social exclusion is 'psychologically damaging' and 'harmful to health' (Marmot & Wilkinson, 2003: 16), and presumably well-being.

Normativity

Normativity and norms are related concepts but it is also useful to distinguish between them, as social scientists often do (Therborn, 2002; Wade, 2010). A norm is what is common and frequent in a society whereas a normative action, practice or behaviour is one that is 'morally-endorsed' as an 'ideal' (Wade, 2010). In other words, even if something is not statistically the norm, it can be considered normative if it is collectively seen as normal and correct. Marriage is a key example of a normative practice. Indeed, when looking at marital statistics in conjunction with social attitudes, it is apparent that 'value systems may stay the same while behavioural

norms change' (Lewis, 2001: 20). Indeed, society continues to value marriage despite the facts that fewer people marry, and many people divorce.

Heteronormativity and homonormativity are terms commonly used in academic literatures around sexualities. Both terms/concepts stress an orientation towards and privileging of normativity. Berlant and Warner (1998) specify the meaning of heteronormativity as follows:

> *'By heteronormativity we mean the institutions, structures of understanding, and* practical orientations that make heterosexuality seem not only coherent – that is, organized as a sexuality – but *also privileged [...] it consists less of norms that could be summarized as a body of doctrine than of a sense of rightness' (Berlant & Warner,* 1998: 548).

Thus, it is the assumption that heterosexuality is the normal, and correct, way. Homonormativity, according to Duggan (2002; 2003), is a 'riff' on heteronormativity, and can be defined as follows:

> *'[Homonormativity] is a politics that does not contest dominant heteronormative* assumptions and institutions but upholds and sustains them while promising the possibility of a demobilized gay constituency and a privatized, depoliticized gay culture *anchored in domesticity and consumption' (Duggan, 2002: 179).*

While the concept of homonormativity 'has been very influential in the literature,' it deserves 'more critical analysis' according to Richardson and Monro (2012) who caution that 'it would seem important to distinguish a lack of political critique from positively desiring and enacting forms of 'homonormative' practices' (81). While Berlant and Warner (1998: 548) argued that 'it would not be possible to speak of "homonormativity" in the same sense' as heteronormativity, this seems to be exactly what has happened. Indeed, when empirical studies employ the concept of homonormativity what they seem to mean is that anything that LGB people desire or do that is considered normative of heterosexual life can be considered 'homonormative' when applied to LGB people. Thus the 'heteronormative institution' of marriage and the 'heteronormative assumptions' of monogamy and parenthood, for example, become 'homonormative' when LGB people desire or engage in them. It is for this reason that I prefer the term normativity. Furthermore, I feel that those terms reify and reinforce the divisions and binaries that queer scholars, despite their use of the terms, so adamantly take as their purpose to challenge. Finally, many practices/beliefs considered 'normative' transcend those divisions/binaries and are seen as normative, that is as ideals, by many couples regardless of sexual orientation or gender (although certain practices/beliefs may be more prevalent among one group than another). The important distinction, I think, is to distinguish, as Kurdek (2005b)

does, between normativity in a descriptive and evaluative sense; that is, what most people do, and what is held and valued as 'normal'.

1.5 Why study civil partnership?

This research project was not merely an academic exercise, but also reflects my personal and political goals and interests as a gay man with a deep concern for human health and social justice. Academically, I have always been interested in human health and sexuality. I elected to take several human sexuality modules during my undergraduate biology degree. My public health master's dissertation focused on HIV transmission and high-risk sexual behaviour among men who have sex with men in London. While writing the dissertation I came across King and Bartlett's (2006) speculative piece entitled: *'What same sex civil partnerships may mean for health'*. I read the article with great interest and decided to include a section on CP in the discussion chapter. Specifically, I saw CP as an example of social policy that could have a positive impact on the health and psycho-social well-being of gay men, with the knock-on effect of influencing sexual behaviour and associated health outcomes. This was something I wanted to explore further at PhD level.

After finishing my MSc I worked in sexual health promotion and HIV prevention for a few years before I began my doctoral studies. When I began the PhD I was initially inclined to do a mixed-methods study, using a quantitative survey and qualitative interviews to compare the sexual behaviour and health of gay men in CPs to gay men in other relationship statuses. Over time, however, the study evolved considerably into an interdisciplinary and qualitative study exploring the experiences and meanings of CP. Such an exploratory study seemed an appropriate starting point considering that CP was such a new social form in the UK which had not yet been studied in detail among gay men. I also felt that a qualitative study would still give me the latitude to explore to some extent the sexual practices of men in CPs, and to consider potential links between the social status of CP, health and well-being.

Personally, I have always envisioned having children and given my normative upbringing I saw marriage as the obvious context within which to do that (although my own parents did not have a wedding and were not legally married). I do not recall that I ever felt I would have to give up these two life aspirations because I was gay, although when I came out to my otherwise supportive family, they certainly wondered whether I would ever be able to become a father and marry as a gay man. I recognize that my experience of coming of age in an unprecedented historical and socio-political context has allowed me to imagine these as possible as a gay man. I was fortunate enough to explore my sexuality in San Francisco where I eventually embraced a gay social identity. I had the delight of encountering gay families on a regular basis and I fondly remember the atmosphere created when 3,300 same-sex couples took

advantage of the mayor's announcement in 2004 that city officials could perform same-sex weddings – although these were later deemed unlawful. I also met my partner of seven years in San Francisco. We hope to formalize our commitment, perhaps by entering a CP, and begin the path to parenthood once our respective studies are complete.

With regard to politics, I believe that the law and social policies should recognize and support a diverse array of inter-dependent living situations. I hope that the personal experiences represented in this thesis will add current to the changing tide in societies across the world for increased tolerance and acceptance of, as well as social and legal recognition for, diverse forms of human relating, including same-sex relationships. I also hope that the study will de-emphasize the focus on sex and sexual behaviour which has typified much research involving gay men and instead emphasize the ordinariness of being gay and the perhaps not so uncommon desires for committed coupledom, marriage, and family.

1.6 Overview and structure of thesis

To build on this introductory chapter, I further outline the background, contexts, and debates pertinent to this thesis in chapter 2. I consider gay male identity, couple relationships and the gay life course prior to the existence of legal frameworks for same-sex relationship recognition, and argue, based on the documented health and well-being benefits of heterosexual marriage (Waite & Gallagher, 2000), that such frameworks may have implications for the mental health disparity between gay men (and LGB people generally) and heterosexuals (Meyer, 2003). I also discuss the ever-changing meanings and socio-demographic trends in marriage, the introduction of CP in the UK, and the debates surrounding the issue of same-sex relationship recognition. Chapter 3 reviews the relevant empirical literature on LGB people's experiences of same-sex relationship recognition and identifies themes in this literature that resonate with this study. The chapter concludes with a summary of the literature and discussion of how this study complements the extant literature. In Chapter 4 I describe the philosophical, methodological and ethical considerations I took into account while designing and conducting the research. I also describe the recruitment strategy and the characteristics of the resultant sample, and reflect on the methods used to generate, analyse, and re-present/represent the data.

The next three findings chapters (and the preface to them) provide a rich interpretive description and analysis of participants' lived experiences as gay men, as well as their experiences of CP. In line with a narrative-life course framework, these three chapters are more or less chronologically ordered. The first, chapter 5, focuses on participant's lives and relationships prior to the event of their CPs. As such, the chapter serves to contextualize their subsequent experiences of CP. It considers participants' dual and dialectical experiences of being 'normal' and 'ordinary' while also suffering the consequences of bearing a stigmatized

social identity in a social context that, while changing, remains relatively adverse for sexual minorities. The chapter first considers the ordinariness of participants' lives and the ways in which their relationships developed. I then discuss the minority stress experiences that all participants reported, to varying degrees. This is followed by a section on the coping and resilience mechanisms participants employed to deal with aspects of minority stress and to sustain their relationships prior to the availability of an institutional framework for supporting their same-sex relationships. With the introduction of CP, such a framework became available and the final section of the chapter discusses participants' motivations and decisions to enter a CP as well as their experiences of informing kin and social networks of their decisions and inviting guests to their ceremonies and celebrations, both of which were carefully managed processes.

As the title of the chapter suggests, the second findings chapter (Chapter 6), focuses on participants' experiences of planning, constructing and participating in CP ceremonies and celebrations as 'two men'. Participants' narratives were indeed permeated by the fact that they were 'two men' engaging in a new social form, which while legally and semantically distinct from marriage, was often understood as such. Many participants noted how they felt, and/or were made to feel, that they were treading on foreign and heterosexual symbolic terrain. As such, all participants' experiences of planning, constructing and participating in their CP ceremonies and celebrations were tainted, to varying degrees, by some level of awkwardness, anxiety, discomfort or vigilance. In planning their CPs, participants felt free to embrace or eschew traditional (and gendered) aspects of marriage and weddings. This freedom, however, was tempered with the constraints of planning an 'utterly civil' ceremony. The fact that they were 'two men' also had implications for interactions with service providers who were often blinded by heterosexism. Participants reported varying levels of practical and financial support from kin and social networks in planning their events. With no distinct cultural model for same-sex ceremonies, participants had little choice but to draw on, assemble and adapt wedding traditions and rituals to creatively construct desired and personally meaningful CP ceremonies that were also appropriately tailored to reflect the fact that they were 'two men'. As explained in the chapter, this process was conceptualized as a dynamic process of bricolage[5]. In participating in their CP ceremonies and celebrations, participants recalled varying levels of (dis)comfort with displaying their gay identities and same-sex relationships as well as participating in particular rituals and roles demonstrating love and physical affection. Participants also reported a range of emotions related to their own participation, or the participation (or lack thereof) of others, in these ceremonial occasions.

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[5] The analysis in the chapter draws on Duncan's (2011) conception of bricolage which is explained in the chapter.

Chapter 7, the third and final findings chapter, considers the impacts and meanings of becoming and being civilly partnered, as well as the socio-cultural legacy of CP. It starts off by considering the social intelligibility of CP as marriage and then discusses the legal and practical impact and meaning of CP. The next three sections cover, in turn, the personal, relational and social meanings and perceptions of change that participants reported subsequent to their CPs. The chapter also considers the potential normative influence of formalizing a relationship, including participants' adoption of, or resistance to, the marital conventions of sharing a home and money, becoming parents, and monogamy. Also included in the chapter is a section on participants' speculations about the wider implications (the 'socio-cultural legacy') of CP for future generations of gay men, gay culture and society generally. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the fact that while participants understood CP as a positive step towards equality and the inclusion of gay men in society, many were also dissatisfied with CP and looked forward to further legal and social change.

In the final discussion chapter (chapter 8) I draw together insights from the previous three findings chapters and develop these in relation to the overarching themes of citizenship, normativity and well-being. I also critically reflect on the findings and the methodology employed, outline the broader significance of the findings, and suggest policy and population health implications as well as future avenues for further research. I finish with some conclusions.

Chapter 2: Background, context and debates: same-sex relationship recognition as a social, political, and public health issue

This chapter builds on the introduction to further outline the background, context, and debates surrounding the issue of same-sex relationship recognition. The first section considers gay male identity, couple relationships and the gay life course prior to the existence of legal frameworks for same-sex relationship recognition. This leads on to a section outlining the mental health disparity between gay men (and LGB people generally) and heterosexuals, and the potential mental health and well-being implications of relationship recognition. I then discuss the socio-historical and political antecedents to CP in the UK. This is followed by a discussion of the changing socio-demographic trends and meanings of marriage as well as the sociological explanations for these changes (and continuities) in contemporary personal and intimate life. Finally, I consider the academic, public, and intra-community (ordinary LGB people's views) debates around the legal recognition of same-sex relationships.

2.1 Outside marriage: (mis)representations of gay male identities, relationships, and lives

Models of gay identity formation suggest that 'coming out' is a key stage in developing a positive gay identity (Troiden, 1979; Cass, 1984). This process is also seen as the 'most significant developmental event' in the 'gay life course' (Herdt & Boxer, 1992: 14). Indeed, coming out is considered a rite of passage (Herdt, 1992; Meeks, 2011). Beyond coming out, however, gay life has typically not promised other common rites of passage such as marriage. Warner (1999) has argued that, in general, 'gay social life is not as ritualized or institutionalized as straight life' (115). Similarly, Kertzner (2001) argues that the gay life course has lacked 'milestones of partnership,' such as marriage, and other 'social markers that define life transitions' (80). He attributes this to the task of maintaining a gay identity which, he argues, 'introduces different meanings and a different time course' to psychosocial development (Kertzner, 2001: 79). As a result, gay men might experience 'life course asynchrony', a feeling of being 'off schedule' in relation to similarly-aged heterosexuals who might have married or had children (Kertzner, 2001: 80). For those gay men who did form partnerships or ventured into parenthood, these milestones were often 'socially unheralded' because 'gay male sexual culture' typically did not recognize or celebrate them (Kertzner, 2001: 80-81).

Even if socially unheralded, gay men constructed an array of lifestyles and intimacies outside the purview of marriage (as discussed in the introduction). However, outside the bounds of respectable marital life gay men were often constructed by mainstream society as 'unhappy individuals who are unsuccessful in developing stable romantic ties and so end up frustrated and

lonely' (Peplau & Fingerhut 2007: 418). Several stereotypes (mis)represented gay men, usually in negative ways. Indeed, as Levine (1979) wrote: 'gay men are represented by several interrelated stereotypes: the hopeless neurotic, the moral degenerate, the nelly queen, the effete dandy' (1). These stereotypes were/are invariably associated with 'mental illness,' and 'moral degeneracy,' and therefore: gay men were/are seen as 'debauched,' 'sex crazed,' 'depraved' and 'incapable of intimate relationships' they were/are prone to be 'unhappy,' 'lonely' and 'miserable' seeking comfort in 'alcohol and drugs' and 'compulsive promiscuity'. On a more positive note, gay men were/are also seen as 'exemplars of style and art,' 'sophisticated and trendy,' 'witty', 'intellectual', 'artistic', 'sensitive' and 'creative' souls clued up on art, fashion, gourmet cuisine and cultural pursuits like theatre (Levine, 1979: 1-2). However, these stereotypes of gay men's lives misrepresent their actual experiences as 'gay life-styles are a far cry from these images and vary to the same extent as those of heterosexuals' (Levine, 1979: 8).

Research has contested stereotypes about gay men, their relationships, and the gay life course. With regard to relationships, research has provided insight into various aspects of same-sex relationships. Several studies highlight the desire for and the successful maintenance of enduring same-sex relationships prior to, or despite a lack of, the institutional support offered by marriage (Blumenstein & Schwartz, 1983; Lewin, 1998; Kurdek, 2005a; Herek, 2006). Most gay men have been involved in a relationship at one point or another, with 40-70% involved in relationships at any given time (Herek, 2006).

Research comparing same-sex and heterosexual relationships suggests that both types form and proceed in much the same way and that there are more similarities than differences among gay male, lesbian and heterosexual couples (Kurdek 2005a; Herek, 2006; Peplau & Fingerhut, 2007). Common areas of comparison between same-sex and heterosexual couples are: the division of household labour, levels of love and satisfaction, sexual arrangements, conflict and conflict resolution, commitment levels, relationship stability and duration, and perceived levels of social support (Kurdek 2005a; Herek 2006; Peplau & Fingerhut, 2007). Where differences have been observed, same-sex relationships seem to function better than heterosexual relationships on most measures (Kurdek, 2004), apart from perceived levels of social support from family (Kurdek, 2005a). Qualitative research has also painted a more positive, and more ordinary, picture of gay relationships. According to Hostetler and Herdt (1998), the life stories of long-term same-sex couples 'defy cultural stereotypes about homosexuality' (280). Indeed, based on interviews with 156 male couples in relationships ranging from 1-37 years in duration, McWhirter and Mattison (1984) concluded that gay men 'can and do establish long-term, committed relationships, which are characterized by stability, mutual caring, generosity, creativity, love, support and nurturing' (5).

While research from the 1980s (Blumenstein & Schwartz, 1983; McWhirter & Mattison, 1984) documented the propensity and capability of gay men to form lasting relationships, some researchers suggested that gay men might want more. Indeed, McWhirter and Mattison (1984) argued that many of the gay men they interviewed placed a high value 'on finding a partner and settling down' and that gay men share, and are affected by, the same expectations that heterosexual couples have about their relationships (128). They write: 'the expectation that relationships follow a set pattern of romantic attraction, falling in love, courtship, marriage, and family also has its effect on male couples. Gay men are apt to share these same hidden expectations' (McWhirter & Mattison, 1984: 128).

If such desires and expectations were noted even before legal forms of same-sex relationship recognition was an option for male couples anywhere in the world, then it is no surprise that subsequent research has documented the 'widespread desire' for marriage among LGB people (Herek, 2006: 617). Indeed, a national survey conducted by the Kaiser Family Foundation in 2001 found that 74% of US lesbians and gay men indicated that they would like to legally marry a same-sex partner if they could someday (Herek, 2006). In another survey, conducted in 2005, 76.2% of 812 Danish lesbians and gay men indicated that they would enter a registered partnership if they found 'the right person' (Eskridge & Spedale, 2006). Most authors explain this desire in terms of socialization. Schneider (1997), for example, argues that some LGB people and same-sex couples desire marriage because 'they live in this society and are steeped in this culture, as everyone is. And like everyone else who is human, they want to do what they are supposed to do, they want to feel what they are supposed to feel, they want to believe what they are supposed to believe, and have the rewarding and fulfilling life that they were explicitly and implicitly promised as they grew up' (271).

While gay men are part of mainstream culture, which valorises family and marriage, they are also subject to socialization, to varying degrees, in a gay social milieu which is often portrayed as promoting and facilitating casual sex over long-term, committed relationships. Thus, gay men are exposed to various, and perhaps discordant, relational discourses and practices. For this reason, some scholars have argued that gay men are 'dually-socialized' (Green, 2010) or 'bicultural' (Brown, 1989; Lukes & Sand, 1990). Despite alternative models for living and relating, it is unsurprising that some gay male couples choose to formalize their relationships in whatever form is available to them given that mainstream culture continues to promote the culmination and celebration of couple relationships through marriage and weddings. As such, it seems that Herdt & Boxer's (1992) call for more recognition of the other milestones and features of gay lives, beyond 'coming out,' is warranted now that the '"official" recognition of same-sex partnerships' is possible (20).

2.2 Minority stress, mental health, and marriage: public health priorities

As mentioned in the last section, one out-dated stereotype about gay men had to do with mental illness – that homosexuality was a disease itself or that mental illness was inherent to being homosexual. However, prevailing views have changed and nowadays the higher rates of mental health issues among gay men, as compared to heterosexuals, is largely seen to be a product of the stressful or adverse social environment in which they live (Meyer, 2003). Notwithstanding changes in social context, this social environment continues to be characterized by stigma, discrimination and prejudice and results in minority stress (Meyer, 1995; 2003).

Extensive epidemiological evidence indicates that while the majority of LGB people do not have mental health issues (Cochran, 2001), that LGB populations are at excess risk compared to heterosexual populations of a range of mental health issues. Indeed, based on a review and meta-analysis of the available evidence, Meyer (2003) writes: 'compared with their heterosexual counterparts, gay men and lesbians suffer from more mental health problems including substance use disorders, affective disorders, and suicide' (Meyer 2003: 674). Another more recent review and meta-analysis (King, Semlyen, Tai et al., 2008) confirmed the higher prevalence of mental health issues among LGB people as compared to their heterosexual counterparts. While most of the evidence is from the US, studies in the UK context corroborate these findings (King, McKeown, Warner et al., 2003; King & Nazareth, 2006; Chakraborty, McManus, Brugha et al., 2011). The 'preferred explanation' for this mental health disparity is minority stress theory (Meyer, 2003: 674) which was outlined in the introduction to the thesis (see section 1.4a).

In addition to the quantitative epidemiological studies which have documented a mental health disparity between LGB and heterosexual populations, qualitative studies have explored the minority stress experiences of LGB individuals and same-sex couples. Meyer et al. (2011), for example, interviewed sexual minority men and women to examine how stigma and social inequality affected LGB people's lives. They found that stigma deprived participants of 'access to critical possibilities and opportunities' including formalizing their relationships through marriage, and that 'stigma deprives them of safety and acceptance' (Meyer et al., 2011: 204). Overall, it was concluded that social inequality and stigma increased stress and reduced well-being among LGB people. In another study, Rostosky et al. (2007) interviewed 20 male and 20 female same-sex couples in order to explore their experiences of minority stress. These included internalized homophobia, anticipating and/or experiencing disapproval or rejection from families, low levels of perceived support from families, institutional discrimination by legal and religious institutions (lack of marriage), negative stereotypes and attitudes pervading society,

and a lack of visible positive role models for same-sex couples (Rostosky et al., 2007: 394). Findings from both studies demonstrate the pervasive effects of minority stressors on LGB people's lives and well-being.

In addition to the stressors outlined by minority stress theory, another contributing stressor may be institutional discrimination in the form of deprivation of rights to formalize a same-sex relationship. It is argued that denying same-sex couples the right to marry, or otherwise legally formalize their relationships, not only disadvantages them socially but may also have deleterious consequences for their mental health and well-being (Herdt & Kertzner, 2006; Herek, 2006). Hatzenbuehler et al. (2010), for example, argue that depriving same-sex couples of the right to formalize their relationships is a form of 'institutional discrimination' which may 'create stress that harms mental health' and 'well-being' of LGB people (452). A few US studies have provided evidence consistent with these arguments. These studies found that LGB people living in states considering constitutional amendments banning same-sex marriage or defining marriage as between a man and a woman had higher levels of minority stress and worse mental health and well-being outcomes than those living in jurisdictions where such discriminatory marriage policies were not up for vote (Rostosky et al., 2009; Hatzenbuehler et al., 2010). The main finding of Rostosky et al.'s (2009) study was that 'marriage-amendment campaigns have a negative and immediate effect on LGB psychological health' (62). While these campaigns had an 'immediate' effect, this effect may not have been sustained beyond the campaigns. As such, these findings are not necessarily a result of marriage denial per se, but rather, are a result of exposure to the negative, 'inflammatory' and 'stigmatizing rhetoric' (Rostosky et al., 2009: 57), spawned by the 'extended and heated public discourse' generated by the campaigns. Nonetheless, the findings are 'consistent with an argument that implementing social policy changes to abolish institutional forms of discrimination may ultimately reduce mental health disparities in LGB populations, an important public health priority' (Hatzenbuehler et al., 2010: 457).

Numerous scholars argue that same-sex relationship recognition is an important public health issue which may improve LGB people's health and well-being outcomes and reduce minority stress (Meyer & Northridge, 2007; Buffie, 2011; Fingerhut, Riggle & Rostosky, 2011; Wight, LeBlanc & Badgett, 2013). While these views are commonly articulated by US scholars, leading commentators in the UK have made similar speculations. For example, in an article titled 'What same sex civil partnership*s may mean for health'*, King and Bartlett (2006) postulated that CPs may reduce social exclusion and 'lead to better physical and mental health for gay and lesbian people' (188). These speculations are based on the assumption that the health and well-being benefits associated with heterosexual marriage (discussed in the next paragraph) will translate to same-sex couples who formalize their relationships. While

alternatives to marriage, including CP, may prove beneficial to some degree, Herek (2006) emphasizes that it is likely that 'marriage will bestow greater benefit than civil unions or domestic partnerships' (607).

There is extensive evidence indicating that, on average, heterosexual married people live longer, tend to have better physical and mental health, have higher self-rated health, and are happier and more satisfied with their lives (as measured by subjective well-being scores) than their non-married counterparts whether single, dating, cohabiting or widowed (Waite, 1995; Waite & Gallagher, 2000; Elliott & Umberson, 2004; Kamp Dush & Amato, 2005; Liu & Umberson, 2008). While these findings may, in part, be explained by selection effects – healthier and better-adapted people are more likely to find a partner and have the financial resources and social capital to marry – a number of studies, including longitudinal studies, have found that marriage also has an independent protective effect (for a review see Kamp Dush & Amato, 2005). Overall, this corpus of evidence has led to the conclusion that 'marriage bestows substantial psychological, social, and health benefits' (Herek, 2006: 607), and that there is something 'unique' about marriage, as compared to cohabitation, that confers these health and well-being benefits (see for example Waite & Gallagher, 2000).

There are several explanations for the links between marital status, health and well-being. Firstly, the marital resource model posits that marriage provides social, psychological, and economic resources which 'promote physical health and longevity' (Liu & Umberson, 2008: 241), and presumably mental health and well-being. Similarly, the social support and integration perspective suggests that the health and well-being benefits of committed relationships, including marriage, stem from 'emotional support, companionship, and a sense of belonging' (Kamp Dush & Amato, 2005: 625). Another theory is the structural symbolic interactionism perspective which assumes that these benefits arise from the 'strong identity and sense of self' that marriage provides (Kamp Dush & Amato, 2005: 625). The empirical evidence which demonstrates the mental health and well-being benefits of various forms of same-sex relationship formalization is presented in the literature review (see section 3.10).

2.3 The introduction of civil partnership: socio-historical and political contexts

Notwithstanding the advent of same-sex civil marriage in 2014 and the concomitant uncertainty around the future of CP, this study was possible as a result of the passing of the Civil Partnership Act 2004. The history and politics of the act are discussed here.

After the Stonewall Inn riots in New York City in 1969, gay liberation movements sprung up in major cities across the Western democracies and gave LGB individuals a collective

platform from which they could claim the freedom to be who they were. Initially, the movements demanded non-persecution, tolerance, freedom of sexual expression and visible identities. After a few years, the tenacity of the early gay liberation movement subsided and since the 1980s a new discourse in gay politics has emerged, one which is 'concerned with wider aspects of homosexual existence than simply sexuality and identity' (Weeks, 2000: 213). There is now a 'relationship paradigm' where intimate relationships, friendships, family, parenting, and partnership rights, including marriage are dominating the political discourse (Weeks, 2000). It seems that the 'battleground' has shifted from 'the politics of coming out, pride, and visibility to equality – before the law and across social institutions' (Seidman, 2005: 233). Central to this notion of equality is the legal recognition of same-sex relationships.

A growing number of countries, or local jurisdictions within them, have opened up existing social institutions or created new forms of relationship recognition to provide similar, or the same, rights to same-sex couples as heterosexual married couples receive. In 1989, with the introduction of registered partnerships, Denmark became the first country to provide a legal framework for the recognition of same-sex relationships. Other Scandinavian countries soon followed suit and over the next decade alternative forms of legal recognition for same-sex relationships were implemented in several countries. It was not until 2001, however, that The Netherlands became the first country to implement same-sex civil marriage.

While several countries had already enacted same-sex partnership recognition schemes, as recently as 2000 the UK Labour government seemed to have no intention of allowing same-sex couples to enter legal unions. The Home Secretary of the time, Jack Straw, whose traditional stance defined marriage as a union between one man and one woman which fosters procreation, said: 'I see no circumstances in which we would ever bring forward proposals for so-called gay marriages' (The Independent, 1st October 2000). However, in 2001, Ken Livingstone, the mayor of London at the time, set up a registry system that allowed same-sex couples to register their partnerships with local authorities. Similar registry systems were set up in cities across the UK. These relationships had no legal bearing but built the momentum at the grassroots level for equality and justice in same-sex relationship recognition, which was reinforced politically by effective lobbying on the part of Stonewall, a prominent LGBT rights advocacy group. It was also around this time that the European Convention on Human Rights was being integrated into UK law, and hence the claim that CP was at least partly an outcome of 'the Europeanization of British social legislation' (Weeks 2007: 189). This, and the lobbying of LGB advocacy groups, led the government's Women and Equality Unit to publish a discussion paper in 2003 on potential same-sex partnership recognition schemes which was followed by a public consultation process. The introductory section of the consultation document outlined the government's intentions and stipulations for CP:

'Civil Partnership registration would be an important equality measure for same-sex couples in England and Wales who are unable to marry each other. It would provide for the legal recognition of same-sex partners and give legitimacy to those in, or wishing to enter into, interdependent, same-sex couple relationships that are intended to be permanent. Registration would provide a framework whereby same-sex couples could acknowledge their mutual responsibilities, manage their financial arrangements and achieve recognition as each other's partner. Committed same-sex relationships would be recognised and registered partners would gain rights and responsibilities which would reflect the significance of the roles they play in each other's lives. This in turn would encourage more stable family life'. (Women & Equality Unit, 2003: 13, emphasis added).

In one sense, it is clear that the Labour government was offering a legal framework which would ensure a form of equality (equality of outcome rather than substantive equality), confer legitimacy and provide recognition and rights to same-sex couples. In exchange, the document laid out its expectation that same-sex couples be in permanent, stable, interdependent and committed relationships. Operating with a seemingly modern and liberal definition of what constitutes family (i.e., same-sex couples), the document also expressed traditional and conservative values as it hoped to encourage more stable family life through CP. Overall the government thought that CP 'could make a real difference to the lives of same-sex partners,' not only through the provision of recognition and rights, but also by 'affecting attitudes more widely', presumably meaning that CP might promote further tolerance and acceptance of same-sex relationships in mainstream society (Women & Equality Unit, 2003: 13).

As the legislation made its way through the various stages of parliamentary debate, there were attempts to amend it so that it would not be limited to same-sex couples, nor to conjugal couples, but so that it might also cover heterosexual couples and others, including 'family members and carers who might wish to register and opt in to the bundle of rights and responsibilities' (Stychin, 2006: 80). Ultimately, this did not happen to the dismay of several scholars and activists (Auchmuty, 2004; Tatchell, 2004; Barker, 2006; Stychin, 2006) whose views are considered further in section 2.5.

Overall, the introduction of CP in the UK in 2005 was emblematic of the changing contexts in which gay lives and relationships are/were lived. Surveys of social attitudes suggest that UK society is increasingly accepting and tolerant of homosexuality (Guasp & Dick, 2012). There have also been significant advances in terms of rights and equality measures for LGB individuals, couples and families since the early 2000s. This period saw the repeal of the controversial Section 28 which had been enacted in 1988 to ban the 'promotion' of

homosexuality in local authorities and schools. The age of consent for sex between two men was reduced to 16, the same as the legal age of sexual consent between a man and woman. Other legislative changes included the Adoption and Children Act (2002), the Employment Equality (Sexual Orientation) Regulations (2003), the Gender Recognition Act (2004), the Equality Act (Sexual Orientation) Regulations (2007), and the Equality Act (2010).

2.4 Crisis and continuity: the ever-changing institution of marriage

The introduction of CP was symbolic not only of the changing contexts in which gay lives were lived, but also of wider social changes, including changes in the nature and meanings of marriage. Indeed, Bech (1997) has written that 'homosexual marriage has become possible only on the basis of the decline in prestige and importance of marriage and the family' (202). While this statement may be controversial, and more relevant in particular contexts (Bech was referencing same-sex registered partnerships in Denmark), it does allude to a converging consensus that across the contemporary Western world the importance and meaning of marriage, and intimate relations in general, are in flux. Giddens (1992) has diagnosed this as 'the transformation of intimacy'. His and other sociological explanations of this transformation range from a theory of rampant individualization (Giddens, 1992; Beck, 2002; Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, 1995; 2002) to milder accounts of de-traditionalization and deinstitutionalization (Lewis, 2001; Cherlin, 2004; Duncan & Smith, 2006). Liberalized social attitudes, the decline in marriage rates and increasing rates of cohabitation are called upon to serve as evidence of this transformation.

In the contemporary European context at least, the 'golden age of marriage' is 'well and truly over' according to Kiernan (2004b: 980). Lasting from the 1950s-70s, it was a time when nearly everyone married, did so at a young age, and remained married. While the desire and propensity to form couple relationships has not declined according to Kiernan (2004a), the socio-demographic patterns in marriage behaviour across Europe indicate that formal marriage has declined. The decline in the marriage rate began in the Scandinavian countries in the late 1960s and had spread across most of Europe by the mid-1970s, although the pace has slowed since the 1980s (Kiernan, 2004a). Across Europe, the decline in the marriage rate was accompanied by a rise in the divorce rate and a rise in the age at first marriage (Kiernan, 2004a; Paetsch, 2004).

Alongside the decline in marriage rates and delayed entry into marriage are increases in cohabitating relationships and what sociologists term 'living apart together' relationships (Duncan & Phillips, 2010). Cohabitation is seen by some as a prelude to marriage and by others as an alternative to marriage (Seltzer, 2004). Cohabitation as a prelude to marriage is a behavioural norm in Britain with over three-quarters of all British first marriages resulting from

prior cohabitation (Seltzer, 2004). It offers many of the same features and advantages of marriage: 'shared home, economic support, sexual intimacy, and not infrequently, children' (Kiernan, 2004b: 985). It is also a way of testing out a relationship. Indeed, most couples either marry or separate within two years of moving in together (Paetsch, 2004) and 'after five years, only a minority of cohabiting unions remain intact' (Kiernan, 2004a: 20). Seltzer (2004) argues that cohabitation will not replace marriage completely although the marriage rate may continue to decline. Furthermore, she claims that cohabitation cannot be considered an alternative to marriage because it does not receive the same formal and informal supports as marriage.

These statistics represent 'disparate trends' according to Lewin (2004) who contends that 'uniformity of expression need not be a requirement for marriage or any other social institution to be central to our lives' (1005). In other words, although fewer people marry or marry later in life and may not stay married, marriage is still a meaningful life goal which many people hope to achieve. Indeed, Seltzer (2004) writes that 'marriage is still a highly valued state...maybe because it is so highly valued, the expectations about the conditions under which it is appropriate – economic requirements and love – are hard to achieve' (926). Kiernan (2004b) refers to the Eurobarometer survey of 1998 which indicated 90% of young people aged 25 to 34 were in favour of marriage, even in countries where cohabitation was most widespread such a Denmark and Sweden. The paradox is that while people value marriage, perhaps more than ever, they delay entering marriage until 'they are ready for it, can afford the (ever growing) cost, and are prepared to accept the mixture of rights and obligations' (Weeks, 2007: 139). Others opt out of marriage altogether preferring to cohabitate or 'live apart together' instead.

Cherlin (2004) claims that across Europe, Canada and the US 'marriage has undergone a process of deinstitutionalization—a weakening of the social norms that define partners' behaviour' (848). He notes two transitions in marriage, the transition from the institutional marriage to the companionate marriage, and then from the companionate to the individualized marriage. He identifies five societal developmental forces that have led to this 'deinstitutionalization' of marriage. In roughly chronological order from the 1950s they are: changes in gendered division of labour in the domestic sphere; increase in children born to unmarried parents; increase in divorce rates; increasing proportion of the population living as unmarried cohabiters; and most recently, the push for same-sex marriage. Changing cultural trends were also responsible for the evolution of the meaning of marriage. These include 'an emphasis on emotional satisfaction and romantic love' and 'an ethic of expressive individualism' (Cherlin, 2004: 851). These cultural trends have also been commented upon by other theorists who provide sociological explanations for the changes in personal lives. Some explanations emphasize intrinsic changes in intimacy and love (Giddens, 1992), whereas others argue that individualization is the key factor (Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, 1995; 2002).

In The Transformation of Intimacy, Giddens (1992) argues that marriage - although retaining the highest position in the relationship hierarchy - has been undermined by the 'pure relationship', making it just 'one life-style among others' (154). The 'pure relationship' is defined as a social relationship which is: 'entered into for its own sake, for what can be derived by each person from a sustained association with another; and which is continued only in so far as it is thought by both parties to deliver enough satisfactions for each individual to stay within it' (58). Marriage for most of the population is now a form of the 'pure relationship'. Marriage then, is a genuine choice and it is contingent, lasting only for as long as a couple are satisfied. Similarly, Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (2002) argue that marriage is no longer based on economic necessity and religious and social expectations, but now it is 'held together by the love, self-discovery or self-therapy of two wage-earners seeking each other and themselves'(9). Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (2002) argue that: 'the why, what and how long of marriage are placed entirely in the hands and hearts of those joined in it. From now on there is just one maxim defining what marriage means: the script is the individualization of marriage' (11). Indeed, the main argument behind Beck and Beck-Gernsheim's books, The Normal Chaos of Love (1995), and Individualization (2002) is that individualism is the driving force behind the changes in intimate and family life. Marriage is now: 'primarily a source of emotional support, a tie between two persons who each earns their own living and seeks in their partner mainly the fulfilment of inner needs...this shift in what counts as a 'good' marriage means that its central focus is now the individual person with her own desires, needs, ideas and plans, in short, personal happiness...the newly emerging form of the couple always has behind it a claim of *one's own on life'* (Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, 2002: 72, emphasis as in original). Giddens (1992) also acknowledges the force of individualism, arguing that wider social changes oblige people to engage in 'reflexive projects of the self' which involve a 'continuous interrogation of past, present and future' (30). Similarly, (Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, 2002) argue that the state-sanctioned normal biography – education, career, marriage, family - is increasingly subject to choice and innovation and is being replaced by biographies that are 'elective', 'reflexive' and 'do-it-yourself'.

These grand theories are highly criticized, mainly on the grounds that they were not derived empirically (Jamieson, 1998; 1999; Lewis, 2001; Smart & Shipman, 2004; Gross, 2005; Duncan & Smith, 2006). Duncan and Smith (2006), for example, argue that while these theories are valuable as heuristic devices, 'they are top-down, abstract visions with little connection to particular social contexts' and are 'not well founded in terms of empirical and historical evidence' (2-3). Central to the arguments of most critics is that consistency and continuity in personal lives exist alongside change. The critics also argue that people do not act as free

agents, unattached from others, nor have they lost the desire for intimacy, relationships and families. Duncan and Smith (2006) write:

> 'People value connection and commitment to others just as much as before, and that in making family decisions they search for the morally right thing to do with relation to others. If there is individualisation, it is within social bonds, not away from them […] commitment may no longer take traditional forms as in marriage or even conjugality, and what matters within families and across generations may have changed […] but a wider relational and committed 'family' remains central in people's lives' (3).

While the importance of social and intimate connections may not have changed to a great extent, the purpose and meanings of marriage have indeed changed over the course of history. As Boswell (1994) writes: 'In premodern Europe marriage usually began as a property arrangement, was in its middle mostly about raising children, and ended about love […] By contrast, in most of the modern West, marriage begins about love, in its middles is still mostly about raising children (if there are children), and ends – often – about property' (Boswell, 1994: xxi-xxii). Cherlin (2004) argues that 'people marry now less for the social benefits that marriage provides than for the personal achievement it represents' (857). Marriage is no longer a 'marker of conformity' but rather a 'marker of prestige' (Cherlin, 2004). It is no longer the foundation of adult life but often the final achievement - the capstone - that 'one builds up to, often by living with a partner beforehand, by attaining steady employment or starting a career, by putting away some savings, and even by having children […] It is something to be achieved through one's own efforts rather than something to which one routinely accedes' (Cherlin, 2004: 855). Indeed, for most people, marriage has become 'a matter of choice' which is 'entered into voluntarily' and largely as a 'sign of commitment' (Weeks, 2007: 15). Marriage has become a 'free personal choice based on love' (Nock, 2001: 769). Although marriage may not necessarily be characterized by unconditional love, life-long commitment, cohabitation, financial interdependency, monogamy and children, these remain associated with marriage (Kitzinger & Wilkinson, 2004), often as 'normative' ideals (Nock, 2001).

According to Cherlin (2004) while the 'practical importance of being married has declined, its symbolic importance has remained high, and may even have increased' especially among low-income groups and young people (855). Lewin (2004) concurs with this line of argument: 'Marriage is often particularly valued and desired among those who are least likely to be able to achieve it' including same-sex couples (1004-5). Despite socio-demographic patterns and cultural trends that might indicate otherwise, it seems that marriage still operates as an ideal in society, a state of being that many heterosexuals and, increasingly LGB people, aspire to achieve.

2.5 Debatable unions

The legal recognition of same-sex relationships, whether through civil marriage or an alternative legal status, has spawned heated academic and public debates and attracted swaths of media attention in the last few decades. If the following newspaper headlines from the UK press are any indication, then it is clear that rights and citizenship, health and well-being, and the potential for 'traditional' marriage to be 'redefined' or transformed are prominent points of the debates:

- *'Gay marriage: "Let us be first-class citizens"* (BBC News, 15 March 2012)

- *'Redefining marriage to include same-*sex couples would benefit nobo*dy' (*Sentamu, 2012 in The Guardian, 17 May 2012)

- *'Traditional image of marriage being eroded by same-*sex unions, warns top family lawyer' (*The Daily Mail, 16 March 2010)

- *'Gay marriage "improves health"'* (BBC News, 16 December 2011)

With regard to health and well-being, the academic speculations regarding the 'public health argument' of same-sex relationship recognition was covered in an earlier section (see section 2.2). Although this argument may be 'overlooked' in most public debates (Culhane, 2008), it is detectable. Indeed, a BBC News article from 2011 was entitled with the bold claim: 'Gay marriage "improves health"' (BBC News, 16 December, 2011). On the other hand, former Catholic Cardinal Keith O'Brien penned an article suggesting that same-sex marriages and CPs are: 'harmful to the physical, mental and spiritual well-being of those involved' (O'Brien, 2012 in The Telegraph, 3 March 2012).

Much of the debate about same-sex relationship recognition, in its various forms, draws on, or refers to, debates about same-sex marriage. Therefore, before I discuss the debates surrounding CP in the UK, I first consider the debates regarding same-sex marriage. As the title of Sullivan's (1997) book on the matter attests – the book is titled: 'Gay marriage: pro and con' - there are proponents and opponents to same-sex marriage. Within this dichotomy, however, there are a range of views and positions. Indeed, three main positions in the activist and academic debates on same-sex marriage can be delineated: the 'social conservative', the 'critical feminist/queer', and the 'lesbian/gay assimilationist' (Green, 2010).

Pro: lesbian and gay academics, activists, assimilationists and allies

The lesbian/gay assimilationist position supports efforts to legalize same-sex marriage. These 'proponents of same-sex marriage typically advance a liberal, rights-based discourse in support of extending the institution to same-sex couples. Here, marriage is understood to confer a wide range of benefits to which lesbian and gay couples are entitled' (Green, 2010: 407). Some arguments in favour of same-sex marriage, however, are not so much liberal as 'neoconservative' (Warner, 1999), such as those put forward by Andrew Sullivan, Jonathan Rauch, and Gabriel Rotello. Indeed, Sullivan (1995) has written that 'one of the strongest arguments for gay marriage is a conservative one' (181).

Sullivan's 'new politics' of homosexuality, which he claims can 'reconcile the best arguments of the liberals and conservatives'(Sullivan, 1995: 169-170), is fundamentally underpinned by an affirmative agenda which emphasizes the common humanity of gay people and thus their rights to equal citizenship. He calls for the end of 'all public (as opposed to private) discrimination against homosexuals' which entails the extension of 'every right and responsibility that heterosexuals enjoy as public citizens' (Sullivan, 1995: 171). The 'most powerful and important elements' of this politics is 'equal access' to the military and to marriage (173). It is clear, however, that equal access to marriage is the 'centerpiece' of his agenda:

> 'If the military ban deals with the heart of what it means to be a citizen, marriage does even more so, since, in peace and war, it affects everyone. Marriage is not simply a private contract; it is a social and public recognition of a private commitment. As such, it is the highest public recognition of personal integrity. Denying it to homosexuals is the most public affront possible to their public equality' (Sullivan, 1995: 178-179).

Beyond his claims for equal citizenship, Sullivan also casts his arguments in favour of same-sex marriage in terms of the positive social consequences for gay people and their families. In his view, same-sex marriage will provide 'role models for young gay people' and a vision of their 'future life stories'; it will also bring gay couples 'into the heart of the traditional family in a way the family can most understand' (183-4). Another component of Sullivan's argument for same-sex marriage emphasizes the 'stabilizing,' 'domesticating,' 'taming' and 'civilizing' influence of marriage on men. This is a view also advanced by Rauch (1997) who argues that above and beyond being in a committed relationship, marriage further stabilizes men who would presumably otherwise be out making 'trouble' and engaging in 'sex with innumerable partners' (177-8). Similarly, Rotello (1998) argues that marriage would 'create an honoured place for relationships and fidelity' among gay men and thus encourage a more 'sustainable gay culture' as it would encourage coupledom, 'sexual restraint and monogamy' (Rotello, 1998: 245-250).

Overall, it is argued that 'gay marriage is not a radical step; it is a profoundly humanizing, traditionalizing step' which is 'ultimately the only reform that truly matters' (Sullivan, 1995: 185). Alternatives to same-sex marriage - civil unions, domestic partnerships and the like – are often not satisfactory for these proponents because they 'lack the social and symbolic legitimation of marriage, constituting instead a kind of "second-class citizenship" for lesbian and gay couples' (Green, 2010: 408).

Con: social conservatives, critical feminists, and queer scholars

The social conservative and critical feminist/queer positions oppose or are deeply critical of same-sex marriage, but for different reasons. Among social conservatives marriage is considered to be a central social institution in society, defined as heterosexual, and based on gender complementarity, monogamy and nuclear families (Green, 2010). From this perspective, same-sex marriage is thought to threaten the traditional form and meanings of marriage. The critical feminist/queer camp, on the other hand, worries about the potential for same-sex marriage to reinforce patriarchy and (hetero)normativity. In this sense, same-sex marriage is a 'site of sexual regulation and social control' and an 'institution of normalization wherein the married are rendered "normal," healthy, and moral, and the unmarried "abnormal," unhealthy, and deviant' (Green, 2010: 406).

Social conservatives are not amenable to giving LGB people the right to marry because they worry that marriage, as they know it, will be 'undermined' or 'redefined' (e.g., Arkes, 1997; Wilson, 1997). They champion marriage as a timeless and monolithic institution and ignore the fact that marriage has undergone changes in recent history, including legal reforms to allow, for example, inter-racial marriages. They lament the breakdown of traditional family values - high rates of divorce, cohabitation and parenting that occurs outside marriage – and see same-sex marriage as yet another threat to traditional marriage, 'an already strained institution' (Wilson, 1997: 162-3). They uphold definitions of marriage as: a union between a 'man and a woman,' an institution for raising children, a religious 'sacrament' which is 'central' to all faiths (Wilson, 1997: 163). Furthermore, social conservatives advance slippery slope logic and speculate that granting same-sex couples the right to marry would lead to incestuous, intergenerational or polygamous marriages. Arkes (1997), for example writes 'if there is to be gay marriage, would it be confined then only to adults? And if men are inclined to a life of multiple partners, why should marriage be confined to two persons?' (157). Like other social conservatives, Arkes (1997) also expresses his concerns about same-sex marriage in terms of the effect on children. As Rauch (1997) points out, however, social conservative commentators like Arkes advance an 'anti-gay view' cloaked under a 'child-centred view' (173). This is clear in the following quotation from Arkes who does not discount the possibility that 'men may truly

love men, or commit themselves to a life of steady friendship' but proceeds to question why they would need to have sex, marry, or have children:

> 'Many of us [social conservatives] have continued to wonder just why any of these relations would be enhanced in any way by adding to them the ingredients of penetration – or marriage. The purpose of this alliance, after all, could not be the generation of children, and a marriage would not then be needed then as the stable framework for welcoming and sheltering children' (Arkes, 1997: 156).

Although social conservatives claim that their views are simply 'traditional' and not based on 'irrational prejudice' (Wilson, 1997: 163), it is indeed rational, if convoluted thinking which is likely underpinned by homophobia. However, as queer scholar Michael Warner points out, 'if the conservative arguments against gay marriage reduce to almost nothing but homophobia' the arguments of Sullivan, Rauch, and Rotello (highlighted above) in favour of same-sex marriage 'are powered by homophobic assumptions as well' (Warner, 1999: 114) because they view gay men as wild, sexually depraved, men who need 'civilizing'.

Queer scholars, on the other hand, seek liberation for these lifestyles, and call for the recognition of a wide range of forms of human relating. Marriage is seen as a conservative, normal and traditional step backward, and a threat to queer politics. For example, Michael Warner sees same-sex marriage as the 'rallying point of the normalizing movement' to which many LGB people have surrendered their radical politics of resistance (Warner, 1999: viii). As Rotello (1998) notes, queer scholars view the legalization of same-sex marriage as a way to 'undermine a major goal of gay liberation, which is to validate all kinds of relationships and all forms of sexual expression and experimentation, not to mimic an outmoded and oppressive heterosexual norm' (Rotello, 1998: 256). Some queer and feminist writers oppose same-sex marriage because it legitimizes and normalizes only one type of same-sex relationship. For example, Warner (1999: 82) writes that marriage is 'selective legitimacy' which 'sanctifies some couples at the expense of others', and Ettelbrick (1997: 119) writes that 'marriage defines certain relationships as more valid than all others'. Furthermore, Ettelbrick (1997) argues that same-sex marriage will not transform society, and will not liberate gay people:

> 'We must not fool ourselves into believing that marriage will make it acceptable to be gay or lesbian. We will be liberated only when we are respected and accepted for our differences and the diversity we provide to this society. Marriage is not the path to that liberation' (Ettelbrick, 1997: 124).

Feminist scholars such as Auchmuty (2004) also call for the recognition of a diversity of relationships and lifestyles, including LGB relationships and lifestyles, despite their

'difference'. Rather than the assimilatory potential of granting same-sex marriage to LGB people, some feminists call for the 'abolition' of marriage altogether. They wonder why LGB people would want to subscribe to an institution which, at least historically, has benefitted men more than women, for whom it was often oppressive, limiting, impoverishing and abusive, and was marked by 'gendered power difference' and was, therefore, a patriarchal and unequal institution which was often exploitative of women who surrendered their bodies, personalities and names (Auchmuty, 2004).

Debates on CP

While the points of debate highlighted thus far are primarily articulated in relation to same-sex marriage, many of them also apply to CP (Kitzinger & Wilkinson, 2004). Several scholars regard CP as a 'compromise' solution (Stychin, 2006; Wilkinson & Kitzinger, 2006). By 'simply reproduc[ing] marriage law wholesale but call[ing] it something else,' the UK Labour government was able to provide rights and recognition to same-sex couples whilst avoiding the controversies of introducing same-sex 'marriage' that had occurred elsewhere (Weeks, 2008: 791). But because CP was based on marriage, and is regarded as 'marriage in all but name' (Auchmuty, 2004; Kitzinger & Wilkinson, 2004; Stychin, 2006), it is susceptible to many of the same critiques levied against marriage.

Several critical commentators have drawn attention to notions of citizenship, justice and (in)equality. Most scholars acknowledge that CP is a move towards equality, citizenship and justice. While the legal and semantic distinctions between CP and civil marriage were welcomed by some precisely because it is not technically 'marriage,' for others this is a point of contention. In this view, CP is understood as a form of symbolic violence and signifies second-class citizenship and that same-sex couples are not worthy of marriage. Some have also highlighted that CP is not only a form of inequality for LGB people but also for heterosexuals who are cannot enter CPs (Tatchell, 2004; Stychin, 2006; Wilkinson & Kitzinger, 2006). Indeed, gay rights and equality activist Peter Tatchell (2004) has claimed that having 'one law for heterosexuals and another for gays' is 'not equality' but 'reinforces and perpetuates discrimination' by creating a 'separate-but-equal' institution. For these reasons, he branded CP as a form of 'sexual apartheid':

> 'The Civil Partnership Bill creates a form of sexual apartheid, with one law for
> heterosexuals and another for gays. Same-sex couples are excluded from marriage and

opposite-sex partners are excluded from civil partnerships. This is not equality. It reinforces and perpetuates discrimination' (Tatchell, 2004).

Other academic debates question both the role of the state in recognizing and regulating relationships (Harding, 2008) and the privileging of the conjugal couple. Summarizing the radical feminist and queer positions, Stychin (2006) argues that 'if the state is going to recognize relationship forms outside the institution of marriage, then it should take the opportunity to consider real alternatives to the marriage model that might be available more widely; a model in which conjugality be deprivileged' (Stychin, 2006: 81). The privileging of the conjugal couple is, indeed, a common critique of marriage which can be applied to CP which continues to construct 'the couple' as the 'normative' and 'basic social unit' in society (Kitzinger & Wilkinson, 2004). Furthermore, providing recognition and rights only to couples privileges those who are 'already so richly served' and 'already privileged' by virtue of being a couple, with all of the attendant benefits – 'love, company, mutual support, extra money and higher status than single people' (Auchmuty, 2004: 122). However, although it is generally assumed that the intent of the legislation was to recognize only those same-sex couples who match the form of the conjugal couple (i.e., romantically and sexually intimate), the act has 'loopholes' because it did not contain any clauses about consummation, adultery or monogamy (Barker, 2006), meaning that in theory at least, any two same-sex adults bonded in some way other than sex, love or biology (i.e., friends or flatmates) could register a CP (Stychin, 2006).

A number of critiques have expressed concerns regarding the LGB individuals and same-sex couples who do not, for whatever reason, enter CPs. Browne (2011) draws attention to the fact that the legislation requires all same-sex couples who live together to declare their couple status when applying for benefits, even if they are not in CPs. This means that they will be assessed as though they are 'civil partners' when applying for benefits and may see a reduction in their entitlement to benefits. Other scholars draw attention to the potential marginalization of LGB people who do not formalize relationships. Weeks (2007) draws attention to the potential for CP to create a relationship hierarchy: 'There is no doubt that the civil partnership and related legislation carries with it the danger of separating off the respectable gay from the unrespectable, the stable couple from the promiscuous' (Weeks 2007: 192).

Finally, scholars have also commented on the potential normalizing and transformative effects of CP. For instance, Weeks (2007) writes that the impact of CP legislation 'will depend ultimately on the degree to which the practice of same-sex unions can transform both the normative meanings of marriage, and every day practices of LGBT people themselves' (Weeks, 2007: 198). Of a similar stance, Harding (2008) writes that although CP has been modelled on

marriage and may have 'assimilatory or normalizing' effects, that it could also be a 'substantively different form of organizing relationships' and may also 'leave room for wider transformative effects in society' (749-756). Both Weeks (2007) and Harding (2008) seem to be suggesting that, for better or for worse, CPs may be 'transformative' for same-sex and heterosexual relationships alike, for the institution of marriage, and for society. In addition to these more positive views, however, are also views about the potential for CP to imprint 'new normativities on to the gay community' (Weeks, 2007: 192), a prospect that is clearly not welcomed by some.

Intra-community debate: ordinary LGB people's views on relationship recognition

The points of debate outlined in this section thus far, whether related to marriage or CP, represent polarized public and abstract academic views. These debates prominently feature the disparate views of religious leaders, politicians, activists, academics and 'gay and lesbian elites' and are not 'representative of how ordinary gay and lesbian couples think about marriage' (Hull, 2006: 23). Nonetheless, these debates have filtered their way into the public consciousness and influenced ordinary LGB peoples' views and attitudes toward the legal recognition of same-sex relationships.

A few studies have investigated the views and attitudes of LGB individuals and couples with regard to same-sex marriage (Lannutti, 2005) and other legal recognition schemes, including CP in the UK (Yip, 2004; Clarke et al., 2006). Other studies explored why some LGB people had not formalized their same-sex relationships through a CP (Harding, 2008; Rolfe & Peel, 2011). Overall, these studies show that LGB individuals and couples are generally in favour of some form of legal recognition for same-sex relationships. Their views and attitudes reflect several points highlighted in the public and academic debates discussed above. For example, in each study the degree to which a particular form of relationship recognition represented 'full' or 'second-class' equality and citizenship was a common concern. Many participants were also concerned about the threat to distinctive same-sex relationships posed by assimilation and accommodation into heterosexual values/norms (Yip, 2004; Lannutti, 2005; Clarke et al., 2006). Others were concerned with the idea of submitting their same-sex relationships to government regulation (Harding, 2008; Rolfe & Peel, 2011). While participants in these studies often held critical, complex, and ambivalent personal and political views towards legal recognition (Clarke et al., 2006), they did not necessarily discount the possibility that they might seek legal recognition in the future (Harding, 2008; Rolfe & Peel, 2011). It must be noted, however, that the attitudes and views highlighted in this section were expressed by LGB people and couples who did not want to, or had not (yet), legally formalized their relationships. Thus, as Smart (2008) has noted, they do not necessarily represent the views or

experiences of same-sex couples who have actually entered legal unions. These are discussed in the next chapter which reviews the empirical evidence of LGB individuals' and couples' experiences of formalizing relationships.

Chapter 3: Experiences of same-sex relationship recognition: a review of the literature

The last two chapters have provided context to this thesis by considering the literatures regarding: marriage; gay men's identities, lives and relationships; and the debates around the issue of same-sex relationship recognition. This chapter moves on to focus on the empirical literature on LGB individual's and same-sex couples' experiences (and the attendant meanings) of formalizing a same-sex relationship via CP in the UK context as well as via various other forms of same-sex relationship recognition in other national contexts. I draw primarily from the sociological, psychological and (emerging) public health literatures on the matter. This includes work published as commissioned research reports, books or peer-reviewed journal articles. I included only studies published in English (given my limitation as a monolingual English speaker), but this did not necessarily preclude studies documenting LGB people's experiences of same-sex relationship recognition in non-Anglophone countries.

Although CP was implemented nearly a decade prior to the writing of this thesis, and despite the fact that tens of thousands of same-sex couples have entered CPs in the UK, only a few qualitative studies have documented the experiences of LGB individuals and couples who have registered a CP (Gavin, 2007; Goodwin & Butler, 2009; Mitchell et al., 2009; Heaphy, Smart & Einarsdottir, 2013). Ellis (2007) has also written a reflective account on her personal experience of CP. Given the paucity of completed and published research on CP, I broadened the scope of this review. As such, I consider a range of quantitative and qualitative studies which have shed light on the experiences, and attendant meanings, of individuals and same-sex couples who have legally formalized their relationships via: civil unions in Vermont (Solomon, Rothblum & Balsam, 2005); same-sex marriages in Canada (Alderson, 2004; Green, 2010; MacIntosh et al., 2010); same-sex marriages in Massachusetts (Porche & Purvin, 2008; Schecter et al., 2008; Ramos et al., 2009; Lannutti, 2011); same-sex marriages in Iowa (Ocobock, 2013); registered partnerships in Scandinavia (Eskridge & Spedale, 2006); and various forms of relationship recognition in The Netherlands (Badgett, 2009; 2011). The chapter also includes a section on the quantitative studies which have examined the potential impacts of same-sex relationship recognition for minority stress and well-being (Fingerhut & Maisel, 2010; Riggle, Rostosky & Horne, 2010; Wight et al., 2012; Wight, LeBlanc & Badgett, 2013).

Although the focus is on legal recognition, I also draw, to an extent, on the studies examining same-sex couples' experiences of extra-legal commitment ceremonies as they provide important insights into social recognition and the symbolic and cultural aspects of ritual and ceremony. This includes work on same-sex commitment ceremonies in the San Francisco

(Lewin, 1998) and Chicago (Hull, 2003; 2006) areas, as well as the outputs of a UK research project which explored why some same-sex couples had commitment ceremonies or (symbolically) registered their partnerships with local authorities prior to the availability of CP as well as the meaning and significance these (non-legalized) relationship recognition forms (Shipman & Smart, 2007; Smart, 2007; Smart, 2008). I have arranged the following review in accordance with themes identified in the literature.

3.1 Motivations for formalizing relationships

This section explores the reasons that LGB individuals and couples give for formalizing their relationships. Eskridge and Spedale (2006) sum it up succinctly: 'there is no single overriding reason that all same-sex couples give for wanting legal recognition of their partnerships. Each couple who has tied the knot has their own story, and there are as many reasons for entering into a legal union as there are stories to be told' (Eskridge & Spedale, 2006: 133). They argue that both the 'tangible' (legal rights and financial benefits) and 'intangible' (emotional and symbolic) benefits of legal recognition act as motivating factors underlying the decision to formalize a relationship. For example, in a 2005 survey of gay men and lesbians in Denmark, Eskridge and Spedale (2006) asked respondents to indicate why they would register a same-sex 'registered partnership'. The most common response (49%) was 'to secure the legal rights of marriage for myself and my partner' followed by 'to demonstrate my commitment to my partner' (39.5%).

In contrast to Eskridge & Spedale's (2006) findings, other survey based studies indicate that 'intangible', emotional, or romantic reasons were more salient than the 'tangible', legal, or practical reasons, at least for same-sex couples in the US. Solomon, Rothblum and Balsam (2005) asked 212 lesbians and 123 gay men in civil unions in the US state of Vermont to rank their reasons for entering a civil union in a self-completed survey. The most common responses were as follows: 93.7% cited love and commitment for each other, 91.6% cited the wish to have a legal status, and 59.7% did so out of a desire for society to know about lesbian and gay relationships. Other less common reasons, usually cited by less than 10% of respondents, were related to children, parents and wider family, property and finances, inheritance and tax, and factors related to jobs and health benefits. Very similar results were found by Ramos et al. (2009) who asked 558 individuals in same-sex marriages in Massachusetts to identify the three most important reasons that they decided to marry. Love and commitment was cited by 93% of couples, followed by legal recognition of their relationship at 85%. Other factors were less commonly cited as motivators to enter a same-sex marriage, however, 40% of participants said that an important reason behind their decision to enter a same-sex marriage was to increase the social visibility of same-sex relationships, and 20% indicated that children factored into their

decision, whereas 18% cited wills and inheritance, 14% cited property issues, and 13% cited health benefits (i.e., health insurance through a spouse).

Qualitative research based on interviews provides a more complex and nuanced picture. Interview participants in Alderson's (2004) phenomenological study of same-sex couples who were either legally married, in a domestic partnership, or soon to be married, cited an array of reasons for formalizing their relationships. For some it was seen to be an expression of formal commitment to each other, wider family and social networks. For others it was part of a spiritual journey, a way to access legal protections, or have their relationships socially sanctioned and recognized, or a chance to make a political statement and serve as role models. Porche and Purvin (2008) interviewed four lesbian and five gay male couples who had been together 20 years or more, seven of whom had been legally married in Massachusetts soon after it became an option. Three couples had children and it was their parental status which prompted them to 'legally marry as soon as it became possible in order to provide protection and legitimacy to their families' (Porche & Purvin, 2009: 152). The researchers also emphasize that participants' age, the duration of their relationship, and 'important markers of commitment' such as buying a home together affected the decision of couples to legally marry or not. Marriage was 'necessary and celebrated for the seven younger couples as a meaningful recognition of what was already there, whereas unnecessary for the two oldest couples who did not need further recognition for what already existed' (Porche & Purvin, 2009: 156).

Shipman & Smart (2007) report on the 'everyday reasons' that some same-sex couples in the UK had commitment ceremonies or registered their partnerships with local authorities in the absence of a legally recognized form of same-sex partnership, and why others had the intention of doing so, including the looming prospect of entering a CP. Their motivations included: love, mutual responsibilities, family recognition, legal recognition, and to make a public statement of commitment (Shipman & Smart, 2007). They also found that reasons for formalizing a relationship varied with age and relationship duration. Indeed, older and more established couples tended to emphasize the practical and legal reasons.

Mitchell et al. (2009), conducted in-depth interviews with individuals involved in same-sex relationships in the UK, of whom, 25 had formed CPs. The decision to enter a CP involved the weighing up of factors including: certainty of love and commitment and the desire to demonstrate this; support and acceptance from families; gaining legal rights and responsibilities; financial incentives and disadvantages; financial interdependency; social recognition and validation; equality with marriages and freedom of definition; view of self in relation to 'mainstream' society; and the level of 'outness' as a couple (Mitchell et al., 2009). It must be noted that these factors were identified not only from interviews with individuals who had gone

through CPs, but also from those who were undecided, and those who had decided not to. Those who did choose to enter CPs were motivated by a range and combination of these factors. To a greater or lesser extent they wanted: to demonstrate their love and commitment; to be recognized by families and society as having valid relationships; to access the perceived legal and financial advantages; and/or to become part of mainstream society, or at least to emphasize that they already saw themselves in this way (Mitchell et al., 2009).

Same-sex couples in the UK, composed of partners who were both under 35 when they registered their CPs, generally decided to enter CP to express their love for each other and commitment to the relationship, although practical issues and legal rights were also involved in their decisions to a lesser extent (Heaphy, Smart & Einarsdottir, 2013). Of 50 couples, six mentioned that their decision to enter a CP revolved around their desires to be recognized as joint parents for their children, and for eight couples the decision was prompted by immigration issues which could be resolved through CP.

Similar to research which has explored why heterosexual couples marry (e.g., Hibbs, Barton & Beswick, 2001; Eekelar, 2007), the studies reviewed in this section show that same-sex couples formalize their relationships for a range of reasons that align with the dichotomies of 'romance and reason' (Heaphy, Smart & Einarsdottir, 2013), 'head and heart' or 'instrumental and expressive' (Badgett, 2009), 'tangible and intangible' (Eskridge & Spedale, 2006), 'emotional/romantic or legal/practical' (Gavin, 2007). It is also evident that relationship duration and age are associated with LGB individuals' and couples' motivations for, and decisions to formalize same-sex relationships.

3.2 Responses and reactions to the announcement

Once the decision has been made to 'marry' or otherwise formalize a relationship, couples then have to decide whether or not to have a ceremony or 'wedding'. Such events are 'culturally meaningful moments' and often invoke 'unavoidable' thoughts about, and desires to involve, families of origin as well as friends (Smart, 2007). However, announcing the intention to marry is often met with mixed reactions from family and friends.

In Smart's (2007) study, some participants were 'warmly embraced by biological family, but somewhat cold-shouldered by friends; while with others, friends offered the most supportive context while biological family remained at a distance' (Smart, 2007: 672). Reflecting on her own experience of CP, Ellis (2007) also writes about the mixed messages she and her partner received when they announced their intent to enter a CP to their families of origin and wider social networks: 'in announcing the news, we were surprised by the mixed responses we received. We had positive responses from a small number of family members, but

more commonly close friends and colleagues...we only had one overtly negative response...however, more interestingly, we also had quite a few responses that whilst not exactly negative, were not positive either' (246-7).

Similar to Ellis's (2007) experience, all the couples in Smart's (2007) study encountered at least one person who was not supportive of their decision, even if their family and friends were mostly supportive. For some participants in Smart's (2007) study, the process of announcing to their parents their intention to have a commitment ceremony or register their partnership involved emotional distress on par with 'coming out'.

In addition to informing family and friends, couples also had to choose who to invite to their ceremonies and celebrations. Family, however, was not always a priority as the potential for negative responses might undermine what was supposed to be a positive experience. Mitchell et al. (2009) found that in some cases 'invitations were limited to people who the couple knew loved them and accepted their relationship' because they felt it was important to enjoy the occasion without the worries of disapproving or uncomfortable family members (68). Similarly, Smart (2007) found that 'where relationships were really bad or where there was little point in even thinking of a reconciliation, parents and other family members were not informed of the ceremony let alone invited' (Smart, 2007: 682).

While family often presented a problem, friends could not always be counted on to offer their support. Both Mitchell et al. (2009) and Smart (2007) noted how some participants experienced negative reactions from friends who rejected CPs on political grounds. This rejection was typically expressed 'with friends questioning why a couple would adopt straight values, or would wish to conform to the standards of the dominant heterosexual value system' (Smart, 2007: 682).

3.3 Creatively constructing ceremonies, celebrations and rituals

An elaborate 'wedding' is not necessary in order to legally formalize a relationship. Many couples, however, opt for some sort of ceremony or celebration involving ritual elements to attribute meaning to what is otherwise a legal contract. These ceremonies are occasions or events involving a set of more or less formal or routine activities, some of which may be rituals, which in turn are symbolic acts of meaning.

Cultural anthropologist Ellen Lewin conceptualizes marriage ceremonies as both performances and rituals which offer a 'discursive arena within which many different kinds of statements can be made' (2004: 1001). Commenting on her earlier work on commitment ceremonies among same-sex couples in the San Francisco Bay area (see Lewin, 1998), she writes that 'these ceremonial occasions offer excellent opportunities for elaborating various

kinds of messages about identities and communities' (Lewin, 2004: 1001). For example, participants in her study used their same-sex commitment ceremonies 'to claim a place in ethnic or other communities, to make statements about their relationship to God, to situate their bonds in a discourse of nature, and to affirm their connections with either the mainstream culture or with subversions of that culture' (Lewin, 2004: 1001). These claims were both implicit and explicit and made in various ways including costumes, language, food, and music (Lewin, 1998).

Smart (2008) also found that same-sex couples in the UK used their commitment ceremonies, 'weddings' and celebrations to make personal, and political, statements. She writes: 'Decisions about whether to hold a ceremony, register a partnership or to go down the route of civil partnership all involve consideration of wider sexual politics, personal aspirations and desires, and ideas about how to retain integrity and principles concerning life-styles' (762). With these considerations in mind, some couples insisted on making their events prominent and elaborate while others did not feel the need to 'display their relationships in public ceremonies' as this was seen to be mimicking heterosexual marriage (761). Smart (2008) has characterized the various ways in which the same-sex couples she interviewed performed their 'weddings' and commitment ceremonies as 'personal-political' styles ranging from 'regular' to 'minimalist' to 'religious', and finally to 'demonstrative'. Common to all couples, regardless of the 'personal-political' style of the wedding they opted for, was the matter of how closely their ceremony might resemble heterosexual marriage, and whether or not they wanted to endorse the values often associated with it. Couples had different strategies for dealing with these issues. For the couples who had 'regular' weddings these were secular ceremonial occasions generally followed by a meal and/or celebration. Most of these couples felt it important to 'build their own ceremony' by choosing their own words, readings and poems and incorporating gay and lesbian elements alongside traditional rituals. However, one couple felt that by emulating a heterosexual wedding they were able to show their parents the meaning and authenticity of what they were doing. Couples who opted for a 'religious' wedding were similar to those who opted for a 'regular' wedding except that they also added a spiritual dimension to their ceremonies. They also struggled with 'adopting a ready-made heterosexual model of ritual' (769). Although it was important for these couples to assert their religious affiliation, they did not always stick to convention. Some incorporated songs and hymns whose lyrics had been slightly altered to suit the same-gendered nature of their ceremony. More established couples who already saw themselves as committed, and couples who were mostly concerned with gaining the legal protections offered by CP tended to opt for 'minimalist' weddings. Some were 'resolutely against visible ceremony and ritual' as this was seen to imitate heterosexual marriage, while others simply preferred not to perform a 'wedding' but rather, to privately express their personal

feelings (Smart, 2008: 767). 'Demonstrative' weddings, on the other hand, were those that were the most elaborate and public. They involved extensive planning, sometimes benefitting from the assistance of a wedding planner, and were 'almost military campaigns in some cases' (770). In order to express their sexual politics - to emphasize that gay/lesbian commitments and values 'should be displayed and widely admired and understood' - it was necessary for these couples to be highly visible (772). In all cases, couples created 'weddings' that were personally meaningful and which suited their personal and political goals (Smart, 2008).

Mitchell et al. (2009) found that the CP registration process and ceremony differed in the extent to which couples personalized their ceremonies, how big they were and who was invited. Borrowing Smart's (2008) terminology, Mitchell et al. (2009) posit that couples whose CPs could be considered 'minimalist' had several reasons including: feeling nervous to make a public commitment; being private people; preferring personal meaning over public declaration; not wanting to deal with the hassle and fuss of planning a big event; having already had a blessing or commitment ceremony; or limiting the event to include only those they thought would be supportive. The more 'demonstrative' CPs were favoured by those 'who wanted to make a political point about love and commitment in same-sex relationships' (67). They also felt that it was important to include their families and wider social networks, to make this statement, and some simply felt uncomfortable about denying their families a celebration.

Making personal and political statements are indeed a goal of many same-sex couples who choose to have their relationships recognized. Ellis (2007) and her partner did not want to 'reproduce the heterosexual model of a wedding', however they felt that 'a visible (i.e. public) celebration rather than simply a private visit to the register office' was important because it sends the message that same-sex partnerships are not 'inferior to or different from heterosexual relationships', nor can they be ignored (246). To make this statement she had to rely on the social intelligibility and language of marriage to put on a public performance. She writes: 'in order for what we were doing to be understood as comparable to a heterosexual marriage, we needed to invoke some of the formalities associated with a (heterosexual) civil marriage, but we also tried to create a hybrid that is distinctly lesbian/gay' (246). While Ellis and her partner wanted their CP to be understood by those attending the event, including heterosexual others, they also wanted to make it personally meaningful and to make claims about their identities and community affiliations as lesbian women. To achieve this, they, like participants in other studies (Lewin, 1998; Smart, 2008), selectively combined elements of traditional heterosexual marriages and others from gay/lesbian culture. The way that she and her partner performed their CP reflects the free license they felt.

The ideas of freedom and creativity in constructing same-sex 'weddings' and commitment ceremonies is also emphasized by Lewin (1998). She writes: 'the process of creating a ceremony, of planning who will say what, who will wear what, and what everyone will do, is one that many gay men and lesbians understand as open and innovative. There are no rules, it seems, for what has to happen' (53). However, the gay men and lesbians in Lewin's (1998) commonly used what they considered 'tradition' as a guide for constructing their ceremonies. Traditional rituals were also used to communicate to others, and themselves, the naturalness and authenticity of their relationships and their desire for public recognition of them. Some tried to keep tradition intact while others wanted to 'reconfigure it playfully or solemnly' (Lewin, 1998: 86). Tradition was, therefore, something that Lewin's participants felt they could draw on, but also something that they could make their own by incorporating rituals reflecting a gay sensibility as well as their gender and ethnic identities. Participants in Mitchell et al.'s (2009) study also valued the flexibility they were allowed in constructing their CP ceremonies, particularly the option to exchange rings and vows, or not to. For some, exchanging rings was seen as a 'symbol of commitment and togetherness' that would be understood by others, while others saw rings as a symbol of a 'loss of independence' (67). Some couples did not exchange rings or vows because they had already done so on a previous occasion and others felt they would be embarrassed about an emotional display in public (Mitchell et al., 2009).

While many same-sex couples employ creativity in constructing their commitment ceremonies, 'weddings' and CPs, many find it hard, in practice, to make their ceremonies much different from a heterosexual wedding even when they intend to. Indeed, Ellis (2007) concedes that it was 'much more difficult than we had imagined' to create a ceremony which balanced heterosexual traditions with gay/lesbian values (246). She attributes this to the non-existence of a distinct cultural framework for same-sex partnerships/marriage. Same-sex couples, then, often have little choice but to look to heterosexual wedding formats, traditions and conventions. Smart (2008) notes that some couples appreciated that they did not have to work 'from scratch' and could use or re-configure heterosexual practices; for these couples 'the ultimate goal of recognition (personal, political and legal) was more important than the fact that, superficially, it might not look very different from a heterosexual wedding' (767).

3.4 Emotional and transformative events

Ceremonial occasions and rituals tend to evoke strong emotions (van Gennep, 1960; Meeks, 2011). Mitchell et al. (2009) found that many of the lesbian and gay men they interviewed were 'overwhelmed' by the emotions brought about by going through a CP. Even couples who had anticipated emotions were absorbed by the actual emotional significance and reaction they had. Some of those who had already had blessing or commitment ceremonies, or who had cited legal

reasons as their main motivation, were also surprised by how moved they were. Similarly, Lewin (1998) has commented on the unexpected nature of her own feelings. Although she never imagined 'getting married', the same-sex commitment ceremony she ultimately did have was much more powerful than she had expected. She writes: 'There was something about the exposure of a public ceremony that seemed to seal our intent to make the relationship permanent, after the wedding something felt different, though I wasn't quite sure what' (xviii-xix).

Lewin (1998) maintains that the ritual content of marriage ceremonies 'have the ability to transform identity and shape action', therefore profoundly impacting the ways that individuals view themselves as well as how others view them (xix). Green (2010) also holds this opinion. His qualitative study of legally married same-sex couples in Canada revealed that 'marrying' often altered his participants' self-concepts which had repercussions in everyday life. He writes: 'following civil marriage, informal interactions on the street, in the grocery store, or at the bus stop, are perceived to change because one's self-concept has changed' (Green, 2010: 415). Eskridge and Spedale (2006) also found that many of the same-sex couples they interviewed in Scandinavia had not anticipated the transformative impact they experienced after legally formalizing their relationships. They write: 'couple after couple told us how "marriage" changed their lives in beneficial ways they had not anticipated' (Eskridge & Spedale, 2006: 7). Shipman & Smart (2007) found that for some of their participants, particularly those whose families were supportive, CP was seen to offer a 'kind of rite of passage and a signal that their relationship was truly committed' (paragraph 5.1). This message, presumably because it was conveyed in a socially familiar ceremony, allowed partners to be integrated into their partner's wider families, and vice versa. Beyond becoming 'part of the family' it also meant that they were treated like 'adults' or 'fully fledged citizens' (Shipman & Smart, 2007: paragraph 4.8). Similarly, participants in Mitchell et al.'s (2009) study reported feeling ''more grown up' in the way that they viewed themselves' after their CP (92).

Marriage has long been considered a rite of passage (van Gennep, 1960; Berger & Kellner, 1964), and it seems that same-sex couples who opt for some form of recognition of their relationship, legal or not, feel the same emotions, and can experience similar transformations in the way they view themselves and their relationships after formalizing them. Others may also view them differently. The transformative power of ceremonies and their ritual content can be traced in the following sections.

3.5 Recognition and social support, inclusion and status

The desire for acknowledgement and recognition of their relationships is one of the reasons that same-sex couples give for having public ceremonies. It is often through such recognition that

same-sex couples perceive a shift in their social status, may gain social support for their relationships, and may feel more included in their families and society.

Lannutti's (2011) study of older American same-sex couples, some of whom had legally married when the opportunity arose, revealed that they felt an increased sense of recognition as a result of same-sex marriage. She writes: 'married couples expressed an increased sense of recognition for their relationship from people close to them, such as friends, and those with whom they are less close, such as neighbours or fellow church members' (Lannutti, 2011: 72). Furthermore, this increased sense of recognition was not only felt and voiced by married same-sex couples, but also by those who had chosen to remain unmarried. The media coverage of same-sex marriage in Massachusetts, and the surrounding debates, had brought all same-sex romantic relationships into the light of legitimacy. In addition to increased social recognition, several studies have noted the increased social support that participants reported subsequent to marriage (Schecter et al., 2008; Ocobock, 2013). With regard to CP, Goodwin and Butler (2009) noted that 'civil partnership led to a sense of increased social recognition of same-sex relationships and increased feelings of social support' among their participants (235). As will be discussed further in a subsequent section, many same-sex couples feel like they become part of families after formalizing a relationship.

Several studies have also drawn attention to the inclusionary impact of formalizing a relationship. Green (2010) noted that among his participants civil marriage served to mediate 'the outsider status of being homosexual' because it created 'a context for added integration and social support within the family' and also provided 'a normalizing and socially intelligible identity' which was seen to have positive implications for relations with work colleagues and social interactions in wider settings (Green, 2010: 416). Feeling more accepted by society after entering a same-sex marriage was also reported by 38% of Ramos et al. (2009). For many participants in MacIntosh et al.'s (2010) study, even the mundaneness of the ability to file taxes together and the right to receive spousal health insurance, made them feel like full participants in society and they felt a 'newfound sense of empowerment and inclusion in a system that they had been restricted from in the past' (85). Based on interviews with married same-sex Dutch couples and survey data from 556 LGB individuals married to a same-sex partner in Massachusetts, Badgett (2011) concluded that same-sex marriage produces 'feelings of social inclusion' (316). On the other hand, Goodwin and Butler (2009), who were particularly interested in the 'societal positioning' of same-sex couples who had registered CPs, found that their participants expressed contradictory views when it came to feelings of inclusion and exclusion. Participants felt included in the institution of marriage on a wider social level, in the sense that CP was viewed and talked about as equivalent to marriage by others. Some also reported feelings of exclusion which were linked to the legal inequalities between marriage and

CP - including circumstances where a religious ceremony was desired (Goodwin & Butler, 2009).

With regard to social status, participants in Goodwin and Butler's study (2009) spoke about a perceived shift in 'their social status and visibility in society following their CP, both as a couple and as LGB individuals' and they felt that CP encouraged tolerance and their ability to be out (Goodwin & Butler, 2009: 238-9). Other studies also found that formalizing a relationship increased the confidence and openness of same-sex couples. Mitchell et al.'s (2009) found that many couples who had entered CPs reported being more open about their relationship and sexual orientation in work settings and other areas of their lives. Sometimes CP prompted a coming out for the first time to families, a comfortableness in being affectionate in public spaces, and confidence in accessing public and private services such as when booking hotel rooms, dealing with health professionals and educational institutions (Mitchell et al., 2009). These feelings arise from 'feeling backed up by the law', a sense that the CP legislation has put same-sex relationships in the public eye to an unprecedented level to the effect that gay and lesbian couples are 'normal', and the sense that society now has a formal set of terms to use when talking about committed/legally recognized same-sex relationships (Mitchell et al., 2009). Ramos et al. (2009) found 'very high levels' of being out among their sample of legally married same-sex couples in Massachusetts. While most of these couples were already 'out' in familial and work settings, more than 80% indicated that being in a same-sex marriage had made them more likely to come out. Similarly, three quarters of MacIntosh et al.'s (2010) participants mentioned that they felt more 'comfortable and entitled to be out' and 'a sense of responsibility about the need to be out' now that they were legally married (84).

3.6 Authenticity, legitimacy and validation

Many scholars write about the authenticating, legitimating and validating effects that same-sex couples experience as a result of formalizing their relationships – whether legally or socially. This section explores how same-sex couples construct and impart the message that their unions are indeed, authentic, legitimate and valid, as well as what it is about formalizing a relationship that leads to these outcomes.

Lewin (1998) found that same-sex couples who had commitment ceremonies prior to the existence of a legal form of recognition, used concepts such as God and humanity, and the key symbol of 'love' to claim that their ceremonies and relationships were authentic and akin to heterosexual weddings and marriage. Lewin (1998) points out additional ways in which couples felt that that their relationships had been validated as authentic and legitimate. She writes: 'the recognition of others also can validate a claim to authenticity' (163). The presence of family

was particularly important as 'the appearance of blood relatives imbues a ceremony with legitimacy' (Lewin, 1998: 57).

While social recognition in the form of commitment ceremonies may have validating and legitimating effects in the absence of legal recognition, studies on legal same-sex marriage suggest the importance of law in legitimating same-sex relationships. Green (2010), for example, writes that some couples in his study rejected 'commitment ceremonies outright as a kind of "second hand marriage" and "less than real marriage." In these cases, the power of same-sex marriage comes as a function of its formal institutionalization in law and the resulting symbolic cache accruing to legal recognition' (Green, 2010: 430-1). Participants in MacIntosh et al.'s (2009) study emphasized the legitimizing impact that legal marriage had on their relationships; many reported that they finally felt like they 'existed and were accepted by society and not just by their immediate social circle' (87).

Marriage is not the only form of legal recognition which authenticates, legitimates and validates same-sex relationships. Indeed, participants in Goodwin and Butler's (2009) study felt that registering a CP provided a sense of recognition as an 'authentic' couple to themselves, their families, wider social networks, and to society. They write that 'having the "solid framework" of the CPA was an important way of articulating to others that same-sex relationships are not an unsuccessful imitation of opposite-sex couples but worthy of legal recognition' (Goodwin & Butler, 2009: 239). Similarly, Mitchell et al. (2009) found that the legal recognition of CP had a legitimating effect and often provided partners with 'a strong sense of "belonging" and feeling "more grown up" in their relationship with society' (92).

3.7 Bringing together, creating and imagining family

As this section demonstrates, there are many ways in which the notion of 'family' is invoked in relation to the experience of formalizing a same-sex relationship. Indeed, the studies reviewed here reveal how some same-sex couples report that their experience of formalizing a same-sex relationship brought families together, ameliorated their relationships with family members, or reconfigured or created new kinship bonds. Relationship formalization also prompted some couples to consider, or reconsider, thoughts about children and parenthood.

Same-sex couples who formalize their relationships often desire the presence of both their families of origin and families of choice at their ceremonies. However, as noted earlier, not all potential guests are supportive of same-sex relationships and/or marriage. Because unanimous and automatic support is seldom expected, it is all the more meaningful when families do attend according to Smart (2007) who found that: 'this bringing together (if only for a day) was often described as the main success of the whole process' (683).

Relationship formalization may result in several positive family outcomes including: the acceptance of one's sexuality or same-sex relationship by family members, improved or strengthened relationships with family members, or the integration of each partner into the other partner's family. When same-sex couples 'marry' the social intelligibility of marriage and the ceremonial processes involved may signify the seriousness and authenticity of their relationships which may in turn serve as the substrate for integrating them into wider families. Couples in Shipman & Smart's (2007) study, for example, indicated that 'the availability of a legitimate ceremony' meant that their relationships were taken more seriously by their families and 'that their partner would be more likely to be accepted as part of the wider family' (paragraph 5.1). Similarly, the act of marriage can improve strained relationships with family because it 'pushes families of same-sex spouses to confront unresolved issues around the same-sex relationship' (Green, 2010: 412). Marriage, therefore, 'operates as a normalizing rite of passage that catalyzes support and recognition from family members otherwise opposed to or minimally tolerant of homosexuality' (Green, 2010: 412). Many same-sex couples in Eskridge and Spedale's (2006) study found that the legal commitment they had made 'strengthened their relationships with extended families' which had the effect of 'enriching the lives of everyone' (7). Ramos et al. (2009) found that 62% of respondents agreed with the statement 'my family is more accepting of my partner', and 42% agreed that their family was more accepting of their sexual orientation. Along the same lines, MacIntosh et al.'s (2010) participants 'talked with animation and emotion about their experiences of being welcomed into the family of their partner' and this was especially powerful when previously 'anxious or unaccepting' parents had come around to consider them family as a result of the marriage (86). Similarly, same-sex couples in Alderson's (2004) study saw their marriages as providing 'recognition of them as a family' (114). In some cases, though, formalizing a same-sex relationship does not lead to 'positive family outcomes' but can have 'negative consequences, including new and renewed experiences of family rejection' (Ocobock, 2013: 191).

Marriage also widens and reconfigures kinship bonds through the reliance on and application of familiar and recycled terms like 'mother-in-law', 'son-in-law' or 'daughter-in-law'. Mitchell et al. (2009) report that some of their participants and their families of origin started to use this 'new and acceptable language' for the first time, or with more comfort following a CP. Mitchell et al. (2009) draw a parallel from these results to earlier research by Smart et al. (2005) which highlighted the emergence of 'new forms of kinship' as same-sex couples who had commitment ceremonies were integrated into wider families as sons- or daughters-in-law.

Relationship formalization may serve as a platform for new families by encouraging and supporting some same-sex couples to become parents. Indeed, Green (2010) argues that

'marriage provides a context of stability and sociolegal support that encourages parenthood and a dyadic trajectory organized around the goal of family formation' (416). Seven percent of Ramos et al.'s (2009) sample indicated that their same-sex marriage had encouraged them to decide to raise children. In MacIntosh et al.'s (2010) study a definite majority of participants (92%) indicated that being legally married had made them feel 'more open or ready for the idea of having children' and many were in the process of creating families (86). Furthermore, some couples were reconsidering previous decisions not to have children; it seemed that being legally married had allowed these couples to 'imagine' parenthood (MacIntosh et al., 2010). Similarly, Heaphy, Smart and Einarsdottir (2013) found that 'almost all' of the 50 same-sex couples they interviewed 'had turned their attention to the question of becoming parents' after they had entered CPs (162). Notably, these were relatively young couples composed of individuals who were 35 or younger. Heaphy, Smart and Einarsdottir (2013) also noted a gendered difference. Indeed, while several female couples either had or were planning for children, none of the male couples had children and few had definite plans for children. Some male couples simply did not envision children as part of their future, and those who did usually articulated 'tentative plans' for children in five or ten years. This gendered difference may be related to the 'extensive planning and concerted effort' involved in becoming parents as gay men, which is arguably not as straightforward as it is for lesbian couples (Green, 2010: 416). While relationship formalization may encourage efforts to become parents, it is also perceived to support these efforts. Indeed, several couples in MacIntosh et al.'s (2010) study reported that they 'felt more entitled to apply to adopt' after they had married (86). Similarly, one male couple in Mitchell et al.'s study (2009) reported that CP symbolized a form of 'social backing' by the state which they felt had boosted their application to foster children.

3.8 Security, stability and strengthened commitment

Most legal relationship recognition schemes are meant to recognize stable and committed couple relationships. Indeed, the UK government expressed these sentiments in its consultation document on CP for same-sex couples (see section 2.3). As the studies reviewed here demonstrate, it is often the case that the very act of formalizing a same-sex relationship, whether legally or socially, leads to feelings of increased security, stability and strengthened commitment, even when couples have been together for several years.

Most studies have revealed that formalizing a relationship has some effect on perceived levels of commitment. Schecter et al. (2008) interviewed 50 same-sex couples in Massachusetts after legal marriage became available to same-sex couples there in 2004. The sample included couples who had formalized their relationships (through extra-legal commitment ceremonies, legal wedding ceremonies, or both), as well as couples who had not formalized their

relationships. The study revealed that those who had formalized their relationships, whether legally or socially, reported a 'deepening of commitment' (Schecter et al., 2008: 419-420). Similarly, Eskridge and Spedale (2006) noted that same-sex couples who registered their partnerships in Scandinavia often sensed 'an additional element of commitment to their relationship' (7). Ramos et al. (2009) found that 72% of respondents who had married their same-sex partner in Massachusetts either 'agreed' or 'somewhat agreed' with the statement 'I feel more committed to my partner', and 9% felt surer of their partner's commitment. Green (2010) found that a sense of 'growing commitment' was 'ubiquitous' in his participants accounts, 'perhaps more than any other sentiment' (Green, 2010: 410-11). He writes: 'once married, same-sex spouses commonly report an increased sense of commitment to the dyad and a reframing of their relationship around the themes of stability and permanence' (Green, 2010: 416).

Alongside a greater sense of commitment, many participants in Mitchell et al.'s (2009) study mentioned that they also experienced an increased sense of 'comfort and stability' or that they felt more 'settled' or 'relaxed' in their relationship – that they were 'more of a couple' (79). These feelings were related to the perceptions that CP 'signalled a willingness to commit to each other for life' and a willingness to 'work through difficult times' as the relationship was now more difficult to leave given the legal basis of CP (80). For some participants the public declaration of their commitment had increased the sense that they belonged to each other. Others felt more 'responsible' for each other due to legal and financial responsibilities and their role as next of kin in making medical decisions (Mitchell et al., 2009).

Even couples who have been together for many years prior to formalizing their relationships may note the impact of formalizing their relationships in terms of commitment, stability and security. Alderson (2004) found that although many of the couples in his study had made commitments and mutual lives that, in effect, made them already feel 'married', it was common that the actual 'act of marriage forced a deeper reflection regarding the sincerity and depth of their commitment' (115). However, studies by Mitchell et al. (2009) and MacIntosh et al. (2010) highlight that not all same-sex couples will report a growing sense of commitment following a CP or marriage ceremony. Some of the more established partners who had been together for many years indicated that CP did not affect their sense of commitment, which was already 'stable' or 'rock solid' (Mitchell et al., 2009: 79). MacIntosh et al. (2010) claim that for most couples a growing sense of commitment did not occur. Most participants said that marriage had no effect on their level of commitment, rather they spoke about how they had instead been 'overwhelmed' and 'surprised' by 'a newfound sense of peacefulness and feeling relaxed and at ease in the relationship in ways that they had not before' (86-7). These feelings were expressed in terms of safety and security.

Some same-sex couples relate feelings of stability and security to the legal and financial and aspects of formalizing a relationship, while others relate these feelings to emotional, relational, and symbolic aspects. Ramos et al. (2009) found that 14% of their participants felt more financially stable, and 48% reported worrying less about legal problems as a result of same-sex marriage. For some of their participants, the stable context of marriage encouraged them to buy a house together, and 7% felt that they were less likely to break up. Lannutti's (2011) study of older American same-sex couples revealed that all of the couples who married when the option became available in Massachusetts reported an increased sense of security as a result. This increased sense of security was expressed in financial, medical and relational terms. The financial and medical impacts are expected as marriage offers these protections legally, but the relational security is perhaps more interesting given that these couples had been together just over 18 years on average. Lannutti (2011) writes: 'some partners discussed feeling an increased or renewed sense of love between them as a result of getting married' and others expressed a 'deeper sense of security due to the traditional aspects associated with marriage, such as the spousal titles of "husband" or "wife" or wedding rings' (71).

3.9 Embracing and resisting normality and normativity

Many LGB people consider themselves relatively normal and understand any desire they may have for formalizing a same-sex relationship as normal, as 'human' (Schneider, 1997; Lewin, 1998). For many same-sex couples then, formalizing a relationship is an expression of their perceived normality. It can also, however, serve as a normalizing rite of passage (Green, 2010). And, while some LGB people who formalize their relationships embrace feelings of normality and arguably normative aspects associated with marriage, others resist these.

Many of Lewin's (1998) participants already felt 'normal' but they also asserted this normality through public commitment ceremonies. Similarly, the participants who had entered CPs in Mitchell et al.'s (2009) study expressed that they didn't feel different from heterosexual couples, and some had a 'strong desire to be part of the mainstream and not different from heterosexual couples' (59). Another study by Heaphy, Smart and Einarsdottir (2013) found that 'most' of the younger (under 36 years of age) same-sex couples that they interviewed about their experiences of CP, 'just wanted "ordinary" things for their relationships' and that they 'modelled their relationships on a concept of the ordinary rather than on the radically different' (165-6).

In addition to asserting or gaining a sense of normality through relationship formalization, some LGB people who have formalized their relationships report that same-sex relationship recognition seems to have wider normalizing effects in society. A majority of participants in MacIntosh et al.'s (2010) study indicated that 'the language of marriage and the

increased "outness" of being married had the combined impact of creating normalization for their relationships and for same-sex couples in general' (85). Many participants in Goodwin and Butler's (2009) study spoke about the positive impact that CP had in terms of dispelling negative stereotypes about lesbian and gay individuals and relationships. For gay men in particular, being in a CP provided an escape from negative identities where 'the dominant construction of gay identity within accounts of male participants seemed to be a negative one of promiscuity or even danger' (Goodwin & Butler, 2009: 243). Rather, CP has been seen as a 'healthy' or 'domesticated' alternative for gay men, because it 'offers a romantic, stable, family/couple-orientated construction' of gay male identity (243). On the flip side, some male participants expressed concerns that in years to come CP may lead to the expectation for gay men 'to "settle down" like heterosexual men at a younger age' or that 'being old, gay and single could create a negative identity' (Goodwin & Butler, 2009: 244). Among Mitchell et al.'s (2009) participants 'there was a feeling that through their ability to enter legally protected long-term partnerships – alongside the publicity given to this in the media – lesbian and gay people were increasingly no longer viewed as unusual, but as normal people getting on with normal lives, "ordinary and dull"' (Mitchell et al., 2009: 96).

At the same time as some same-sex couples embrace normality when they formalize their relationships there is also resistance to subscribing to normative aspects associated with heterosexual marriage. For example, some participants in Mitchell et al.'s (2009) study did not think of themselves as conforming to heterosexual norms by entering a CP even if the 'outside world might regard their relationship as similar to marriage' (85). They felt that CP was 'what you make it,' and that it offered them the 'opportunity to consolidate their own definitions of their relationship and eschew aspects of heterosexual marriage' including monogamy (85).

The sexual arrangements of same-sex couples who have formalized their relationships are arguably a key site of resistance to heterosexual norms (Green, 2010). Solomon, Rothblum and Balsam (2005) compared the sexual agreements and practices of same-sex couples in civil unions in Vermont to their heterosexual married siblings and to same-sex couples not in civil unions. The survey based research suggested that male same-sex couples, whether in civil unions or not, were less likely than heterosexual and lesbian couples to report agreeing to and practicing monogamy. With regard to male couples, the research found that male same-sex couples in civil unions were more likely to agree to monogamy (50.4% had agreed to this) than male couples not in civil unions (of whom 33.8% had agreed to monogamy). In practice however, both those in civil unions and those not in civil unions reported sex outside their main relationship at about the same frequency (58% and 61%, respectively). Among the male couples in Green's (2010) qualitative study of married Canadian same-sex couples, 60% did not subscribe to the idea that marriage 'need always be monogamous' and nearly half reported that

they had an 'explicit' arrangement allowing for non-monogamy. Furthermore, Green (2010) noted that some couples claimed to become non-monogamous only after they had married. Not all same-sex couples who formalize their relationships, however, are innovative when it comes to their sexual relationships. Ramos et al. (2009) found that some same-sex couples became monogamous after they were legally married, and CP affirmed commitment to monogamy for some couples in Mitchell et al.'s (2009) study. Heaphy, Smart and Einarsdottir (2013) found that only five out of the younger fifty same-sex couples in CPs that they interviewed were non-monogamous. Age and generation may be important factors here. Indeed, based on their longitudinal research Gotta et al. (2011) suggest that there has been an increase in both monogamy agreements and practices in heterosexual and same-sex relationships over the last few decades. They compared self-report survey data on heterosexual married, heterosexual cohabiting, and lesbian and gay couples from 1975 to data collected in 2000 from lesbian and gay couples in civil unions, lesbian and gay couples not in civil unions, and heterosexual married couples. Gay men had the most significant decreases in non-monogamy; 83% reported sex outside of their relationship in 1975 compared to 59% in 2000. Gotta et al. (2011) speculate that the threat of HIV and other STIs has encouraged more conservative behaviour with regard to sex outside of relationships, and that 'longer-term monogamous, committed, legalized' relationships are becoming normalized among younger generations of gay men and lesbians (371).

3.10 Reduced minority stress and improved well-being

Some of the (mostly sociological) studies reviewed thus far have revealed that formalizing same-sex relationships results in impacts that could be considered consistent with aspects of well-being (i.e., increased social support, security, stability and commitment in relationships, recognition, validation, feelings of social inclusion). In most of these studies, however, the findings are not explicitly interpreted in terms of well-being. An exception is Schecter et al.'s (2008) study. Based on qualitative interviews with same-sex couples who married in Massachusetts, Schecter et al. (2008) argued that it would be reasonable to assume that the increased social support and strengthened social ties that respondents reported subsequent to marriage, along with the security and 'peace of mind' offered by financial and legal protections of marriage would translate to increased well-being (Schecter et al., 2008: 419-420). Additionally, it was noted that some participants reported that their 'feelings of marginalization and internalized homophobia' had been 'lifted or eased' subsequent to marrying (Schecter et al., 2008: 413). This finding could be considered a reduction in minority stress. In addition to Schecter et al.'s (2008) qualitative study, a few studies, albeit none from the UK, have employed a quantitative approach to examine the potential implications of same-sex relationship formalization for well-being and minority stress. These studies, which either employed a public

health or well-being perspective, or interpreted results with minority stress theory, are reviewed in this section.

Fingerhut and Maisel (2010) conducted an internet study of individuals in same-sex relationships in California. Of 239 respondents, 63% had legally registered domestic partnerships, 32% had a commitment ceremony, 37% had a domestic partnership but no ceremony, 5.5% had a ceremony but no domestic partnership, and 26% had both a domestic partnership and ceremony and 31% had neither. The survey measured individual well-being (gay-related stress, life satisfaction) and relationship well-being (relationship satisfaction, relationship investment scores) with various scales. The well-being and gay-related stress scores of respondents who had made a formal (legal or social) commitment were compared to those who had not made a formal commitment. Furthermore, the well-being and minority stress scores of respondents who had made legal commitments (registered a domestic partnership) were compared to those who made social commitments (had a commitment ceremony). The findings of the study revealed that legal recognition (domestic partnership) was associated with relationship investment but unrelated to life satisfaction and relationship satisfaction. On the other hand, social recognition in the form of a public ceremony was associated with life and relationship satisfaction (and unrelated to relationship investments). Although social and legal forms of relationship formalization were 'differentially related to individual and relationship well-being,' both legal and social recognition 'buffered the negative effects of [gay-related] stress' on life satisfaction and relationship satisfaction, respectively (Fingerhut & Maisel, 2010: 964-5).

Riggle, Rostosky & Horne (2010) conducted an online survey of LGB individuals from across the US. Of 2,677 respondents, 406 had legally formalized a same-sex relationship (either through registering a domestic partnership, a civil union, or a civil marriage). The other respondents were categorized as: single, dating but not in a committed relationship, in a committed same-sex relationship which has not been legally formalized. Respondents in legally recognized same-sex relationships reported the lowest levels of psychological distress (as assessed by scales measuring stress, depressive symptoms and internalized homophobia), and the highest levels of well-being (as assessed by a meaning in life scale) as compared to respondents reporting any other relationship status. Based on these results, the researchers suggest that the legal recognition of same-sex relationships has a 'protective effect against depressive symptoms, stress, and internalized homophobia' and that individuals in such relationships may 'perceive more meaning in their lives because of the recognition of their intimate relationship' (Riggle, Rostosky & Horne, 2010: 84). Although other scholars had previously speculated that other forms of relationship recognition (including civil unions and domestic partnerships) may not be as beneficial, in terms of well-being, as marriage (Herdt &

Kertzner, 2006; Herek, 2006), this study did not distinguish between these other forms and marriage.

Two studies have distinguished between the well-being impacts of marriage versus other forms of legal recognition for same-sex couples. The first of these studies examined the effects of minority stress, ageing-related stress and same-sex marriage on the mental health of a cohort of 202 midlife and older gay-identified men in California (Wight, LeBlanc, de Vries & Detels, 2012). Of these participants, 12% were married to another man and 30% were in domestic partnerships. The study assessed a range of measures of interest including: mental health outcomes (positive affect and depressive symptoms); sexual minority stressors (perceived gay-related stigma and experience with HIV-related bereavements); aging-related stressors (independence and fiscal concerns); and psychosocial resources (mastery and emotional support) with questionnaires. Both sexual minority stress and aging-related stress were found to be detrimental to respondents' mental health outcomes. With regard to the effect of marriage, having a legal spouse (whether through domestic partnership or marriage) was not only significantly associated with positive affect, but also protective against depressive symptoms. This was not the case for partnered respondents who had not legally formalized their relationships. While there was not an obvious difference in the mental health outcomes of respondents in domestic partnerships as compared to married respondents, supplemental analyses revealed that same-sex marriage appeared to confer a greater positive effect on mental health than domestic partnership. Thus, the researchers concluded that marriage is the 'most beneficial' relationship arrangement for gay men in terms of being a protective factor for mental health (Wight et al., 2012: 507, 509). In the second study, which basically mirrors the results of the first, Wight, LeBlanc & Badgett (2013) analysed socio-demographic and mental health outcome data from the 2009 California Health Interview Survey, the largest representative population-based state health survey in the US. The sample used for analysis included 1,166 LGB respondents; of these, 7.13% were legally married to a same-sex partner and 12.35% had registered domestic partnerships. Again, the results revealed that LGB respondents who were married or in a domestic partnership had lower levels of psychological distress (i.e., better mental health) than LGB respondents who were not in legally recognized relationships. And again, significant differences in levels of psychological distress between LGB respondents in marriages and those in domestic partnerships were not directly observable, however, the results of supplemental statistical analyses supported the notion that legal marriage might have a 'unique positive mental health' benefit over and above that conferred by domestic partnerships (343). This finding led to the conclusion that 'potential mental health benefits might incrementally accrue with access to relationships that offer greater degrees of social and legal recognition' (Wight, LeBlanc & Badgett, 2013: 345).

In another study, Badgett (2011) drew on both quantitative survey data from 556 LGB individuals married to a same-sex partner in Massachusetts and qualitative interviews with 19 Dutch couples. The study employed 'the conceptual frameworks of social exclusion and minority stress' to examine the hypothesis that 'feelings of social inclusion would be bolstered by legal equality, specifically the right to civil marriage for same-sex couples' (Badgett, 2011: 318). Consistent with the hypothesis and based on both the quantitative and qualitative data, Badgett (2011) concluded that same-sex marriage did indeed produce 'feelings of social inclusion'. Importantly, the data showed that feelings of social inclusion were not limited to same-sex couples who formalized their relationships, but also experienced by Dutch same-sex couples who had not formalized their relationships: 'The right to marry and exercising the right to marry were associated with greater feelings of social inclusion among people in same-sex couples' (Badgett, 2011: 316).

The evidence reviewed in this section indicates that both social and legal recognition of same-sex relationships has implications for minority stress and well-being, and that marriage, in contrast to other forms of legal recognition, may be slightly more beneficial, presumably because of the social meanings attached to marriage. The evidence also seems to indicate the very availability of the option to legally formalize a same-sex relationship leads to decreased feelings of social exclusion and increased feelings of inclusion among LGB couples regardless of whether or not they choose to formalize their relationships.

3.11 Summary of the literature review

This literature review chapter drew on empirical research on LGB people's experiences of formalizing relationships, legally and socially, from a range of countries. Within this literature several themes were identified. Participants in these studies reported a range of practical/rational and romantic/emotional motivations for formalizing their relationships. They also reported positive, negative and ambivalent responses and reactions from family and friends when they announced their decision to formalize their relationships. It was common for participants to creatively construct ceremonies, celebrations and rituals to celebrate the event of formalizing their relationships. These varied in size and format but were often emotional and transformative events. These events provided legal and social recognition, thereby leading to increased feelings of social support and inclusion as well as perceptions of elevated social status. Participants also reported that these events had the effect of bringing family together (if only for the day), created new kinship bonds, and encouraged discussions and decisions to start families. Another common theme was increased feelings of security, stability and commitment within relationships. Relationship formalization also legitimized and validated participants' same-sex relationships, socially and legally, as real, authentic and normal. While many participants

embraced these feelings of normality and arguably normative marital conventions, others did not. Taken together, the generally positive impacts of relationship formalization seem to contribute to well-being and relieve minority stress. The themes identified in this literature review informed the development of the topic guide (see appendix H) I used during interviews with participants, as well as my analysis and interpretation of participants' narratives.

Although the research literature reviewed in this chapter may seem extensive, I want to emphasize that I identified only four completed studies (Gavin, 2007; Goodwin & Butler, 2009; Mitchell et al., 2009; Heaphy, Smart & Einarsdottir, 2013) on LGB people's experiences of CP as a distinct marriage-like social and legal form in the UK context. Apart from Heaphy, Smart and Einarsdottir's (2013) study, these studies were conducted soon after the implementation of CP, when the initial surge of registrations was among older and longer-established same-sex couples who avidly took advantage of an opportunity they had previously been denied. My study joins Heaphy, Smart and Einarsdottir's (2013) to capture the experiences of a second wave of people who have registered partnerships, including younger people and people who have formed a relationship since the legislation was enacted. These people are likely to have different experiences and attribute different meanings to CP as Goodwin & Butler (2009) have acknowledged.

While all of these studies on LGB people's experiences of CP have been qualitative, three of them focus on discrete aspects of experience. While insightful in many ways, such focused approaches did not allow consideration of the influence of biography. For example, Gavin's (2007) study was commissioned by the Village Citizen's Advice Bureau in order 'to explore the advice and information needs of same-sex couples considering civil partnership'. Mitchell et al.'s study (2009), of the National Centre for Social Research, was essentially a policy evaluation which explored LGB people's views, attitudes, and experiences with respect to a range of legislative changes, one of which was the introduction of CP. The research was particularly concerned with experiences of 'social inclusion and discrimination and attitudes towards state involvement' as a result of these legislative changes (Mitchell et al., 2009: 1). Goodwin and Butler (2009) were particularly interested in the 'societal positioning' of same-sex couples who had registered CPs. In contrast to these three studies, Heaphy, Smart and Einarsdottir (2013) considered biographical aspects of their participants' narratives. However, because they interviewed only same-sex couples in which both partners were 36 or younger when they entered CPs, their findings may be specific to younger same-sex couples in CPs. Thus, to complement Heaphy, Smart and Einarsdottir's (2013) work, my study utilizes a narrative-life course perspective to consider the experiences of both younger and older generations, including how these experiences are shaped by and understood in relation to participants' biographies. Unlike all four of these studies, I chose to focus exclusively on men's

experiences of CP. By focusing on men's experiences, I sought to offer perspectives on gay men's lives that counter the often negative ways in which gay men have been perceived (see section 2.1). Lastly, my study complements the existing studies on CP by offering a public health perspective which considers the potential implications of CP for well-being and minority stress.

Chapter 4: Designing and doing qualitative research: philosophical, methodological, and ethical considerations

This study explores how CP, a new relational possibility, was experienced and given meaning, in relation to participants' biographies and in a context of expanded legal options and wider socio-cultural change. Given the aim and exploratory nature of the study's research question, a qualitative approach was the most appropriate. Indeed, qualitative research generally has 'aims which are directed at providing an in-depth and interpreted understanding of the social world of research participants by learning about their social and material circumstances, their experiences, perspectives and histories' (Snape & Spencer, 2003: 3). This focus on 'understanding, rich description and emergent concepts and theories' (Snape & Spencer 2003: 14), and on social 'meaning', contrasts to that of quantitative research, which deals with 'numbers' (Dey, 1993). Furthermore, qualitative research methods are generally adopted to address research questions, like mine, which seek to 'explor[e] issues that hold some complexity' and 'require explanation or understanding of social phenomena and their contexts' (Snape & Spencer, 2003: 5).

Pragmatic considerations of how to best address the research aim, question and objectives of this study resulted in a methodological framework bringing a narrative and life course approach together (Hammack & Cohler, 2009), underpinned by phenomenology and social constructionism (Crotty, 1998). Consistent with this approach, I conducted qualitative, semi-structured, in-depth life story interviews to generate data. To analyse the narrative data I combined aspects of thematic narrative analysis (Riessman, 2008) and socio-cultural narrative analysis (Grbich, 2007). I then took a 'descriptive/interpretive' approach to interpreting the narratives which is 'oriented to providing thorough descriptions and interpretations of social phenomena, including its meaning to those who experience it' (Dey, 1993: 2).

The approach outlined above is consistent with a critical humanist orientation to conducting research. According to Plummer (2005), critical humanists are 'pragmatic', align themselves with, and are concerned with, 'storytelling, moral progress, redistribution, justice and good citizenship' (359). They focus on 'human subjectivity, experience, and creativity' by starting 'with people living their daily lives' and by looking 'at their talk, their feelings, their actions...as they move around in social worlds and experience the constraints of history and a material world of inequalities and exclusions' (Plummer 2005: 360-361). Critical humanism, therefore, is not only consistent with the chosen methodology, but also seems particularly appropriate for my topic of inquiry: men's experiences of CP.

In this chapter I first discuss in more detail the philosophical and methodological considerations underpinning the design of the study, and then discuss the 'doing' of the research. Ethical considerations were central to the design and conduct of the research and are woven throughout the chapter, as is critical reflection on the methods and processes of data collection and analysis.

4.1 Philosophical considerations: relativism, social constructionism and phenomenology

In research it is common practice to explicitly articulate one's ontological and epistemological stances – that is, what constitutes reality and how we can know about reality. In studying the social world I take the ontological stance of relativism – that there are multiple socially constructed, and phenomenologically experienced realities. Indeed, 'we need to recognise that different people may well inhabit quite different worlds. Their different worlds constitute for them diverse ways of knowing, distinguishable sets of meanings, separate realities' (Crotty, 1998: 64). Furthermore, historical and cross-cultural comparisons reveal that 'at different times and in different places, there have been and are very divergent interpretations of the same phenomena' (Crotty 1998: 64). Take for example homosexuality, which has been stigmatized, tolerated and accepted at various times, and to greater and lesser extents, in societies across the world (Herdt, 1997).

Relativism also aligns with an epistemology of social constructionism and phenomenology, an interpretive theoretical perspective according to Crotty (1998). Indeed, he claims that 'constructionism and phenomenology are so intertwined' that it would be difficult to work from a phenomenological perspective while claiming a subjectivist or objectivist epistemology (Crotty, 1998: 12). A social constructionist epistemology is clearly aligned with relativism and assumes that:

> 'There is no objective truth waiting for us to discover it. Truth, or meaning, comes into existence in and out of our engagement with the realities in our world. There is no meaning without a mind. Meaning is not discovered, but constructed. In this understanding of knowledge, it is clear that different people may construct meaning in different ways, even in relation to the same phenomenon' (Crotty, 1998: 8-9).

Particularly resonant with the aim of the present study is phenomenology which seeks to explore the subjective everyday lived experiences and meanings of phenomena from the 'point of view' or 'perspective' of the subject (Crotty, 1998). Plummer (2001) writes that 'phenomenologists seek to understand how a person lives a life in a culture' (141). Phenomenological research is an 'exploration, via personal experiences, of prevailing cultural

understandings' (Crotty 1998: 83). Phenomenology can also offer a critical perspective because it 'calls into question what is taken for granted' (82). A phenomenological approach therefore, is useful in furthering our understanding of the extent to which the experiences, meanings and relationship practices of men in CPs confront or conform to the social constructions of what constitutes heterosexual and/or gay norms with regard to relationships and marriage.

4.2 Methodological considerations: narrative and life course

For this research I employed a methodological approach which integrates narrative and life course perspectives (Hammack & Cohler, 2009). In my view, such an approach uses methods, such as the life story interview (Atkinson, 1998; 2001), that create and/or expose personal and collective narratives as windows into culturally relevant representations of experiences and meanings and then explores these as the basis for analysis and further interpretation of social phenomena, both at individual and wider levels. Life stories are a form of personal narrative. They can be 'short' or 'long' and may be topics of investigation in their own right or resources to explore social phenomena (Plummer, 2001). In this study I used relatively 'short' life stories as a resource. To generate the personal narratives for this research, I employed the life story interview method which is outlined further in the section 4.5. I defined these personal narratives as: contextually-embedded and thematically-linked biographical, and relational, accounts elicited and co-constructed over the course of a single interview. I purposely omitted a temporal dimension because I was aware that narrative data may include stories about past, present, future and/or imaginary events and experiences. To arrive at this methodological approach, I drew on the following methodological literature.

Hammack & Cohler (2009) advocate an approach that integrates life course and narrative perspectives, particularly for research into areas of sexuality, identity and human development. They write that such an approach 'takes history, discourse, and culture seriously' and 'provides a paradigm for the study of sexual lives that maximizes our consideration of the contextual basis of human development' (5). In what follows I outline the components of this approach, starting with narrative.

Maines (1993) argues that social science has always had a narrative character and cites The Polish Peasant in Europe and America, a now classic work by Thomas and Znaniecki (1918-20) which used the entire life history of one individual to describe the experiences of immigration. Notwithstanding this early work, there has been an 'explicit interest' in narrative in the social sciences since the early 1980s (Elliott, 2005: 5). Despite this 'narrative turn' (Plummer, 2001; Riessman, 2005), it is argued that the field of narrative inquiry is, as yet, 'in the making' as there are various definitions of what narrative is and what a narrative approach entails (Chase, 2005).

Chase (2005) describes contemporary narrative research as a subtype of qualitative inquiry 'characterized as an amalgam of interdisciplinary analytic lenses, diverse disciplinary approaches, and both traditional and innovative methods – all revolving around an interest in biographical particulars as narrated by the one who lives them' (Chase 2005: 651). Indeed, this case-based commitment is a fundamental feature of narrative inquiry, distinguishing it from other qualitative approaches such as grounded theory which looks across cases often emphasizing similarities, rather than differences, across cases in order to theorize (Riessman, 2008).

While 'nearly anything' that a social scientist might want to explore can be investigated with a narrative approach (Maines, 1993: 22), taking such an approach means different things in different disciplines (Chase, 2005). Elliott (2005) writes that a narrative approach is suited to researchers who are interested in, among other things, 'people's lived experiences and an appreciation of the temporal nature of that experience' as well as 'an interest in the self and representations of the self' (6). Hammack & Cohler (2009), who are particularly interested in sexuality, identity and human development write: 'a narrative approach restores a focus on the voices of sexual subjects and hence provides access to the meaning-making process as it is actively lived and embodied in word, thought, and action' (xv-xvi).

The very term 'narrative' has many meanings and applications depending on discipline. Indeed, as Riessman (2008) notes, a social linguist definition of narrative might be 'a discrete unit of discourse, an extended answer by a research participant to a single question, topically centred and temporally organized' (5). Psychological and sociological definitions of narrative could include 'long sections of talk – extended accounts of lives in context that develop over the course of single or multiple research interviews or therapeutic conversations' (6). Another perspective would be the definition of narrative used by social historians and anthropologists which might include 'an entire life story, woven from threads of interviews, observations, and documents' (5).

Several scholars have distinguished narrative from other forms of discourse. According to Elliott (2005) three key features of narratives are that they are chronological, meaningful and social. Riessman (2005) provides a similar definition of what constitutes narrative: 'what makes such diverse texts "narrative" is sequence and consequence: events are selected, organised, connected, and evaluated as meaningful for a particular audience' (Riessman, 2005: 1). Chase (2005) also claims that narrative is a 'distinct form of discourse' and defines it as 'retrospective meaning making – the shaping or ordering of past experience' (656). This focus on past experience or events ignores the fact that narrators may, and often do, juxtapose stories about present and past experiences with stories about future and/or imaginary experiences (Patterson,

2008), or that they might construct 'hypothetical' narratives (Riessman, 1993). Patterson (2008) argues that an experience-based definition of narrative 'fits' many narratives better and it also enables 'researchers to produce richer, more comprehensive analyses and interpretations of the full range of forms that personal experience narratives can take' (37). Her definition of experience-based narratives is: 'texts which bring stories of personal experience into being by means of the first person oral narration of past, present, future or imaginary experience' (Patterson, 2008: 37).

Implicit in a narrative approach which utilizes life stories is the idea of the life course. Indeed, life stories 'show life courses' (Connell, 1992: 739). A life course perspective emphasizes the importance of four fundamental principles: location in time and place, linked lives, human agency, and timing (Giele and Elder, 1998). Giele and Elder (1998) provide expanded definitions of these principles as follows: 'Location in time and place refers to history, social structure, and culture. Linked lives are the result of the interaction of individuals within societal institutions and social groups. Human agency is embodied in the active pursuit of personal goals and the sense of self. Timing covers the chronologically ordered events of an individual's life that simultaneously combine personal, group, and historical markers' (2). By considering these four principles life course research aims to shed light on the lives of individuals through time and has the power to 'link historical context and social structure to the unfolding of people's lives' (Elliott, 2005: 72-3). As such it can guide research on 'the impact of changing societies on developing lives' (Elder, 1994: 5) and was well-suited for this study which aimed, in part, to document the contextual basis of participants' personal development and how they believe they have come to be in a CP.

If one accepts that there is a 'lived life' and a 'told story' (Wengraf, 2001), then it follows that life course and narrative perspectives map on to each other well. A life course biography is an 'objective' set of events, actions and experiences about which a 'subjective' life story narrative is constructed, performed, and told. According to Wengraf (2001) 'the lived life is composed of the uncontroversial hard biographical data that can be abstracted from the interview material and any other helpful source', it is the '"objective" data about the person's life, the life-events as they happened' (236). The told story, on the other hand, is the narrative which sheds light on 'the way in which those events and actions were experienced and are now understood from the perspective of the person giving the interview' (Wengraf 2001: 236). Here ideas of narrative and life course are clearly brought together.

Overall, a methodology which integrates narrative and life course perspectives and places the narratives generated by life story interviews at the core offers a powerful and flexible, yet consistent, approach to the qualitative study of the lived experiences, and attendant

meanings, of men in CPs. This approach provides a voice to individuals, and serves as an ideal platform from which to gain 'greater understanding of phenomena in the context of people's own accounts of their personal development and histories' (Snape & Spencer, 2003: 10). This approach also highlights the interplay of individual agency and wider social structures, and the role of discourse and culture in shaping a life (Hammack & Cohler, 2009).

Having outlined the philosophical and methodological considerations underpinning my approach to the research, I now turn to the actual 'doing' of the research including: how I recruited participants, how their narratives were co-constructed via interviews, how I analysed and interpreted these narratives and then how I 're-presented' them. All of this was underpinned by ethical research practice which is discussed briefly below, and then interwoven throughout the other sections.

4.3 Ethical research practice

Both the design and conduct of the research were guided by principles of ethical research practice drawn from the British Sociological Association's Statement of Ethical Practice (2002), the Social Research Association's Code of Practice for the Safety of Social Researchers (2007), and the Data Protection Act of 1998. Most ethical issues in research are covered by adopting the general principles of informed consent, right to privacy, and protection from harm. These were central to the entire research process. Additionally, I also identified, and considered, issues of power in the research relationship, issues of representation, my own personal safety whilst conducting research in the field, and the potentials for participants to experience negative emotions and distress during interviews, to express need or desire for further support or information, or to indicate that they or someone else may be in harm's way (please see appendix B for further details). Furthermore, I bore in mind Kong, Mahoney and Plummer's (2003) article entitled: *'Queering the Interview'* which outlines suggestions for doing interview based research with LGB participants. They suggest that adopting an 'ethical researcher persona' and an 'empathic, emotional orientation,' and potentially revealing one's own sexuality are important 'methodological tool[s]' for 'building trust and cooperation' (104). Indeed, they write that 'before being interviewed, many gay men want to know where both the researcher and the teller of that life are coming from, what kind of relationship they are having together, and how intimate details will be used and represented' (Kong, Mahoney & Plummer, 2003: 101). Although I did not explicitly disclose my sexuality as a gay man prior to interviews (unless participants asked), I did explain on the information sheet (see appendix E) that I had worked with gay and bisexual men in other capacities (i.e., sexual health work). In any case, our common sexual identity as gay men became obvious either when we spoke on the phone or when I met them for interviews.

The study involved a voluntary sample of adult individuals who consented (see appendix F for consent form) to take part in the study. Prior to interviews, participants received the information sheet which explained the aim and purpose of the research and the research procedure, including their role in it. The information sheet also covered how their identities and information provided would be protected through standard procedures for confidentiality and anonymity. They were also assured that personal information, digitally recorded interviews, and interview transcripts would be kept safe in accordance with data protection and storage protocols which followed guidelines of the Data Protection Act of 1998. The information sheet also outlined proposed strategies for dissemination and representation, and informed participants that I was happy to send research updates (preliminary analyses, drafts for publications and conferences) if they wanted. Participants were encouraged to ask questions or express concerns at each stage of their involvement in the research. They were made aware that they could withdraw from the study at any time without consequence and of the complaints procedure. At the beginning of each interview I emphasized that while the interview would be like a guided conversation, that they were ultimately in control of what they wanted to tell me, and that they did not have to answer particular questions or cover particular topics, or that we could turn the recorder off or stop the interview altogether at any point of their choosing.

Based on the ethical considerations discussed here (as well as those in appendix B), the project was granted ethical approval and indemnity insurance from the School of Health Sciences Research Ethics Committee at City University London on 20th October 2011 (see appendix C for ethical approval letter). Participant recruitment, discussed in the next section, began thereafter.

4.4 Recruitment of participants and sample characteristics

The logic underpinning sampling in qualitative research is one in which 'the precision and rigour of a qualitative research sample are defined by its ability to represent salient characteristics' and not by statistical representation or size (Ritchie, Lewis & Elam, 2003: 82). Participants are chosen purposively on the basis of the selection criteria and 'if data are properly analysed, there will come a point where very little new evidence is obtained from each additional' participant, and 'there is therefore a point of diminishing return where increasing the sample size no longer contributes new evidence' (Ritchie, Lewis & Elam, 2003: 83). With this notion of data saturation in mind, I estimated that a sample size of 25-30 individuals would be appropriate for this study. Furthermore, previous qualitative studies into individual's experiences of same-sex relationship recognition have generally relied on similar, or smaller, numbers of participants.

In addition to the methodological and theoretical assumptions that underlie qualitative sampling, practical considerations were also taken into account. It is difficult to recruit large numbers of participants for lengthy in-depth interviews, especially among hard-to-reach and widely dispersed groups for whom there is often not an available sampling frame. Also, the time involved in conducting, transcribing and analysing interviews, as well as writing up are amplified with the addition of extra cases, and was therefore not realistic for me as a lone and novice researcher.

Recruitment strategies and inclusion criteria

The recruitment period lasted nine months (November 2011-August 2012). The period came to a close after I had interviewed the 28th participant and found that his interview did not reveal any further information beyond earlier interviews – I had reached the point of saturation, the point of 'diminishing returns'.

As with other qualitative research with hard-to-reach groups, for which there is no distinct or available sampling frame[6] to draw from, I employed a range of recruitment strategies including:

- Maintenance of online social media accounts: a Facebook page and Twitter account dedicated to the study only;

- Distribution of flyers (see appendix D for flyer) at gay-oriented community spaces and events (e.g., bars, clubs, gay pride events);

- Email broadcasts and newsletters through a range of organizations, charities, and social groups who serve the gay community, and through event organizers and photographers offering services to same-sex couples or specializing in CP;

- Snowballing: participants were asked to inform members of their social networks about the study who might be interested in taking part;

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[6] Initially I had thought that potential participants could be identified and recruited through CP registries at local authorities because once registered, being in a CP is a matter of public record and it is possible to obtain a CP registration certificate (for a fee). While this certificate provides an address that could be used for recruitment, these potential participants had not consented to be contacted for research purposes. It is also likely that some had moved away from the address listed on their certificate. More prohibitive for this study was the financial and time expenditure required to obtain even one certificate.

- And, my own professional network as I asked previous work colleagues and social contacts to spread the word about my research via email and social media, or by distributing flyers to their contacts.

Thus it was a purposive/convenience sample, generated by non-probability sampling methods which roughly align with sampling methods referred to as 'community venues sampling' and 'snowball sampling' (Meyer & Wilson, 2009). The methodological strength of a varied recruitment strategy is that potential participants had multiple ways to find out about the study. For example, some men may not have access to, or be familiar with the online environment, or they may not attend the gay scene regularly, but they may be part of a gay men's choir or walking group, or have a friend or colleague who might refer them into the study. In particular, I found that my requests for recruitment help to social groups and CP photographers and planners were very fruitful. In terms of snowballing, two men contacted me after one of their friends had mentioned the study. I found that Facebook advertizing was also an inexpensive and effective medium to recruit participants.

Regardless of how potential participants found out about the study, their first contact with me was initiated by them via email or phone. They were provided with initial information, links to further information on the Facebook page, and asked to complete a pre-interview screening form (see appendix G) which asked for basic demographic information and allowed me to determine if they met the following inclusion criteria:

- in a Civil Partnership that was registered in the UK;
- resident in the UK;
- at least 18 years in age.

Although a CP can be formed when one or both partners are 16 (given that their parents or guardians give consent), I decided to interview only individuals from same-sex couples in which both partners were 18 or older. I did not expect many civil partners under 18, and also wanted to avoid the ethical issues presented with working with young people.

If potential participants met the inclusion criteria, and were willing to take part after reviewing the information sheet and consent form, I would set a date to interview them. I also agreed to interview both members of a couple if they wanted to take part. However, as recruitment proceeded it became apparent that the majority of those responding through the various recruitment channels were of a similar demographic profile in terms of age and ethnicity. Given that one of the objectives of the research was to recruit a diverse sample, I decided to no longer interview both members of the same couple, and began targeted

recruitment efforts aimed at recruiting younger men (under 40) and men from ethnic minority groups. With regard to age, these efforts were matched with success through targeted Facebook advertizing. Although I attended UK Black Pride, which attracts a range of ethnic minority men, to recruit participants, recruiting men from ethnic minority groups continued to be a challenge. Ultimately[7], I ended up with 28 participants in the sample for this study. These 28 participants, however, represent 24 couples as in four cases I decided to include both partners of a couple, although I conducted separate interviews. The characteristics of the sample are described next.

Sample characteristics

As outlined in **Table 1** (next page), the sample varied in terms of age (24 - 72 years), relationship duration (19 months - 43 years), socio-economic and educational backgrounds, employment status, self-identified sexuality, prior marital status, and ethnicity. With regard to ethnicity, 22 participants could be considered White as they self-labelled their ethnic identities as one of the following: 'White,' 'White British,' 'White English,' 'White Scottish', 'Caucasian,' 'White European[8],' or 'White other (New Zealand)'. Six participants could be considered BME as they self-labelled their ethnic identities as one of the following: 'Asian,' 'Chinese,' 'Mixed Turkish and Caribbean,' 'Mixed heritage white and Asian,' 'Pakistani,' or 'South Asian (Indian)'. They also varied in terms of how long they had been civilly partnered for; the sample included men who had entered CPs as recently as two months prior to the interviews (conducted between December 2011 and August 2012) and men who were among the first to register CPs when it became legal to do so in December 2005. As shown in **Table 2** (next page)**,** eleven of the 24 couples represented in the study were composed of two White British men while the other 13 couples were composed of partners who differed in terms of ethnicity and/or national heritage. As shown in **Figure 1** (page 77), participants lived in various parts of England, Wales, and Scotland. Most lived in, or near, large urban areas, including ten in London, but some lived in small towns or villages. Brief pen portraits of each individual participant can be found in Appendix A.

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[7] In total, I received 58 responses from individual men or male couples. Six were automatically excluded because they did not meet the inclusion criteria (in relationships that were not formalized, were in another form of legal relationship, had formalized their relationship outside the UK, had had a CP dissolved). I sent recruitment packs to 24 men who did not end up participating for a variety of reasons: 10 did not return the recruitment pack, 2 decided against participating after receiving information, scheduling difficulties meant that I didn't interview one man, one man did not turn up for interview, and I politely said no to ten men who were similar, in demographic terms, to those I had already interviewed.

[8] In these cases, participants were either German or Greek Cypriot.

Table 1: Demographic characteristics of participants (n=28)	
Age **Range:** 24-72 years old **Mean:** 44.7 years old	**Self-described Ethnicity** **White:** 22 participants **BME:** 6 participants
Length of Relationship **Range:** 1 year and 7 months to 43 years and 2 months **Mean:** 14 years and 8 months	**Length of Civil Partnership** **Range:** 2 months to 6 years **Mean:** 3 years and 10 months

Self-described sexual identity	Previous marital status
'Gay': 26 participants	**Never married or in a CP:** 26 participants
'Queer' or 'mostly gay': 2 participants	**Divorced from woman:** 2 participants
Educational Qualifications	**Employment Status**
Postgraduate: 18 participants	**Employed:** 21 participants
Undergraduate: 7 participants	**Student:** 2 participants
Secondary or Vocational: 3 participants	**Retired:** 5 participants
Estimated household income	**Self-labelled Social Class**
Range: £19- £110K	**'Working':** 4 participants
Mean: £57K	**'Middle':** 15 participants
	'Professional': 3 participants
	Other: 6 participants

Figure 1: General area of residence of participants (n=28), with red dots representing individuals

Table 2: *Composition of couples (n=24) by ethnicity (and national heritage)*	
11 couples were White British + White British	
13 couples composed as follows:	
Participant	**Partner**
White British (UK born)	Black Caribbean (Caribbean born)
White European (German born)	White British (UK born)
White European (German born)	White British (UK born)
Mixed Heritage White & Asian (UK born)	White British (UK born)
Asian (British born, Guyanese descent)	White British (UK born)
White European (Greek Cypriot born)	White European (Italian born)
Mixed Turkish & (Black) Caribbean (UK born)	White British (UK born)
Pakistani (UK born)	Pakistani (Pakistani born)
South Asian (Indian born)	White British (UK born)
White other (New Zealand born)	Thai (Thailand born)
White British (UK born)	White South African (South African born)
Chinese (China born)	White British (UK born)
White British (UK born)	White (American born)

4.5 Collecting and co-constructing life stories: method, procedures, and reflection

A common way to gain insight into people's lived experiences, and attendant meanings, is to ask them directly – to give them the chance to share their stories. In research, this is often achieved through dialogically-based interviews. Notwithstanding issues of social desirability bias and memory (Kong, Mahoney & Plummer, 2003), I contend that listening to people talk about their lives is a valuable and valid way to gain access to these socially constructed representations. I also acknowledge that these stories are contingent - told differently at different times and to different listeners. This is precisely why we have to interpret the lived experiences that participants tell us about in their life story narratives, thus co-creating a version of reality. In this section I outline how the data for this research was collected, and indeed, co-constructed via life story interviews with participants. I outline the approach I took to life story interviewing, including how I adapted the method. I also discuss the interview procedure and other means of data collection as well as my reflections on the interview process.

The life story interview: method and adaptation

In this study I sought participants' life stories, which, in line with the research question, were used to explore their lived experiences and their experiences of CP, as well as the meanings of these experiences. Life stories are useful resources for such a task. Robert Atkinson, widely regarded as the father of the life story interview, writes 'a life story narrative highlights the most important influences, experiences, circumstances, issues, themes, and lessons of a lifetime' (Atkinson, 2001: 125). At a more basic level, life stories are accounts of 'lived experience that [are] organized as a story' (Hammack & Cohler, 2009: 5). They are representations of lived experience depicted in narrative form. The narratives that are produced during interviews, however, do not 'transparently reflect experience, rather they give meaning to it' (Elliot, 2005: 24). Indeed, Mishler (1986) suggests that meaning is jointly constructed in interviews, and that this meaning comes to us in narrative form.

Life stories reveal more than simply personal experience and meaning. Indeed, because individuals are embedded in social worlds, personal narratives also reveal social structures and the dominant discourses, norms and shared understandings of particular cultures, times, and places. Interviews that cover the life course are well suited for documenting 'social structure, collectivities, and institutional change at the same time as personal life' (Connell, 1992: 738). As such, the narratives generated by life story interviews were an ideal medium for documenting participants' lived experiences and their experiences of CP, and for gaining insight into how these experiences were shaped by, and understood in, the contemporary UK context and in relation to wider relational models and discourses, in a period of institutional change.

Life stories can occur spontaneously in everyday life, but for research purposes life stories are generally elicited and co-constructed via in-depth interviews which vary in structure, length and focus. Interviews are the most common approach to collecting qualitative data in the social sciences. Holloway and Jefferson (2000: 10) write that 'face-to-face interviewing has become the most common type of qualitative research method used in order to find out about people's experiences in context, and the meanings these hold'. Methodologically speaking, individual interviews are unrivalled because they provide an undiluted focus on the individual, and an 'opportunity for the detailed investigation of people's personal perspectives, for in-depth understanding of the personal context within which the research phenomena are located, and for very detailed subject coverage […] the depth of focus and the opportunity they offer for clarification and detailed understanding' (Ritchie, 2003: 36-7).

The life story interview is one particular biographical interviewing method that produces personal narratives. Atkinson (2001) suggests that, 'as a method of looking at life as a whole, and as a way of carrying out in-depth study of individual lives, the life story interview stands alone' (123). Life stories, however, are not 'finished products ready to be "served up" on demand' (Rosenthal, 1993: 65), nor do they 'emerge from the innermost "self"' or 'fall from the

sky' (Riessman, 2008: 105). Rather, they are generated interactively in the context of an interview – they are co-constructed narratives. According to Mishler (1986) an interview is a 'joint production' – a form of discourse that is shaped and organized by 'what interviewees and interviewers talk about together and how they talk with each other' (vii). Many people enjoy telling stories and 'with a little encouragement will provide narrative accounts of their experiences in research interviews' (Elliott, 2005: 29). From the participants' point of view then, storytelling is a familiar activity which may put them at ease in the interview situation. It can also be empowering because participants are given 'a high degree of freedom to shape and order' the reconstructed narratives in their own way (Ritchie, 2003: 36). As such, life story interviewing is a rather ethical approach.

Life story interviews are generally broad and open and were, therefore, well-suited for this exploratory study of individual's experiences. However, any in-depth interview requires consideration of how to combine structure with flexibility. Wengraf's (2001) Biographical Narrative Interview Method combines ideas of the life course and narrative. However it is time-consuming, as it involves an initial interview and two follow-up interviews with each participant. Additionally, the explicated analytic procedure requires a team of co-researchers. The interviews in this study have been modelled along the lines of the Problem-Centred Interview (PCI) (Witzel, 2000). The PCI is a method that combines distinct interviewing styles into one session. It begins with an open narrative approach and then transitions to a semi-structured thematic approach, and can end with specific questioning if topics remain undiscussed or in need of further exploration. The PCI interview opens with a pre-formulated introductory question which serves as an invitation to narrate and specifies the broad theme that will frame the interview. This is an attempt to capture the gestalt sense of a participant's life story – allowing them to narrate what they remember, what they feel is relevant, what they want to reveal, and in their own language - without imposing too much interviewer structuring.

Data collection procedures

Individual interviews[9] were the primary means of collecting and generating data for this study. These interviews were conducted between December 2011 and August 2012. The interviews ranged from an hour and a half to nearly three hours in duration. They covered the life course but were thematically focused around CP.

My approach to the interviews was based on establishing rapport and trust with participants – I aimed to come across as friendly, non-judgmental, and professional but casual. Once participants and I had gone through the initial greetings, gone over the information sheet and consent form (both of which participants had seen previously), we began the interview proper. At the start of each interview I explained to participants that the interview would be like a guided conversation; they would have most of the floor to tell their stories, but I would also introduce questions, if needed, to ensure that we covered the topics on my topic guide (see appendix H for topic guide). I also reminded participants that their participation was completely voluntary, that they would not have to answer questions they did not want to, that the recorder could be turned off, and that they were free to stop the interview and/or withdraw from the study completely at any time. After covering the basics, I then invited participants to tell me their life story[10] – and specified the theme by asking them to tell me what they felt was relevant to their 'current position as a man in a civil partnership'.

Two participants were ready and able to speak for over an hour and a half with this invitation to narrate. I only had to provide occasional cursory nods and encouraging 'mmhmm's' for them to continue narrating. They provided fully formed stories covering their lives and most of the topics from the topic guide in some roundabout way. However, in the limited amount of time we had together I was not always able to probe them in order to develop the conversation around particular topics. Many participants struggled to find a place to start and took my suggestion to start from their childhood and move forward chronologically. Other participants provided brief synopses of their lives which were fleshed out as I probed their initial narrations and introduced questions in line with the topic guide. As such, most interviews proceeded as guided conversations. In line with the topic guide, the interviews generated narratives covering participants' biographies and the contexts shaping them, their experiences of becoming aware of, exploring, and disclosing their sexuality, their relational histories and

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[9] Given my interest in individuals' life stories, participants were interviewed as individuals rather than as couples.

[10] At the beginning of each interview I said something like the following to invite participants to narrate:

> *'I would* like to hear your life story, everything you think is relevant to your current position as a man in a civil partnership, start where you like, this will be like a conversation but you will have most of the floor, I will jump in with questions when you get stuck, as I have this topic guide here which is really just to remind me of the things I would like to cover with you. So, perhaps you *could start by telling me a bit about yourself…most people find it useful to start from childhood* and move forward in ti*me'.*

dynamics, their motivations for registering a CP, their experiences of announcing the decision to families and social networks, their experiences of planning for, constructing, and going through the day of their CPs, the impact and meaning of the event, their sexual and domestic arrangements, and their imagined futures.

At the end of the interviews I thanked participants for their stories and then asked them if there was anything they wanted to add – anything that I had not brought up or that they had particularly wanted to talk about. Most men thanked me and were pleased that the interview had made them reflect on their past and think about what was to come. Some participants said they were glad to contribute to research documenting personal experiences of a profound legal change. For example, one participant said: 'I think what you are doing is good. It's recording something that needs recording'. I then turned the recorder off and asked participants if they had any questions for me, as they had just willingly divulged so much about themselves. I happily answered their questions which were often along the lines of whether I had a partner and whether I was in a CP or planning to be. I then gave participants a pack for their safe-keeping; this included copies of the information sheet, the signed consent form and a referrals list (see appendix I) which I had developed in the event that a participant might need or want some form of support or information after our interview together. Finally, I asked participants if they wanted to receive research progress updates including preliminary analyses, conference abstracts and drafts of publications via email (see appendices L and M for examples). All agreed to this and I received several gracious responses to these emails. For example, one participant wrote: 'Your work is most impressive and I think an important contribution to the current debate […] all our actions and discussions help the cause and I am grateful for the contribution you are making'. Furthermore, some participants' responses to these emails validated my analyses and interpretation of their narratives (as will be discussed in section 8.4 of the discussion chapter).

While the primary means of data collection was through interviews, I also obtained demographic data prior to the interview via the 'Pre-interview demographic questionnaire' form (see appendix G). After the interviews I obtained further information, when necessary, via email. This was usually in relation to specific details that I had missed, to ask about something highlighted in subsequent interviews with other participants, or related to legislative changes that occurred during the data collection period. Indeed, the possibility of converting CP to civil marriage became a matter that entered the public consciousness while my study was ongoing. I was in the midst of participant recruitment and data collection when the Home Office published the Equal Civil Marriage consultation document in England and Wales (March 2012 to June 2012). I had not anticipated this so did not include it in my original interview topic guide, however, many participants were aware of the consultation and expressed their views on

whether and why they might choose to convert their CP. From then on I routinely asked participants about it. As for those that I had interviewed prior to the publication of the consultation document I sent them a hopeful email[11] requesting their views on the matter. Their responses were amended to their interview transcripts and included in analysis.

Reflections on interviewing

My expectations for the life story interview method were not always met in practice. I had relied on participants for life stories only to realize that telling a coherent life story without necessarily preparing for such deep reflection is a daunting prospect. The interactive interview situation is based on expectations and implicit assumptions. Participants probably had expectations about what an interview would be like and adopted the role of the interviewee – I ask the questions and they answer. Although I had a topic guide, I did not have specific questions prepared and this probably jarred with what they expected. It is certainly true, in my experience, that life stories are not ready to be served up on demand as Rosenthal (1993) has noted. Rather, I found that they were often co-constructed (Mishler, 1986), in dynamic interaction between the participants and me.

Although the interviews were thematically focused on CP (arguably not a sensitive topic), they covered potentially sensitive topics such as participants' awareness and exploration of sexuality, coming out, sex and relationship histories, as well as their sexual relationship with their current partners which included the topic of (non)monogamy. Most participants were comfortable recounting the general details of their biographies and describing their experiences of CP, as well as the potentially more sensitive topics just mentioned. However, other participants found even some seemingly ordinary topics, such as childhood experiences or family relationships, to be sensitive. Furthermore, given the trust and rapport developed between myself and the participants, and the amount of latitude they had to bring up their own topics, some participants introduced sensitive topics that I did not ask about, and had not

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[11] In the email I asked participants the following:

'You are probably aware of the Home Office's consultation on Equal Civil Marriage. The proposals being considered would allow same-sex couples who want to formalize their relationships in law to choose between civil partnership and civil marriage. For those who have already had a civil partnership there would be the opportunity to 'convert' (the word used in the consultation document) their civil partnership into a civil marriage, with the potential to have a ceremony attached to this process. I would be interested to know your views on this. If you have the time and a particular view on this I would appreciate if you could send me a written paragraph which I will amend to your interview transcript. This is completely optional but would certainly be appreciated. In your response could you explain why you would or wouldn't opt to convert your civil partnership into a civil marriage, and if you would convert it, why you would or wouldn't like to have another ceremony.'

anticipated (such as their HIV positive status or experiences of sex work). In these situations, I did not react immediately (at least not visibly), but rather responded calmly and sincerely after an appropriate amount of time.

I found that adopting an 'ethical researcher persona' and an 'empathetic, emotional orientation' was 'embodied work' which affected me just as much as it did participants (Kong, Mahoney & Plummer, 2003). I was able to establish rapport with most participants quite quickly. This is perhaps related to my own identity as a gay man in a relationship. Beyond this common point of reference, however, participants and I differed in many ways. I could easily identify with the stories of the younger participants whereas I could only empathize with the older participants who talked about their struggles to live openly as gay men and same-sex couples. I found the stories of participants from ethnic and cultural backgrounds different than my own particularly striking because their experiences were so far removed from my own. Participants told me about the joys of their journeys and the painful moments and periods in their lives. As such, I was often emotionally moved, whether to laughter or tears, during the interviews.

4.6 Analytic approach

The analytic and interpretive process begins during data collection and continues through the transcription process into writing up. I transcribed interviews myself to ensure that more accurate transcripts were produced. The process also immersed me in the data, thus alerting me to preliminary themes and patterns which were either developed or discounted during formal analysis. While transcribing I made notes, wrote analytic memos and engaged in some 'free-associative unstructured writing' to keep track of emerging ideas (Wengraf, 2001). Ultimately, transcription results in a text which can be considered a narrative. These narratives, however, cannot be presented as they are because they 'do not speak for themselves or have unanalysed merit,' rather, they 'require interpretation' (Riessman, 2005: 2). In this section, I describe the approach that I took to analysing and interpreting the narratives generated by the life story interviews I conducted with participants.

Despite reading around grounded theory and various strands of discourse analysis, I had an early affinity for narrative analysis which, unsurprisingly, lends itself to life story research (Plummer, 2001). While grounded theory may be useful for exploring focused aspects of experience, it is not a biographical method. Furthermore, grounded theory analysis is governed by specific procedures and guidelines. Because I sought a flexible approach to analysis and was interested in participant's lived experiences and how these experiences were shaped by their biographies, a grounded theory approach to analysis did not seem appropriate. Although I was particularly interested in discourse analysis (Wood & Kroger, 2000; Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002)

at one stage, I came to the conclusion that as an overriding approach it was too linguistic and micro for my purposes. I was interested in the content of participants' narratives, not how and why they used language to tell stories about those experiences. Overall, narrative analysis seemed to offer a broader and more flexible way of looking at interview transcripts.

Narrative analysis is a 'family of methods for interpreting texts that have in common a storied form' (Riessman, 2008: 11). This 'family of methods' includes an array of contemporary approaches to narrative analysis. For example, methods of thematic, structural, interactional, and performative narrative analysis have been outlined by Riessman (2005), and Grbich (2007) has described socio-linguistic and socio-cultural approaches. The structural, interactional, and performative methods, as well as the socio-linguistic approaches, however, are focused either on the structure and sequence of stories or how and why a narrative is told or performed. Given my interest in the content and context of participants' narratives, I focused on thematic narrative analysis and socio-cultural narrative analysis.

The fundamental difference between thematic narrative analysis and other theme-oriented methods of analysing qualitative material (Chase 2005), including grounded theory (Riessman 2008), is that narrative analysts first look at individual narratives before looking across cases. According to Chase (2005) this case-based commitment means that 'rather than locating distinct themes across interviews, narrative researchers listen first to the voices within each narrative' (663). Thematic analysis in the narrative tradition also aims 'to preserve sequence and the wealth of detail contained in long sequences'; it aims to keep stories intact rather than fragmenting them into themes that cut across cases (Riessman, 2008: 74). In thematic analysis the 'emphasis is on the content of a text, "what" is said more than "how" it is said, the "told" rather than the "telling".' (Riessman, 2005: 2). While narrative analysis emphasizes a case-based approach, it also allows for theorization 'across a number of cases' based on 'common thematic elements across research participants and the events they report' (Riessman, 2005: 3). Case studies and vignettes are commonly used to provide illustration of the themes.

According to Grbich (2007), socio-cultural approaches to narrative analysis go 'beyond language structures to the broader interpretive frameworks that people use to make sense of everyday happenings/episodes, usually involving past-present-future linking' (130). This approach moves the focus from the order and sequence of past events, and allows narrative analysts to look at how an unfolding story may be linked thematically, rather than chronologically. With regard to time, the past is not the only temporality of concern, indeed, future and imaginary events and experiences provide important insights into expectations and aspirations. Within the text analysts look for contextual clues because personal narratives

'reflect culture, ideology and socialisation, but also provide insights into the political and historical climates impacting on the storytellers' lives' which can inform interpretations of the narratives (130).

Formal analysis procedures

While the process of transcribing the interviews verbatim served as a preliminary stage in analysis, the formal analysis began only after all interviews had been completed, transcribed and loaded (as transcripts) into ATLAS.ti, the software package used to organize and manage the data. My approach to the formal analysis of participants' narratives combined aspects of thematic narrative analysis (Riessman, 2008) and socio-cultural narrative analysis (Grbich, 2007). The procedures for both of these methods of narrative analysis are outlined next, and then followed with a description of how I integrated them for this study.

Thematic narrative analysis

A key objective in narrative analysis is an attempt to 'keep the "story" intact for interpretive purposes' (Riessman, 2008: 74). However, keeping the story intact does not require that a transcript is presented as is. Life story narratives are 'typically long, full of asides, comments, flashbacks, flashforwards, orientation, and evaluation' and it would be 'naive to think one can "just present the story" without some systematic method of reduction' (Riessman, 1993: 43). For analytic purposes narratives often need to be re-arranged and reduced in length but the key is to maintain a gestalt sense of the narrative; to keep the 'core narrative' while 'rendering the "whole story" into a form that allows for comparison' (Riessman, 1993: 43). Riessman (2008) describes thematic narrative analysis as a process in which:

> 'The investigator works with a single interview at a time, isolating and ordering relevant episodes into a chronological biographical account. After the process has been completed for all interviews, the researcher zooms in, identifying the underlying assumptions in each account and naming (coding) them. Particular cases are then selected to illustrate general patterns – range and variation – and the underlying assumptions of different cases are compared' (57).

Socio-cultural narrative analysis

Grbich (2007) outlines the process of socio-cultural narrative analysis which entails:

- Exploring both the content and context of the narrative/story

- Comparing the stories told by one individual to those of others

- Linking stories to wider cultural, political and historical influences

- Interpreting the stories reflexively (130-131).

Integrating narrative analysis methods

Integrating aspects of the two narrative analysis methods explicated above resulted in the following process. The text in bold signifies which aspects of the above explicated procedures I integrated:

1. In the first step I worked through a **'single interview'** transcript at a time, selecting and labelling (i.e., coding) excerpts and quotations from the narratives in accordance with the codes of biography and context[12]. After coding the entire transcript, I then selected the excerpts and quotations coded as 'biography' and arranged them chronologically to construct a **'chronological biographical account'**. Having also coded for context, I was able to explore **'both the content and context'** of the stories and thus take account of the influence of **'wider cultural, political and historical'** contexts linked to these stories. This process provided me with a holistic understanding of participants' lived experiences and the contexts shaping these experiences. Furthermore, the process enabled me to identify the **'underlying assumptions'** or **'core-narratives'** underpinning participants' life stories. As will be discussed in the preface to the findings chapters, these core-narratives were either familiar stories of struggle and resilience or new narratives of normality. The **'chronological biographical account'** developed at this stage served as a basic sketch for the case biography that I wrote for each participant at a later stage (see appendix K for an example of a case biography). Although these case biographies were of varying quality and comprehensiveness, they nonetheless provided a narrative which furthered my holistic 'understanding of participants' lived experience and the contexts shaping them.

2. After the first step was completed for all participants' transcripts, I then began the process of iterative coding which allowed me to further explore the corpus of the data as a whole. While the first step focused on identifying themes within individual participants' narratives, this second step allowed me to identify themes and patterns across different participants' narratives. I revisited each participant's transcript at least

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[12] I also coded, at this stage, for discourse but as analysis proceeded, this seemed to be less salient for my understanding of participants' experiences. I do, however, discuss the 'masculine' and 'gay male' discourses used by some participants with regard to (non)monogamy (see section 7.4).

three times to refine and revise my coding by re-coding, splitting, merging and deleting codes as appropriate. Once satisfied with coding I then arranged codes into tentative categories based on chronological order and thematic content (see appendix J for code list and how I arranged these into tentative categories).

3. Once I was satisfied with coding and the tentative thematic categories I had identified, I then transitioned to writing up. I was then able to begin the processes of linking and **'comparing the stories told by one individual to those of others'**. Writing up also allowed me to more clearly link participants' narratives to contexts and thus begin **'interpreting stories reflexively'** in line with these contexts (socio-historical/generational), as well as socio-demographic characteristics including age, relationship duration, ethnicity and cultural backgrounds (discussed next). Analysis and interpretation continued, and changed, during the write up as new insights and links between the data, or between the data and previous findings and/or theory, became evident.

Linking narratives to contexts and interpreting stories reflexively

As mentioned previously (see section 1.4), participants' social identities and sexual minority status as gay men were key to understanding their lived experiences in general, and their experiences of CP. Thus, I decided to employ minority stress theory (Meyer, 1995; 2003) as the main component of my interdisciplinary interpretive framework. Apart from their common identities as gay men, participants' narratives were nuanced by ethnic, cultural, geographical, and generational backgrounds as well as relationship duration. Among these, age/generation and relationship duration were particularly salient dimensions bearing on my interpretation of their narratives.

Given the salience of generation, I identified the participants of this study into 'older' and 'younger' cohorts based on the age at which they entered CPs, and their generational experiences. **Table 3** (see page 89) shows how I identified participants according to age/generation. The ten participants classified as 'younger' were aged up to 34 when they entered CPs. They were born between 1977 and 1987 and aged between 24 and 35 at the time of interview. They came of age between 1995 and 2005, after legal recognition schemes for recognizing same-sex relationships were in place in several countries. Coming of age after the mid-1980s, they are products of what Parks (1999) terms the 'gay rights era'. This was an era of increased visibility, tolerance and acceptance of gay lives, and relationships, as well as equalities legislation including the CPA. This categorization parallels that of Heaphy, Smart & Einarsdottir's (2013) study of younger same-sex couples' experiences of CP. Both members of each of the couple were 35 or younger when they entered CPs. This generational cohort was

described as the first to grow up with 'the relative visibility and ordinariness of same-sex relationships from an early age, and who could claim relational citizenship via civil partnership or "marriage" for most of their adult lives' (Heaphy, Smart & Einarsdottir, 2013: viii).

The eighteen participants classed as 'older' were aged 35 or above when they entered CPs. These men were born between 1939 and 1971 and aged between 40 and 72 when I met them for interviews. They came of age (reached 18) between 1957 and 1989. Although the 'older' participants represent more than one generation as distinguished in previous academic work examining the life stories of LGB people (Parks, 1999; Hammack, 2005; Hall, 2009), they all came of age before 1989 when Denmark became the first country in the world to extend legal recognition to same-sex relationships couples. These men could be classed as coming from either the 'pre-Stonewall era' or the 'gay liberation era' according to Parks (1999). The 'pre-Stonewall era' occurred post-World War II and prior to the gay liberation movement and was 'oppressive and punitive for homosexuals', and characterized by minimal visibility and relative silence (Parks, 1999: 349-50). It was a time when homosexuals were labelled by medical/psychiatric institutions as 'sick' (Parks, 1999) and were generally represented as 'mad, bad, or sad' (Richardson & Monro, 2012: 83). Indeed, it was not until 1967 that homosexual behavior among men over 21 years of age was partially decriminalized[13], and not until 1974 that homosexuality was declassified as a mental illness[14]. Those who came of age in the 'gay liberation era,' which began in 1969 after the Stonewall Inn riots in New York City and lasted until roughly the early 1980s (Parks, 1999), experienced the relaxation of social attitudes regarding sex and sexuality. They also had access to increasingly visible and political representations of gay identities. However, this liberal era was short-lived as a new era of conservatism rose in the late 1970s-early 1980s (Parks, 1999) which was then followed by the AIDS crisis and a concomitant backlash in social attitudes towards homosexuality. Legal recognition for their same-sex relationships only became possible for this group in 2005 when CP was introduced.

Not only are these generational categories useful in terms of locating participants' lived and imagined experiences in historical time but they are also faithful to participants' accounts. Indeed, during interviews participants commonly located their narratives generationally. Older participants were often rather explicit in referencing generational time, prefacing their stories with phrases like: 'Men of my generation […]', or, 'I come from a vastly different era […]'. Younger participants, on the other hand, seemingly assumed that I, having grown up in the same era as them, shared similar experiences.

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[13] In the UK this was achieved by the Sexual Offences Act of 1967.

[14] In 1974 homosexuality was removed from the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual (DSM).

Table 3: Categori*zing 'y*ounger' and 'o*lder'* participants					
*although this table shows both participants' age at the time of interview and the time of CP, these generational categorizations were based on their age at the time they entered CPs.					
'Younger' (n=10)			**'Older' (n=18)**		
Name	**Age at interview**	**Age at CP**	**Name**	**Age at interview**	**Age at CP**
Rishi	24	22	Thanos	40	35
Kareem	28	25	Kumar	40	39
Bryce	29	27	Eric	42	38
Chen	30	29	Steven	45	44
Ethan	30	27	Mark	45	40
Sean	31	29	Liam	45	40
Hugh	32	31	Sunil	48	43
Ryan	33	28	Mitchell	49	48
Andrew	33	29	Nathan	50	46
Emin	35	31	Jens	51	46
			Klaus	52	46
			Adam	54	50
			Daniel	55	50
			Irving	60	55
			Cameron	62	58
			George	65	60
			Oscar	72	67
			William	72	67

Apart from generation, relationship duration was another salient factor to consider when interpreting participants' narratives. **Table 4** (see next page) shows how I identified participants according to relationship duration. Half of the twenty four couples represented in the study had sustained their relationships for over seven years, and up to a maximum of thirty-eight years, before they entered CPs and were thus in 'established' relationships. Seven years may seem an arbitrary way to define 'established' relationships, however, it was a convenient point at which to divide the sample in two. Furthermore, several participants in established relationships discussed, or made reference to, the fact that they had surpassed the seven year mark, and had thus overcome the 'seven-year-itch' phenomenon. The remaining participants who had entered CPs before they had reached the seven year mark in their relationships were classed as being in 'new(er) relationships'. These participants' relationships were not only definitively shorter in duration (that is, six years or less), but were also less likely to have fortified their relationships

with the legal protections and/or private and practical commitments common to established couples.

Table 4: Categori*zing 'new(er)' and 'established' relationships*	
* Participants' names are in bold text and followed, after a backslash, with their partner's name; underlined relationships indicate that both members of a couple were interviewed, albeit separately.	
New(er) relationships (n=12) (up to 6 years together at time of CP)	**Established relationships (n=12)** (7 or more years together at time of CP)
Sean/Phil**:** 6 years **Adam/Nathan:** 5 years **Ethan/**Conor**:** 5 years **Liam/**Craig**:** 4 years **Bryce/**Jason**:** 4 years **Emin/**Lee**:** 3 years **Hugh/**Alex**:** 3 years **Kareem/**Irfan**:** 3 years **Cameron/**Tai**:** 2 years **Ryan/**Kurt**:** 1 year **Chen/**Miles**:** 1 year **Rishi/**Cole**:** 1 year	**William/**Damian**:** 38 years **George/**Patrick**:** 36 years **Steven/**Oli**:** 22 years **Mark/Irving:** 21 years **Daniel/Jens:** 19 years **Oscar/Eric:** 15 years **Mitchell/**Leo**:** 15 years **Andrew/**Ben**:** 11 years **Thanos/**Riccardo**:** 10 years **Kumar/**Ian**:** 10 years **Klaus/**Peter**:** 8 years **Sunil/**Charles**:** 7 years

4.7 Re-presenting narratives as collective stories of gay life: issues of representation and reflexivity

As discussed in the last section (section 4.6), through analysis I identified themes within and across cases. Given my interest in individual participants' life stories and the contextual basis of their narratives, I did not want to fragment their narratives completely into themes that cut across cases. I also did not want to present these themes randomly or decontextualize them. Rather, my vision was to write a collective narrative, highlighting common themes as well as divergent experiences, peppered with illustrative case-based narrative vignettes that took account of the contexts shaping participants' biographies and experiences.

In writing the three findings chapters (chapters 5-7), I took on board the argument that 'deeper insights can be obtained by synthesising, interlocking and comparing the accounts of a number of respondents' (Snape & Spencer, 2003: 21). Indeed, such a 'diversity of perspectives' can add 'richness to our understanding of the various ways in which' different people's lives have unfolded as well as how different people experience a particular life event, such as CP (Snape & Spencer, 2003: 19-20). As such, I decided to piece participants' narratives together into an account which highlights common themes across their life stories and the core-narratives

underpinning their life stories. This amalgamation of individual stories into a wider account is what Richardson (1990) terms a 'Collective Story'. A collective story 'displays an individual's story by narrativizing the experiences of the social category to which the individual belongs, rather than by telling the particular individual's story' (Richardson, 1990: 25).

The process of constructing a collective story is not straightforward. Indeed, I found the process to be riddled with tension between wanting to show individual's stories and wanting to show the collective story. Furthermore, constructing a collective story may 'gloss over ambiguities and complexities', 'hugely distort the differences' or over-emphasize similarities between participants (Plummer, 2001: 31). My (imperfect) solution was to select compelling and representative excerpts from participants' narratives to illustrate common experiences, themes and life course patterns, as well as unique or unusual ones. This approach allowed me to present common thematic elements and to keep some stories intact in the form of narrative vignettes (presented as longer quotations). While my bias may have been to demonstrate that becoming and being civilly partnered was largely a positive experience, for balance I also made sure to include negative aspects of participants' experiences. To display core-narratives underpinning participants' life stories, some participants' life stories were threaded through multiple chapters and linked via references between sections. I also paid particular attention to generational experience and the nuanced experiences of those from ethnic or cultural backgrounds different than my own.

While difficult, the effort was worthwhile as collective stories have power in relation to their counterpart – cultural stories. According to Andrews (2002), counter-narratives are 'the stories which people tell and live which offer resistance, either implicitly or explicitly, to dominant cultural narratives' (1). While cultural stories take the perspective of the dominant group and do not challenge the status quo, collective stories give voice to marginalized social actors, and may lead to social change (Richardson, 1990). Furthermore, new stories provide new representations which inform new life patterns and new identities (Richardson, 1990). This was, indeed, an aim of the research.

Re-presenting participants' stories was not a neutral activity. I had the power, as the researcher, to use their narratives to construct this thesis, for my own purposes. The life story narratives represented and re-presented in this thesis are drawn from 900 pages of text (transcribed interviews) and so I had to make choices about what to include in representing and re-presenting their narratives. There is always the critique that I selected certain stories. There is also the critique that I framed participants' stories in particular ways. Indeed, as already acknowledged, my public health background compelled me to consider the salience of well-being and minority stress.

As I was aware that some participants might be concerned with how they would be represented in this thesis and potentially to wider audiences through dissemination, I refer to them with a pseudonym[15] and have changed or removed all other identifying information (area of residence, place of work, where they socialized) as well as the names of family members or friends they mentioned.

As Heaphy (2008) cautions, the narratives we social scientists produce about the LGB lives we study are 'partial' as they represent some, but not all, experiences, reflect our biases and pre-existing conceptions, and are involved in 'flows of power'. Thus, we need to be reflexive and acknowledge these limits. Furthermore, he makes the point that much research on gay lives has a 'normative' thrust or an 'affirmative, liberationist or emancipatory' agenda which 'valorises' the experiences of some and makes 'invisible' the experiences of others. Usually, 'the versions of reality that are represented tend to be those which fit most closely with the sociological narrator's own experience of the world, and resonate with their own values' (paragraph 5.3).

As mentioned earlier (see section 1.5), one of my personal-political reasons for undertaking this study was to emphasize the humanness and ordinariness of being gay and the not so uncommon desires for committed coupledom, marriage and family. While this could be read as pushing a 'normative' agenda, or seeking to represent 'versions of reality' that resonate with my own 'values' and 'experiences of the world', it could also be read as being reflexive, as a researcher, about how I would re-present/represent participants as gay men. Indeed, Heaphy (2008) suggests that social researchers might want to revisit the conceptions of gay men they have constructed. These conceptions typically construct gay men (and lesbians) as reflexive and 'self-conscious' social actors who are expected to 'be in the vanguard of radical political change with regard to their personal relationships' (Heaphy, Smart & Einarsdottir, 2013: 165-6). This conception, however, may be at odds with how many LGB people live their lives. Indeed, many seek, and indeed live, rather ordinary lives.

The collective story which follows is based on my analysis and interpretation of participants' experiences and relied on re-presenting parts of their narratives, and making sure that I represented them anonymously but accurately even if they were taken out of the wider narrative of their life story. I also ensured that I represented all participants. Because I did not include perspectives of gay men who have not formalized a same-sex relationship, this thesis should not be read as a general account of gay life. Rather, it should be read as a rich descriptive

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[15] Initially I had thought they could self-choose a pseudonym, but ultimately I decided to assign my own.

interpretation of the lived experiences of gay men in CPs, which takes account of their biographies and the contexts shaping them.

Preface to the three findings chapters

Whilst reading the following three findings chapters there are a few points to bear in mind. Firstly, participant's narratives must be understood as situated stories, arising out of a unique historical moment in which CP was the only available option for same-sex couples in the UK who wanted to legally formalize their relationships. Legislative changes in England, Wales and Scotland, have brought that moment to a close and have also called into question the future of CP. Secondly, as discussed in section 4.6, relationship duration and age/generation emerged as important aspects to consider when analysing participants' narratives. As such, throughout the findings chapters I refer to participants in 'established' and 'new(er)' relationships and to 'older' and 'younger' participants as defined in section 4.6. Third, for the sake of simplicity and consistency I refer to participants as 'gay' men. All the participants understood and used the term 'gay' to describe themselves during the interviews, including the two participants who self-identified as 'queer' or 'mostly gay' on the pre-interview demographic questionnaire. Fourthly, different participants used different language to talk about CP, their ceremonies and their partners. Some embraced the language of marriage – using terms such as 'marriage', 'wedding', and 'husband.' Other participants slipped into the language of marriage on occasion while others used it for the sake of convenience. In contrast, a few participants - preferring terms such as 'civil partnership', 'civil partnership ceremony', and 'civil partner' - maintained clear distinctions between CP and marriage throughout the interviews. Depending on how a given participant thought of or referred to CP I decided to use both civil partnership (abbreviated to CP) and 'marriage' (in quotation marks), and sometimes interchangeably. In the remainder of this preface I consider the salience of generation in participants' narratives.

Generational stories

As I examined participants' life stories and compared them with each other, a distinct pattern, related to generational context, emerged. The oldest participant was born in 1939, and the youngest in 1987. This gap of nearly fifty years is a period of social history marked not only by broad social change, but also by a number of socio-cultural and legal changes that affected the lives of gay men in the UK. These changes were reflected in the participants' life stories. Sixty-five-year-old George, for example, acknowledged that within his lifetime – and specifically, within the 'last forty years' - gay identity had 'gone unbelievably from the most, just about the most, negative and damaging and worthless sort of status into being something that is getting quite close to being sort of mainstream'. Overall, participants' stories were generational stories (Plummer, 2009); that is, their stories were about identities, lives and relationships forged at particular times and in particular places. Participants' narratives not only reflected the changing contexts in which they lived their lives, but also revealed how they coped with this change

alongside the adverse social contexts they faced, to varying degrees, as a result of their gay social identities and same-sex relationships.

Two core-narratives underpinned participants' life story narratives. Older participants tended to tell familiar stories of struggle and resilience whereas younger participants tended to relay new narratives of normality, resulting in a dialectical collection of stories of extraordinary and ordinary lives and relationships, respectively. The following excerpts represent these contrasting generational core-narratives:

Oscar, 72 years old - a story of struggle and resilience:

> *'It's been a long road for me [...] I'm from a vastly different era. I was born in* the 30s, *uh '39 and I grew up in the 40s and 50s when there wasn't such a thing* as a gay person. Uh, I grew up in a provincial town which was even um more *isolating. I didn't have the language to call myself gay when I was younger because I didn't know there was su*ch a thing. Um my parents never ever in the *whole of their lives talked to me about any form of sex whatsoever [...] Men of* my generation, you dare not mention the fact that you were attracted to other *men, you daren't. And so the concept of marriage never entered your psyche.'*

Bryce, 29 years old - a new narrative of normality:

> *'By the time I'd met Jason the civil partnership had gone through and it all* started and to me it sort of seemed like the next sort of step in your relationship was to get married *cuz I didn't really see us as being any different to any other couple that I know [...] It isn't such a different world growing up gay, to be honest [...] you can grow up, you can get married when you meet somebody that you love, and it's not something that is* illegal like it used to be years ago and, I mean there are other social issues that go along with it on the way, but at the end of the day you can grow up and you can get married just the same as *anybody else.'*

Like Oscar, many of the older participants struggled to come to terms with their homosexuality and found the idea of marrying another man inconceivable for most of their lives and into adulthood. Their stories of struggle, and their prior understanding that marriage between two men was inconceivable, are products of the eras in which they grew up. As outlined in section 4.6, these eras were invariably characterized by: the relative invisibility of homosexuality and the lack of positive role models for gay life and same-sex relationships; the

pervasive silence surrounding sex and sexuality in general; and, understandings of homosexuality either as illegal or as a mental illness.

In contrast to Oscar's narrative, Bryce's narrative was illustrative of the younger participants' generation. Their new narratives of normality, as well as their aspirations or expectations for 'marriage,' are products of the era in which they grew up. As outlined previously (again, see section 4.6), this was an era of increased visibility, tolerance and acceptance of gay lives and relationships, the implementation of various forms of same-sex relationship recognition across the (Western) world, as well as equalities legislation in the UK including the Civil Partnership Act of 2004. Notwithstanding the fact that it was legally possible to 'marry' via CP at an early point in their adult lives, in many of the younger men's narratives it is evident that relationships and marriage were not as inconceivable as for earlier generations. Indeed, some of these younger men not only imagined, but expected these things. Furthermore, underpinning most of the younger men's visions of committed relationships, marriage, weddings, and families, was their sense of normality. Nearly all of them said they did not think of themselves as 'different' from their heterosexual peers and therefore were entitled to the same life experiences.

Although a generational pattern was observed, there were exceptions and variations. Indeed, some younger participants' stories were inflected with struggle and some older men did not emphasize this theme as strongly as others. Some participants' stories were further nuanced by their struggles to reconcile their gay social identities with their faith and/or minority ethnic backgrounds. One such example is Kareem, a 28-year-old British-born Pakistani man who reflected on his coming to terms with his sexuality as a gay Asian Muslim. Indeed, he said that for a while there did not seem to be 'a long term solution to being gay and Asian and Muslim'. Although Kareem's life story was strongly inflected with his struggles to reconcile his ethnic, faith and gay identities, it also highlighted the relative normality that he, as a younger participant, felt:

> *'The average Asian Muslim boy wants to get married, to settle down, to have* sex (chuckles), to have a family, to have a great job, to have a great car, to look good - I *want exactly the same thing. I don't see myself as any different and I always felt that I [...] had the same rights as a heterosexual person [...] I always knew that I* wanted to end up with a guy and spend a monogamous relationship and marriage with a guy cuz *that's what I always wanted' (Kareem, 28).*

The following three findings chapters are structured in a more or less chronological fashion. The core-narratives discussed above are implicit throughout and identified where appropriate. I also draw attention, where appropriate, to how participants' experiences relate to the findings of previous studies. Finally, I want to highlight that sections of the following three

chapters also appear, in altered forms, in a book chapter entitled: *'A Novel Gay 'Right' of* Passage: Constructing Ceremonies, Conveying Meaning and Displaying Identities through *Men's Civil Partnerships'* (Stocker, McKeown & Hardy, 2014, in press), a copy of which can be found in appendix M.

Chapter 5: (extra)Ordinary lives, relationships, and reasons for civil partnership

This first findings chapter contextualizes participants' experiences of CP by considering their lives and relationships prior to CP, as well as the meanings and motivations they articulated in explaining why they formalized their relationships via CP, after it had become possible to do so.

Many participants claimed that their relationships were as 'ordinary' and 'normal' as 'any other couples'. Yet, their narratives revealed that their relationships, and lived experiences generally, were also distinctive and extraordinary. Participants' narratives were extraordinary because despite the relatively adverse social contexts they faced, given their stigmatized social identities and minority status, they displayed resilience both in their individual lives and same-sex relationships.

As discussed in the preface to the three findings chapters, the extraordinariness and ordinariness I identified in participants' narratives was closely linked to the social and historical contexts in which their lives and relationships unfolded and developed. Indeed, the prospect and possibility of leading a relatively 'ordinary' life as a sexual minority is the product of recent history (Heaphy, Smart & Einarsdottir, 2013). Although gay lives and relationships are increasingly tolerated and accepted, and although the 'defining story' of LGB lives may no longer centre around 'prejudice, heterosexism or homophobia' (Heaphy, Smart & Einarsdottir, 2013: 7), LGB lives do remain subject to residual social stigma and continue to be marginalized. In other words, gay lives and relationships continue to unfold and develop in social contexts that, while changing, have been, and continue to be, characterized by relative adversity. Indeed, much like the stressors outlined in Meyer's (1995, 2003) theory of minority stress (see section 1.4a), Green (2004) has identified three interrelated risk factors unique to the development of same-sex relationships. These include: internal and external homophobia; lower levels of family and social support; and the lack of a normative and legal template for same-sex relationships.

Despite the residual stigma, social stress and unique risk factors faced by LGB people and same-sex couples, research has shown that they have nonetheless created and sustained lasting relationships based on love, commitment, care and mutual responsibilities (Mattison & McWhirter, 1984; Kurdek, 2005a; Herek, 2006). In other words, gay couples, and the individuals composing them, display aspects of resilience. Indeed, Green (2004) suggests that same-sex couples who formalize their relationships are 'highly resilient' and may be among the most resilient of all same-sex couples because they have successfully coped with the risk factors that pervade their very existence.

In this chapter I discuss first the development of participants' 'ordinary' relationships and argue that their claims to ordinariness are contingent on recent changes in social context which have made these claims possible. In the second section I discuss participants' minority stress experiences related to the adverse social contexts in which they have lived their lives. I then consider the coping strategies and resilience processes that participants employed to validate their lives, and to support, strengthen and legitimize their same-sex relationships before CP was available. Finally, I discuss participants' motivations for entering CPs, and their subsequent experiences of informing family and social networks and inviting guests.

5.1 Ordinary routes to ordinary relationships

In this section the ordinariness of participants' relationships is discussed. As the following quotations illustrate, many participants considered their relationships, and the way in which their relationships proceeded through time, to be as 'normal' and 'ordinary' as 'any other couple's' including the relationships of their parents, siblings, friends and colleagues:

- *'Our relationship pretty mu*ch parallels really what a normal heterosexual *couple have' (Eric, 42).*

- *'I think in many ways it's quite similar to my parents' (Nathan, 51).*

- *'I would say it's quite hard to distinguish us from any other couple' (Adam, 54).*

In making these claims to ordinariness and comparing their relationships to their parents, for example, participants not only drew parallels across lines of sexuality but also across generations. These claims of ordinariness, however, need to be understood as temporally situated claims. It is perhaps unsurprising that younger participants claimed that their lives and relationships were ordinary, given the relatively tolerant social contexts in which they lived as compared to older participants. However, I would argue that older participants' claims to ordinariness were also possible after they retrospectively reinterpreted their relationships anew. For example, George considered his relationship, and the way it developed through time, to be ordinary. The excerpt from his narrative below reveals this. However, it is unlikely that George would have felt the same way in the early 1970s when he met his partner. Indeed, they met on the brink of the gay liberation movement, a few years after male homosexual behaviour was partially decriminalized in Britain in 1967 and just before homosexuality was declassified as a mental illness in 1974. As such, George had grown up in a social context in which, according to his description, gay lives were 'difficult' and 'repressed'. It was a context in which gay men were 'criminals', 'ostracized', and 'subjected' to 'obscene and utterly misguided medical interventions', 'imprisonment' and the possibility of losing their jobs, homes and property if

'caught'. Despite this adverse social context, at the time of the interview, George had reinterpreted his life and relationship from his current, more contemporary perspective. The following excerpt from his narrative shows that he not only considered his relationship to be ordinary, but also highlighted the ordinary routes by which his relationship had developed:

> *'Like any couple we didn't sit analysing anything really in our relationship we just kind* of met and we knew we wanted to have sex, we had sex, we knew we wanted to have *more sex, we had more sex [...] very rapid*ly we became very close and uh, really within a matter of weeks or perhaps a few short months we just seemed absolutely to be, you *know, to become a pair and to love each other [...] and eventually we decided we wanted to live together [...] in the early years*, you might not consciously be doing this, *but you're kind of nest-building almost, you're scrimping and saving, and decorating, you're furnishing, you're buying your house, and creating your life, and that's* - so *there's nothing wildly homosexual about that or gay, or special, it's just what I think most people do'* (George, 65).

George's narrative extract above alludes to several themes common in participants' accounts of ordinary relationship development. Therefore, to organize and present participants' stories about how their relationships unfolded and developed in ordinary ways, prior to their culmination in CP, I discuss the following four themes: (a) initial interactions and attractions; (b) courtship, bonding and integration; (c) relationship definition and commitments; and (d), common couple conflicts and challenges.

Initial interactions and attractions

Most people, regardless of sexual orientation, value physical appearance and personality traits in potential partners, meet partners in conventional ways - through friends, at work, at a bar or social event, and increasingly seek partners via dating websites on the internet, and then rely on ordinary dating scripts (Peplau & Fingerhut, 2007). Indeed, most participants met, or were introduced to, their partners in these ways. It is notable, however, that three quarters of the participants met their partners in predominantly gay social settings. These settings included the gay commercial scene - centred around pubs, bars and clubs – and gay-specific social groups, oriented around activities and pursuits (beyond the commercial scene) such as walking groups and gay men's choirs. Many participants met through personal adverts in magazines or newspapers or online through popular gay dating websites, where many gay men seeking relationships and/or sexual encounters maintain personal profiles. Some participants were actively looking for a partner/relationship while others were seeking sexual encounters, which, in a few cases subsequently developed into relationships, and eventually into CPs. A quarter of the participants met their partners in social contexts that were not gay-oriented. Of these, three

met in social, professional or educational settings, three met randomly – either walking down the street or while on holiday abroad - and one reconnected with a previous acquaintance.

In telling stories about their current relationships participants commonly drew on discourses of romantic love, describing their partners as 'soul-mates', their meeting as 'fate' and 'love at first sight'. For example, Daniel and Jens were introduced by a mutual friend in a gay bar. Daniel said that he was 'instantly' drawn to Jens, not only physically but also because he perceived something special in Jens, what he termed 'a different quality'. He remembered thinking 'this man is going to become important in my life' and 'we're going to be soul mates'. Other participants considered the event of meeting their partner a fateful moment. For example, Cameron was in his mid-50s when he went on a holiday to Thailand where, by 'chance' and 'fate', he met his current partner Tai:

> *'We met at the beach [...] and just by chance we bumped into each other again on the street...and, nothing, nothing happened, and I said "oh I shouldn't do this. He looks nice, he seems to be interested, but you know...Thailand and Thai men...come on get real" so I walked away again (chuckles) and we bumped into each other in a hotel and started to talk, so, I don't believe in fate, on the other hand it seemed to be, you know...I've...I fell in love with him' (Cameron, 62).*

For Kareem, the event of meeting his partner was not a fateful moment but a 'Hollywood moment'. Like many of the men in new(er) relationships Kareem initially came to know his current partner Irfan through a gay dating website. Although Kareem was not particularly 'impressed' by the photos on Irfan's profile he was, to his surprise, overwhelmed by his physical attraction to Irfan when they met in person:

> *'I know it's gonna sound like cheesy but you know tho*se Hollywood moments that are like slow-motion and the world just stops and you know I just see this really, really tall guy, like six foot, um tall um slim but very well-toned and very like you know athletic build and short hair and very fair skin and just gorgeous dark features with facial hair *and he'd just come from work and he was in his shirt and tie and um uh trousers - really handsome!' (Kareem, 28).*

Like Kareem, many participants were initially attracted to their partner's physical appearance but other factors were also important. Indeed, some men cited that physical attraction was not a dimension of their initial interactions. Rather, this was something that 'built up' over time.

> *'I didn't fancy him straight away, I just was quite happy to be in h*is company and

whatnot. Um and that sort of only built up over the sort of next couple of weeks' (Bryce, 29).

Other participants were primarily drawn to their partners on an intellectual and/or emotional level, or were attracted to personality traits. Adam and Nathan, for example, met through a gay and lesbian walking group which they had both recently joined. After their first conversation Adam 'really liked' Nathan because he was 'interesting' and 'very nice'. Nathan appreciated that Adam was 'interested' in what he was saying and felt they shared 'similar ideas'. Similarly, Hugh said that although his partner Alex is not his 'type' in terms of physical appearance, that he had a 'gut instinct' and was drawn to Alex based on 'how he made me feel' and the fact that they 'seemingly had a lot of the same interests' and 'seemed to get on really, really well'.

Sex was another important factor in many men's initial interactions. Indeed a few participants initially met their current partners in the context of an intentionally pre-arranged sexual encounter. Other men spoke of what they presumed would be 'one-night stands' which subsequently turned into relationships. Other men described how they 'ended up in bed' on their first date. However, contrary to popular conceptions that gay men are inherently hyper-sexual or promiscuous several men reported that they did not have sex with their partners straight away. In some cases, the fact that sex did not happen 'on the first night' made their current relationship 'different' from others in the past:

> *'We didn't end up having sex on the first night [...] we met a couple of times, uh, and we didn't really have sex as fast at that time, because we wanted to get to know each* other. And it made, it made our relationship different *for the both of us' (Thanos, 40).*

Courtship, bonding and integration

While attraction, desire and sex brought couples together in the first place, a sense of togetherness developed through courtship, bonding and integration. Many men spoke about ordinary dating experiences including first dates revolving around dinner, cinema, or drinks. The early days of courtship were a test of potential compatibility. Adam and Nathan's first date was arranged by two mutual friends who took on the role of 'match-makers'. They went for dinner and 'really hit it off' according to Adam. Similarly, Sean initially met his partner Phil on a gay dating website and after they had exchanged messages a number of times they decided they would meet in person. They had planned to go to the cinema but they were not impressed with the films on offer. Instead they went out for a drink at a country pub where 'we started talking and that was it, we just got on like a house on fire. Um both had a really good night'. Beyond the first date the courtship period continued to follow ordinary scripts:

'It was nothing out of the ordinary, we were just dating, stepping out together, going to this, that and the next thing [...] we'd just hang out and we'd watch movies a lot and we'd go out for drinks, we'd go out for dinner and we'd go and visit friends' (Ethan, 30).

It was often through these courtship experiences that couples began to bond. Bonding was an important part of relationship development and includes spending time together, 'doing things together' and discovering mutual interests. For example, Rishi and his partner Cole initially met online. In the budding days of their relationship they bonded over their shared political values and 'mutual interests' in arts and culture. Mitchell's relationship with his partner Leo developed through spending time together. They initially met for a sexual encounter through a personal advert. For a few months their time together was 'purely sexual' but then they started to go out for meals and spend 'more and more time together' until their relationship 'suddenly' became more than just sex:

'We started actually going out, um, for meals, or a pizza or whatever, and then we spent more and more time together, more than we would normally if we were just sexual *friends, um, and it just sort of developed'* (Mitchell, 49).

Irving and Mark first met through a chance encounter on the street. Although they were 'instantly' attracted to each other they did not exchange contact details and it was only after another chance meeting at a gay pub that they began to see each other. Over the next year and a half they bonded and created a 'full-blown normal relationship' by 'doing things together':

'We started to do things together, um walking and all that sort of thing, going places, and it wasn't just to meet and drink and you know go to bed sort of affair, it was a proper, as I call it a full-blown normal relationship, we went pictures, we went walking, we went to art galleries, we talked about - *cuz we're both avid readers* - we talked about books, you know, um and I suppose the icing on the cake was that we ended up in *bed together'* (Irving, 60).

Most participants bonded with their partners over generally positive experiences but some also bonded over experiences which required emotional support and empathy. For example, Emin and his partner Lee became 'closer' through supporting each other through a series of bereavements in their respective families.

Apart from getting to know each other through bonding participants also introduced their partners to friends, colleagues and family. This was a process of integrating their partner into their wider social world. Integration not only embedded the relationship but could also validate it and make couples feel even closer:

- *'It was quite* nice because he was introducing me to his family, it was like I was suddenly feeling more, being a part of him' (Rishi, 24).*

- *'The feedback I was getting from my friends was very good as well, and in a selfish way it was good to know that "Oh they like him, they think he is decent and caring" and stuff' (Thanos, 40).*

Relationship definition and commitments

Some participants actively and explicitly defined their relationships and established commitments to each other. For others this was a prosaic process – over time they came to feel that they and their partner were in a relationship characterized by commitment.

Some participants had explicit discussions with their partners about what their relationship was and where it was going. These commitment-conversations occurred at different time points in relationships. In Bryce's case, it was after three weeks that he and his partner established that they were 'boyfriends':

Bryce: *He asked if we wanted to make it a bit more official and I was like "yeah, ok".*

RS (Interviewer): And what, what did that mean? What did making it more official mean?

Bryce: Just boyfriends really, in terms of being official. And um yeah, so I was happy with *that and it just carried on from there' (Bryce, 29).*

For several participants, however, relationship definition was not a matter of explicit discussion, but a feeling that developed over time. Ryan, for example, said that he and his partner Kurt had 'never' had a conversation about whether or not they were in a relationship; rather, 'it just kind of, it self-evidently was a relationship'. After about six months of dating it 'suddenly dawned' on Ryan that there was 'something quite special' about Kurt. Ryan felt that 'a lot of the pieces were in place that felt right' and that Kurt was someone he could imagine himself in a 'very long-term relationship' with. It was at this point that Ryan told Kurt that he loved him, which was reciprocated. Like Ryan, other participants deemed professing love as an 'important point' in establishing or confirming that they were in a committed relationship.

'The "I love you" is quite uh an important point, when you actually say it [...] I keep thinking of the three months after we met, when we went to Paris, we definitely, it felt like *we'd been a couple for a long time. Um, so, definitely those words were there already'* (Thanos, 40).

Participants also spoke about other specific 'milestones', events or points in their

relationships which established or defined their relationships as committed. Other participants spoke about commitment as a process - commitment was built over time and progressively through a series of 'stages':

> *'There's different stages I guess. Your first stage is moving in, feels like you're committed [...] then when we got the dog was quite a big commitment cuz we're committing to look after something else, uh then when he moved across the country that's a pretty big commitment, changes jobs, moves away from his friends, um financial commitment in the joint mortgage [...] so each one of them is slightly different but kind of increasing [...] I just think that commitment moves on if that makes sense' (Kumar, 40).*

Steven also spoke about commitment as a product of time. He said that he realized that he and his partner Oli were in a relationship characterized by commitment after 'about six or seven' years together. He had 'faith' in Oli and believed that their relationship would last. Steven said this was a 'realization that grew' out of the everyday 'business of living together'. But he also highlighted a particular 'milestone' which he regarded as a concrete commitment that 'cemented' their relationship:

> *'There are certain kinds of milestones, like, you know, when you buy a house together, I mean that's a commitment [...] that cements you together' (Steven, 45)*

As Kumar's and Steven's narratives illustrate, for many participants commitment came in different forms and was built over time. It was a sedimentary process, built up prosaically by merging lives and financial resources through cohabitation and joint bank accounts, taking on mutual responsibilities such as joint mortgages and caring for a pet, and/or making choices and sacrifices for the relationship. These events and actions took on meanings of commitment and had the effect of 'cementing' coupledom even if they were not intended to signify commitment. While some participants' relationships inadvertently became committed, other participants actively made commitments. Nathan and Adam, for example, actively and explicitly 'promised and committed to each other' through a discussion they had prior to moving in together.

Common couple conflicts and challenges

In addition to the joys of commitment that participants experienced in their relationships they also faced conflicts and challenges – many of which are common to any couple, regardless of sexuality or gender. Many participants stated that the various conflicts and challenges they faced were an ordinary component of every relationship which reinforced their claims as 'normal' couples:

- *'We have our ups and downs, you know, as any normal couple does' (Emin, 35).*

- *'Like every couple we've had fights and arguments and stuff' (Thanos, 40).*

Some of the conflicts and challenges that participants reported were related primarily to intrinsic differences between partners, others were related to external factors such as other people, events, or distance. Cameron's and Sean's narratives illustrate a number of these conflicts and challenges.

Cameron met his partner Tai by 'chance' while on holiday in Thailand (as discussed earlier). The few days they spent together before Cameron returned to the UK were enough for them to 'fall in love' and begin a long-distance relationship. In addition to the challenges of sustaining a bi-national, long-distance relationship for the first few years of their relationship, Cameron and Tai also experienced a number of 'tensions' stemming from their contrasting social positions. Cameron is a 62-year-old white man, born and raised in New Zealand and educated in Australia. He has spent the majority of his adult life in the UK working as a medical doctor. Tai, on the other hand, is 32 years old, born and raised in a Thai village. He has lived in the UK only for the few years since he and Cameron entered a CP. Although Tai has university qualifications from Thailand, he struggled to find employment in the UK that matched his qualifications or provided a decent income. Although Tai did eventually find work he 'earns modestly' whereas Cameron is on a 'good salary'. Indeed, the disparity in earning power, and financial matters in general, was a 'tension' that Cameron spoke about. The thirty year age difference was another 'tension' for the couple, particularly because it represented a significant difference between them in terms of life stage and future aspirations. Tai wants to educate himself further in preparation for a better career in the UK whereas Cameron has plans to retire soon. Tai is keen to have children but Cameron feels he is past his prime and does not want to look after children in his retirement. Cameron also brought up the fact that he and Tai come from different cultural backgrounds. While Cameron is accustomed to 'European culture' he is 'well aware' that Tai is living in a 'foreign culture'. This was an issue in terms of how they spent their leisure time because they have different interests. Cameron claims that Tai 'does not have any interest European culture as such, he won't go to the theatre' and 'even getting him to the pictures is hard'. Like Cameron, other participants also experienced the strains of living in different cities or countries, reported conflicts and challenges related to age and/or life stage (maturity), socio-economic and/or ethnic/racial/cultural backgrounds.

Whilst Cameron's narrative highlights several tensions related to differences between himself and his partner in terms of age, money and culture, the conflicts and challenges that Sean spoke about were predominantly related to external issues. Sean highlighted how other people 'didn't make life easy' in the first couple years of his relationship with Phil. In addition to living in cities 30 miles apart, Sean and Phil's relationship was particularly challenging

because of their respective 'living situations' and other people in their lives. Sean was living with his parents and Phil, who was not yet divorced from his wife although the relationship had been over for years, continued to live with her for 'convenience's sake'. The couple felt they had no private place to go, apart from hotels and the holidays they took together. Sean and Phil 'would row constantly' and 'were forever falling out and then making it up'. Indeed, Sean said that 'because of all the arguments' he and Phil had 'split up' for a weekend. Most of their conflicts were resolved when they moved in together a few months after their weekend apart. While Sean felt that living together 'really cemented the relationship' and 'made it work' it also presented new problems around the division of domestic labour because Phil was initially 'not very good at doing housework'. Like Sean, some participants also explained that ex-partners, whether male or female, presented issues. Furthermore, like Sean, a number of participants reported that they had experienced a 'split-up' or 'mini-breakup' at some point during their relationship.

Relationship discontinuities were the result of a range of conflicts or challenges including: general conflict; uncertainty of feelings for a partner or being in a relationship; or, in some cases, infidelity. While most of these break ups were in the early days of participants' relationships and were usually short-lived or 'temporary', some occurred later in relationships and lasted for up to a year. Indeed, Kumar and his partner broke up seven years into their relationship after an event of sexual infidelity. When they broke up they had no intention of resuming their relationship, although this happened a year later. Like Kumar, other participants also experienced challenges around sexual fidelity and/or sexual satisfaction although this did not cause them to split up. Rather, they re-negotiated the terms of their relationships with regard to sexual fidelity. The topic of sexual fidelity is discussed further in section 7.4.

Participants who experienced break ups, including Kumar, seemed to think, in 'hindsight', that this time and space (however brief or long), was 'needed' and the 'best thing' for their relationships. It was a period in which they could grow individually and/or re-evaluate the importance of the relationship and their desire to continue it. Indeed, these discontinuities could also fortify commitment, as Ethan explained:

> *'If you were to pinpoint a time where we committed and really made a go of it was after he'd broken up with me and he asked me to take him back and* we decided to really go *for it' (Ethan, 30).*

While many of the conflicts and challenges discussed in this section are common to any couple, the next section considers the distinct challenges faced by participants given their stigmatized same-sex relationships, social identities and minority status as gay men.

5.2 Minority stress and extraordinariness in a context of relative adversity

In the last section I discussed the ordinariness of participants' relationships but I would be misrepresenting their lived experiences if I did not also discuss the extraordinariness and distinctiveness of their lives and relationships. In addition to the common challenges faced by any couple, gay couples also face distinct challenges given their minority status and the stigmatization of their sexual identities and same-sex relationships. Green (2004) argues that this is the 'overarching difference' between the lives and relationships of same-sex couples compared to heterosexual couples. He writes that same-sex couples must 'continually cope with the special challenges of claiming a socially stigmatized identity' (Green, 2004: 290). Indeed, in addition to the claims to ordinariness that many participants made, all participants spoke about the 'special challenges' and distinctive minority stress experiences that pervaded, to varying degrees, their lives as individuals and as same-sex partners.

In this section I consider three forms of stigma: internalized stigma, felt normative stigma and enacted stigma (Steward, Miege & Choi, 2013). These three forms of stigma equate to the risk factors and stressors, outlined by Green (2004) and Meyer (1995, 2003) respectively, that contributed to participants' minority stress experiences. As such, I discuss participants' internalized homophobia, the implications of the lack of a legal and normative model for same-sex relationships prior to CP, expectations and experiences of stigma in the forms of prejudice, discrimination, violence and/or rejection, and relatively low levels of support and acceptance for gay identities and same-sex relationships from kin and/or social networks.

Internalized stigma: homonegativity and what it means to be gay

Internalized homophobia is defined as 'the direction of societal negative attitudes toward the self' (Meyer, 1995: 40). All the participants in this study, whether older or younger, had internalized negative attitudes and ideas related to homosexuality, albeit to varying degrees depending on the socio-historical contexts in which they grew up. This homonegativity was picked up from events and experiences in their lives, through implicit and overt messages received from peers, families, and their communities - whether geographically-defined communities or communities defined by ethnicity or faith, for example. Homonegative messages were also received in institutional settings, including schools[16] and churches. Furthermore, stereotypical media representations of gay men, former medical definitions and legal restrictions, and a general lack of gay rights, all figured in to this process of internalizing

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[16] Section 28 prohibited the promotion of homosexuality as a pretended family relationship.

homonegativity. Some participants also spoke of having heard derogatory comments in their families or communities about media celebrities or local men who were either known, or suspected, to be gay. Others had internalized homonegativity vicariously through experiences including witnessing homophobic abuse.

The internalization of homophobia and homonegativity begins to occur even before one's homosexuality is realised (Meyer, 1995). Indeed, most participants reported first hand exposure to negative messages about homosexuality early on in their childhood. Some men recalled being reprimanded for engaging in exploratory same-sex behaviour as young boys. For example, when Nathan was six he and another boy at school kissed. He says that while he 'didn't think anything of it, or get anything out of it', his mother was informed and her response was 'boys don't do that'. At school many participants had experienced playground taunting and bullying often related to gender-atypical behaviour or interests including a lack of ability or interest in sports, feminine play or friendships with girls, and/or excelling in academia, arts or dramatics. These early experiences and messages coloured their attitudes to their perceived difference as negative and 'bad':

> *'Most of the boys at school were all very much, you know, the straight boys that were* all playing football and whatever and I was the shy one, so I would be, it would be used *an insult, I would be called gay by them […] to me it was something that was bad'* (Sean, 31).

Apart from early childhood experiences participants also internalized negative messages about homosexuality from wider media and cultural references. In most cases these were negative and stereotypical. Older participants commonly reported TV programmes that portrayed gay men as camp or feminine. According to Sunil, gay men were 'never just ordinary people':

> *'Gay people were never just ordinary people on the screen etc., they were always very* fem, etc. so then you internalize that, I think, and you think well that means that, to be, *that's what it means to be gay' (Sunil, 49).*

Younger participants had access to media representations of gay men beyond the usual camp and feminine characters that had dominated the screen previously. However, these participants lamented the fact that these were generally about 'extreme behaviours' and hyper-sexualized. For example, both Andrew and Kumar spoke of TV programmes including Queer as Folk. Although such programmes delved into social issues including HIV/AIDS, drug use, gay marriage and parenting rights, Andrew felt that overall gay life was portrayed as 'this smutty, complete sex rampant uh lifestyle' and Kumar's view on 'the Queer as Folk whole thing' was

that it was all about 'clubbing, drinking, having sex rather than having a positive life and having somebody to share life with'.

Older participants remembered 'salacious stories' and 'scandals' involving gay men in the newspapers. Invariably, homosexuality was presented as a mental illness, sexual deviancy, or a sordid and criminal lifestyle. Daniel, for example, recalled the predominantly negative media attention surrounding the partial decriminalization of male homosexual behaviour in Britain in 1967[17], when he was ten years old:

> *'There was an awful lot in the newspapers about homosexuality and by and large it was* negative, by and large the word homosexual only ever appeared alongside somebody *who had committed a criminal offense or was sick, uh mentally ill, or was a criminal'* (Daniel, 55).

Daniel is an example of someone who internalized negative perceptions of what it meant to be gay to a greater extent than most participants. He had internalized negative attitudes and ideas about homosexuality to the point that he did not want to be a 'homosexual' because he felt there was 'something quite wrong' with homosexuality. Despite his internalized homophobia he had been 'very precocious and sexually active' with other boys and men during secondary school. At university however, he developed a relationship with another young man that was not only sexual, but also emotional. When the relationship ended Daniel suffered a 'breakdown'. He became 'preoccupied' with his own sense of 'depravity' and began to contemplate suicide. Although he was too 'ashamed' to speak to his family about his sexuality he realized that he needed help and consulted his GP who referred him to a psychiatrist. It was 1974 and despite the fact that Daniel was aware that homosexuality had been declassified as a mental illness[18], the psychiatrist explained to Daniel that homosexuality could be 'cured' through electric shock aversion therapy. Daniel voluntarily agreed to the treatment with hopes that he would indeed be 'cured'. He soon realized, however, that the treatment was an 'assault' against his 'core' and he eventually extricated himself from the treatment. Although Daniel later came to a positive conception of his sexuality, these events were the culmination of internalizing negative perceptions of what it meant to be gay from several sources.

In addition to absorbing negative messages about homosexuality from newspapers, Daniel could not recall any media representations of gay men other than those that portrayed gay men as 'incredibly camp'. As for potential gay role models in the local community, he only

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[17] This was achieved by the Sexual Offences Act (1967).

[18] In 1973 homosexuality was first removed as a DSM category.

remembers one man. However, this was again not a positive reference. Indeed, at the age of six Daniel witnessed this man being physically and verbally assaulted by 'thugs' who kicked him whilst shouting 'poof' and 'fucking queer'. Daniel remembered the incident 'really distinctly' and said that, despite his age he 'understood what was going on'. Cumulatively, these messages, experiences and representations of gay men had a negative impact on Daniel's conception of self and what life as a 'homosexual' would be like. He said, 'I had a very negative sense of what it meant to be homosexual'. Furthermore, he imagined a 'very sordid, very um underworld kind of life, a criminal life'.

As Daniel's narrative illustrates, a lack of positive role models and the internalization of negative societal attitudes had an impact not only on the development of participants' self-concepts, but also had implications for what they expected of their own lives. Indeed, many participants had internalized that a gay life would be a life lived on the 'periphery' or 'alone'. Gay life was seen to be 'different' or more 'difficult' and was associated with 'loss'. These ideas were often voiced when participants spoke about realizing or acknowledging their sexuality. For example, when Kumar was in his late 20s he had his first same-sex sexual experience. This experience happened spontaneously when Kumar, who had recently divorced his wife (for reasons unrelated to his unrealized sexuality), was on a night out and expecting to 'pull a girl'. The experience initially led to a 'deep and heavy' six month period in which Kumar struggled to accept or make sense of what had happened. For Kumar, acknowledging his newfound sexuality and accepting a gay identity represented the 'loss' of support from family and friends and the loss of prospects for committed relationships, family and fatherhood:

> *'The key word is loss, I think, for me […]* all I could think about was all the things I was *losing. I didn't think about anything I was going to be getting. I didn't, I couldn't see* any positivity from it, to be honest. So the loss of being a dad was a key thing for me at the time, bearing in mind my wife had a miscarriage. Loss of any chance of family, um to be honest *I didn't know any gay couples who'd stayed together very long […] So it was loss of a family, loss of relationship, um I thought I was going to lose my friends'* (Kumar, 40).

Like Kumar, many older participants found it hard to imagine that they would, as gay men, have long-term relationships. Instead, they imagined lives of 'being alone' and often attributed these visions to the 'invisibility', or lack, of role models for 'proper gay relationships':

> *'I actually visualized myself as being alone […] I didn't* see any you know role models *[…] gay relationships were, uh I mean, proper gay relationships were actually completely invisible' (Steven, 45).*

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While many older participants found it difficult to imagine long-term partnerships, it was even more difficult to imagine the possibility of marriage or legally recognized same-sex relationships. For many, the idea of legal recognition for their relationships remained inconceivable even after they formed their current partnerships; it simply did not 'enter their heads':

- *'I had no idea we'd be able to put it on a legal, formal basis, such as the civil partnership. That just didn't enter my head at all' (Mark, 45).*

- *'The idea that we would one day have legal relationships, partnerships and status, I don't think that ever entered my head' (George, 65).*

While it was more common for older participants to imagine gay lives devoid of committed relationships, marriage, and children, some younger participants reported similar experiences. For example, Bryce said that after he came out, notably before CP was available, he went through such a 'stage':

> *'I did sort of think that I would never have that, the whole children and getting married, etc. um, yeah, at that stage [...] cuz back then there was no civil partnership and it wasn't even on the cards as far as I'd ever heard' (Bryce, 29).*

For many of the younger men, however, accepting a gay identity did not necessarily preclude marriage and family. Indeed, many hoped for, and even expected ordinary lives that included the normative ideals of marriage and children. Most recognized, however, that their pathway to 'marriage' and parenthood would be 'different' and might require extra effort and tenacity:

> *'As I got older I realized that I am gay and that is going to be an obstacle for some of the things I want to do [...]* I knew it would be different and how would I get them *[marriage and children], but it never hit me that I wouldn't have those things'* (Andrew, 33).

Some participants did not internalize negative attitudes or ideas about homosexuality to the same extent as others. Indeed, some participants claimed to have always had relatively positive conceptions of themselves and life as a gay man. Irving and Mark for example, now a couple, both described personal histories of accepting gay identities rather easily. Irving recalled: 'I always felt very comfortable with me self. Um, and it was never a problem'. Mark expressed similar sentiments and did not particularly lament the loss of prospects for marriage and children:

> *'I always expe*cted to get married, 2.4 children; standard pattern, no idea. When I realized I

was gay I thought, "Eh ok, so fair enough I am gay" […] I realized this is what life is going to be like and thought, "Well, let's make the best of it"' (Mark, 45).

Although Mark and Irving had little internalized homonegativity they did experience external homophobia in various forms. These forms of enacted stigma are discussed next.

Enacted and felt normative stigma: experiences and expectations of prejudice

While some participants experienced enacted stigma vicariously by witnessing homophobic abuse (as in Daniel's case discussed above), many also reported direct experiences of enacted stigma. In addition to the playground taunting that participants were subjected to as young boys, many also reported enacted stigma perpetrated by family members, colleagues, neighbours and other community members. These direct experiences of enacted stigma took the forms of: homophobic abuse; institutional discrimination; and/or a lack of support, rejection or estrangement from kin and social networks. Some participants experienced multiple forms of enacted stigma.

With regard to institutional discrimination, Daniel reported issues in gaining and sustaining employment which he felt was due to the fact that he was 'openly gay'. Similarly, in the 1980s Mark and Irving had trouble getting a joint mortgage and opening a joint banking account. They attributed the difficulty they had to the fact they were a same-sex couple.

In relation to family members, participants reported varying levels of support, acceptance or toleration of their sexuality and/or same-sex relationships. While there was variation across the sample in terms of family support, within individual participants' family constellations there was varying levels of support from family members. For example, although Daniel had always felt supported and accepted by his mother and brother, he said that his father was 'homophobic' and had never really accepted who Daniel had become nor his relationship with Jens. Despite a lack of support or acceptance, participants like Daniel still had on-going and vital, if strained, relationships with their unsupportive families or family members. Other participants, however, experienced rejection or estrangement from families. Irving, for example, experienced family rejection. Irving's mother had been aware of his homosexuality since he was a teenager because, as he says, he 'couldn't hide the fact'. When he left for university at eighteen she told him that she had done her 'duty' by him and that he would now be on his own. Indeed, from that point onward they ceased to have any semblance of a mother-and-son relationship. Thirty five years later, when Irving had a heart attack, his partner Mark searched for her phone number so that he could inform her. Her response was 'what you telling me for?' as she claimed that Irving was no longer her son.

Oscar recounted a story of becoming estranged from his children and former wife. In the 1960s Oscar, who was not aware that there was an 'alternative life', married a woman because he felt it was 'expected': by his parents, the church, and society generally. He was married for fifteen years and had four children. While for the most part he was content with life, he was also experiencing great 'turmoil' and was 'seething inside' because of suppressed thoughts and feelings that were 'difficult to cope with'. In his late 30s he began a sexual relationship with another man. His 'world exploded' when his wife found out about his same-sex affair. She divorced him and prevented him from seeing their children. At the time of our interview, decades later, only one of his children had regained contact with him.

Participants' experiences of enacted stigma were not limited to their childhood or the distant past. At the time of interview several participants reported that they, or their partners, had experienced enacted stigma recently. Kumar explained that his partner Ian had recently been 'homophobically abused' by a stranger in the street. Adam and Nathan explained that they had a lot of 'trouble' with their new neighbours when they moved into their current home a few years prior to our interview. As Nathan put it, 'we did have trouble and it was because we were gay'. Recent experiences of enacted stigma also occurred in participants' family constellations. Hugh and his partner Alex reported that they were prohibited from seeing one of their nephews because Alex's brother-in-law was not 'comfortable' with their sexuality or relationship and was worried that they might 'turn' his son gay if they happened to 'sneeze' on him.

In addition to the enacted stigma that participants experienced, a more prominent feature of their minority stress experiences was the expectation and/or fear of enacted stigma. In Eric's narrative 'living in fear' came through as a dominant theme. Eric met his partner Oscar in the early 1990s. For the first nine years of their relationship they both worked, in different capacities, for the British armed forces. At the time, the ban on homosexuals serving in the British armed forces was still in effect. Eric describes this period as one in which he and Oscar lead a 'double life' because neither of them were out to their families, colleagues or community. He expected negative reactions from family and colleagues and feared he would lose his job if he revealed his sexuality or relationship. When Eric visited his family he described Oscar as 'just a friend'. At work he did not talk about Oscar at all. Rather, he 'pretended' to have a girlfriend because he felt that to keep his job he had to 'hide' and 'lie' about what he did at the weekends to his colleagues. By the time the ban was lifted in 2000 Eric had left the forces. In his search for a new job Eric remained wary of revealing his sexual identity to potential employers because he did not want to 'prejudice [his] chances of gaining employment'. After he got a job he again found it difficult to talk to colleagues about his personal life - he thought that they would view him 'differently' when they found out about his sexuality and relationship. Although Eric eventually did come out at work he remained reticent about explicitly coming out

to his family. Despite the fact that his parents had met Oscar, had visited their one-bedroom home, and spent Christmases with them, it was only after eleven years together that the nature of his relationship with Oscar was made explicit to his parents. Eric's experience of 'living in fear' was not limited to the distant past and, indeed, had implications for his CP ceremony (as will be discussed in section 6.1).

Expectations of stigma seemed to be amplified for participants of particular faith, ethnic/racial or cultural backgrounds. For example, although Kareem was open about his sexuality to peers at college from the age of sixteen, and had a boyfriend, he feared that his family and wider ethnic community would not be supportive or accepting of his sexuality:

> *'While I was growing up I never was really out to family or I wasn't out to anyon*e in *my own community because I knew of the prejudices that they would have' (Kareem,* 28).

In addition to showing participants' experiences of minority stress, this section has also touched on the issues of managing disclosure and concealing sexual identity and same-sex relationships. These, and other coping strategies and resilience processes, will be discussed further in the next section.

5.3 Ameliorative coping strategies and relationship resilience

Despite the distinct challenges and contexts that participants faced and continue to endure, this section outlines the coping strategies and resilience processes that participants employed to avoid enacted stigma, to validate their lives, and to sustain their same-sex relationships before CP was available. In this section I draw on two frameworks describing coping and resilience. Firstly, from a minority stress perspective, sexual minority individuals may cope with and/or overcome the adversity that touches their lives through 'ameliorative coping strategies' (Meyer, 2003). Secondly, from a risk and resilience perspective, same-sex couples may employ a range of 'resilience processes' which support, strengthen, legitimize and/or affirm their relationships (Oswald, 2002). There is considerable overlap between the two perspectives and in this section I have combined aspects of both to discuss how participants: (a) accepted and integrated their sexual identities; (b) managed the tasks of revealing and concealing their identities and relationships; and (c), strengthened and supported their relationships by ritualizing and legalizing them.

Accepting and integrating gayness

As the last section demonstrated, participants internalized negative attitudes and ideas about homosexuality. Nonetheless, they eventually accepted their sexuality, claimed and labelled

themselves with a stigmatized social identity and developed a more or less positive conception of themselves. To achieve this they had to re-evaluate what being gay meant, which meant disregarding the negative messages they had internalized. This could be achieved by resilience processes such as 'integrating gayness', 'politicizing' and 'building community' (Oswald, 2002). Integrating gayness is the reconciliation of one's sexuality with other aspects of identity, politicizing is the active involvement in LGBT political issues and building community is active involvement and participation in gay activities, organizations and communities (Oswald, 2002). Like building community, Meyer (2003) also highlights the importance of solidarity and cohesiveness with other gay men. Daniel's and Sunil's narratives illustrate these coping strategies and resilience processes.

As discussed earlier Daniel struggled to accept his sexuality as a young man. His religious faith had proved to be particularly problematic in this process because he had felt 'unacceptable to God as a gay man'. However, he did eventually develop a positive self-concept and accept a gay social identity when he was twenty years old. He then lived openly as a gay man who was 'destined to be dealt with' and whose life had to 'accommodate the fact' that he was gay. Indeed he set out to be 'the best gay man' he could be and after university he became involved in the gay Christian movement and studied the theology of sexuality in graduate school. This allowed him to reconcile his faith and sexuality, and thus integrate his gayness. In his later years he became increasingly involved in gay community life and politics, thus further integrating his gayness. Furthermore, he was a 'professional gay man' as he worked in organizations specializing in gay men's health and LGBT rights and equality.

Sunil also explained how he had come to terms with his sexuality. He grew up in a 'homophobic environment' and it was only when he went to university – a 'liberal' environment – that he was able to 'realize' (in his mid-20s) what his earlier 'homosexual feelings' meant. At this point, however, he remained 'closeted' and was not a 'proud or open gay man'. He described his four-year path from recognition to acceptance of his sexuality as an 'evolutionary process', and a 'time of transition and change', and equated it to a 'rebirth'. This was partly achieved through exploring the gay scene and relationships with other men, but also through becoming involved in the gay 'community' on a voluntary and social basis:

> *'It was just acceptance, a time of acceptance and then I did quite a bit of um, of other kind of voluntary things as well with the gay community […] I um joined a gay group,* social gro*up and I now run a social gay group (chuckles), so it's a kind of process, really' (Sunil, 49).*

For Sunil, being involved in the gay community was instrumental in his journey to personal acceptance of his sexuality. Like Sunil, many participants were involved in gay-

specific activities and social groups which enabled them to interact with other gay men beyond the commercial gay scene. These groups included gay men's choruses, walking groups, gay societies at universities, or had done voluntary work for gay organizations and charities. This engagement with other gay men allowed participants to develop solidarity and cohesiveness with other gay men and couples, an important aspect of coping with the negative societal messages about homosexuality (Meyer, 2003). Green (2004) argues that to 'successfully counter' the negative messages about homosexuality gay individuals and couples must also be exposed to and receive social support from other gay men and couples 'whose behaviour counteracts negative stereotypes about homosexuality' (Green, 2004: 290). This was indeed the case for several participants. Andrew, for example, said that going to a gay club for the first time with a friend was an 'eye-opening' experience that allowed him to re-evaluate gay life as 'normal' rather than the negative 'picture that had been painted' for him. Similarly, Jens said:

> *'It was wow, this whole world, that you didn't know about, and this existed, all these* very normal people, because in my head it was gay people are all strange, and suddenly *I met all these people who are just like me and who are normal, it was fantastic' (Jens,* 51).

In many cases, including Jens's, this exploration, engagement and subsequent re-evaluation of gay life was possible because participants had distanced themselves, both socially and geographically, from unsupportive families and other contexts. Jens put it this way:

> *'For me it was important to be out of this whole German context and this whole* background, can reinvent yourself, you can be somebody different. So I had my ears, *ear pierced straight away' (Jens, 51).*

It was through this exploration and engagement with other gay men that participants were able to re-evaluate gay life as 'normal' and reconcile their sexual identities with their mainstream identities. Some participants emphasized the importance of their gay identities whilst others minimized the saliency of their gay identity; it was merely one aspect, alongside others, of their otherwise ordinary identities. Cameron, for example, explained that his gay identity was no more important than his national or professional identity:

> *'For me being gay is just a part of my life, you know, it's not what I am only, you know* *I am many, many different things, you know I am a doctor, I'm a New Zealander, I like* *walking, I like music, da, da, da, I'm gay' (Cameron, 62).*

While many participants minimized the salience of their gay social identities in everyday life, arguably a gay identity becomes more salient in some contexts and situations.

Revealing and concealing identities and relationships

Participants in this study could be identified as 'discreditable' persons according to Goffman's (1963) theory of stigma. Discreditable persons are those who have a stigma that is not outwardly apparent, but whose stigma may become evident in other ways, for example in how they dress or behave. In social interactions they are faced with the dilemmas of whether: 'To display or not to display; to tell or not to tell; to let on or not to let on; to lie or not to lie; and in each case, to whom, how, when, and where' (Goffman, 1963: 42). This 'management of undisclosed discrediting information about self' is termed 'passing' (Goffman, 1963: 42). As such, there is information about themselves that they must 'control' and 'manage' in order to conceal, or reveal, their stigmatized sexuality and same-sex relationships. It is a coping strategy and resilience process according to Meyer (2003) and Oswald (2002), respectively.

Although participants eventually came to see themselves as relatively ordinary, developed more or less positive conceptions of themselves and accepted gay social identities, they did so in a society which stigmatizes homosexuality and same-sex relationships. For many participants, revealing or concealing a stigmatized sexual identity and relationship was an on-going, managed process. As such, participants 'came out' – verbally disclosed or confirmed their sexuality to others - to different people at different times and in different circumstances. Indeed, participants said the following of their experiences of coming out: Daniel said, 'we come out all the time, every day, don't we? I came out in '77 and I'm still coming out'; Bryce said, **'**it's all been done in sort of drips and drabs over years'; and Andrew said that he came out 'to different people in different ways'.

This management of information – of who knows what and when - was a coping strategy and resilience process. Managing disclosure is a 'boundary process' which brings gay-affirming people closer and creates distance, socially, from those who are unsupportive or hostile (Oswald, 2002). As such, it not only enabled participants to avoid potential enacted stigma on the part of others, but also to avoid the derision of their sexuality and same-sex relationships which they, having disregarded societal negative attitudes about homosexuality, saw as valid and legitimate. Thanos spoke about how he managed disclosure with friends and acquaintances to avoid their potential 'criticism' and prejudice:

> *'It depends also ho*w close I was with people, how open-minded people were, I knew who would be ok to handle it, and who would actually criticize it and stuff. Throughout those years, the last thing you wanted was somebody that actually criticized you or tells *you "it's wrong and you shouldn't be doing that" and stuff. Um, no it was just coming out to people who were, were ok with it' (Thanos, 40).*

Generally, participants came out to members of their social networks before they came out to their families. Furthermore, several participants only came out to their families when they were in a committed relationship (often their current one). These participants reported that coming out to family seemed necessary, more comfortable, or 'easier' when they were in relationships. As Thanos explained, choosing to come out in the context of a relationship was seen as a way to challenge the negative stereotypes about gay men that participants presumed their families would have:

> *'When I came out to my mom it was much easier to say "I have a partner" because they met my partner, it was easier to say "he is my partner, not just my friend" instead of saying "I'm gay" because again the society, people think "oh you're gay, you're sleeping around, you're going to catch AIDS, you're not safe" all t*hose um taboos and *all those ideas that people have about gay men' (Thanos, 40).*

Several participants spoke about how they had been discouraged by family members who they had informed of their sexuality and/or relationship from telling the wider family, particularly older members like grandparents. Thus, managing disclosure of sexuality and relationships was not only a process managed by participants but also by others who acted as gate-keepers to what became a 'family secret'. This family control meant that some participants had never explicitly come out, or continued to actively conceal their sexuality and same-sex relationships, from some people in their kin and social networks. This also meant that they were being protected from the possibility of homophobic reactions or a lack of support or understanding on the part of the unknowing others in their families:

> *'My dad, for years and years had said to me "you know, don't say anything to your grandparents, they won't understand"' (Hugh, 31).*

Beyond families, participants also revealed and concealed their sexual identities and relationships in everyday contexts including work, social events and mundane situations like getting a haircut. For example, Mark explained how he managed disclosure with work colleagues, new social contacts and acquaintances, and with service providers such as barbers:

> *'I always sort of break the ice by talking about my partner [...]then later, a bit later on I'd say my partner Irving, so breaking people in gently. And I sort of at each po*int I sort of gauge reaction - *to see how much should I then reveal' (Mark, 45).*

Although a person's sexuality is not necessarily visible or immediately apparent in social interactions, that person's sexual identity may become visible when that person engages in specific behaviours, such as holding hands or kissing in public. Therefore, to 'pass' and avoid detection participants also policed their behaviour in particular contexts. That is, depending on

their surroundings, they considered the way they behaved and publicly presented themselves. Indeed many men spoke about the precautions they took in terms of displaying affection or behaving in ways that any other 'normal' couple might:

- *'We very rarely go around and hold hands like a normal couple might do'* (Eric, 42).

- *'We don't always hold hands but we do sometimes, uh we only do it in certain places […] we're more careful about it'* (Kumar, 40).

Some participants also concealed their relationships in contexts that might jeopardize their membership in other salient personal communities (Oswald, 2002). Revealing and concealing sexual identity was particularly problematic for participants of particular faith, ethnic/racial and/or cultural backgrounds. Many of these participants either did not come out, or felt inhibited to come out, in communities and contexts which they thought were generally homophobic or would be unsupportive. For example, Sunil explained that while it was 'alright' for him to be out to his mother and siblings that he had never come out in the context of the local ethnic community he grew up in because that would be 'something totally different':

'My mother knows I'm gay, she's met my partners and things […] it's alright if you out yourself to your parents that's alright, but if you out yourself to your parents' friends, your parents' community that is something totally different. Yeah, so, and I've never done that' (Sunil, 49).

While hiding and concealing one's sexual identity to avoid harm can be a coping strategy, it can also be a stressor in its own right and may result in 'coping fatigue' (Meyer, 1995; 2003). Indeed, Sean's narrative revealed the toll that having to conceal his relationship had on his relationship. Sean's partner Phil had not informed his elderly mother of his relationship with Sean because he did not think that she would understand. This meant that Sean and Phil, at least in the early years of their relationship before Phil's mother died, experienced a lot of strain and conflict related to 'the pressures of trying to pretend' that they were not a couple.

Legalizing and ritualizing relationships

In addition to the coping and resilience mechanisms discussed thus far, there are two other resilience processes that are relevant to this discussion of how participants sustained their relationships prior to entering a CP. The first, ritualizing, involves the creative 'use of ritual to solidify relationships and affirm identities in the absence of social or legal validation' (Oswald, 2002: 378). The second, legalizing, includes 'creative strategies to legalize relationships'; these

include combining or sharing finances via joint accounts and mortgages, establishing wills and other legal documents (Oswald, 2002). For those participants who legalized or ritualized their relationships, these resilience processes generally had the effect of strengthening, supporting, protecting and/or defining their same-sex relationships before CP was available or before they chose to enter one.

Before CP was available, same-sex couples in the UK seeking recognition of their relationships or hoping to establish or celebrate their commitment could have commitment ceremonies, religious blessings (if they found a willing clergy person), or register their relationships with their local council[19]. Unlike other studies (e.g., Smart & Shipman, 2007; Schecter et al., 2008; Ocobock, 2013), none of the participants in this study took those steps. At least one participant was unaware of these options, whereas others did not see their significance as they lay outside the law:

> *'Before the civil partnerships, you know there has been, you know people go off and* they have these ceremonies that are blessed but do they actually mean anything on *paper?' (Emin, 35).*

For several participants, however, it was important to establish extra-legal commitments beyond the prosaic commitments built up through time. Some participants reported that over the years they had symbolically established commitments through ritual. They privately exchanged rings and/or vows to celebrate their relationships, mark important anniversaries, to establish or symbolize their commitment to one another and to define their relationships. Ethan and his partner Conor, for example, celebrated the anniversary of their first date every year. To mark the passing of their third year together they exchanged rings:

> *'On our third anniversary we went out and bought matching rings, to wear [...] it* *seemed like the thing to do [...]that was a nice wee gesture' (Ethan, 30).*

As Ethan's narrative demonstrates, for younger participants in newer relationships these ritual actions were not intended to be rituals of resilience; rather, they were simply seen as 'nice wee gesture[s]' which 'seemed like the thing to do'. For other couples however, these rituals served to symbolically define and strengthen their relationships at a time when there was no option to formalize their relationship in legal terms. Oscar and his partner Eric are a prime example. In the absence of any legal framework they exchanged vows and rings a few years into their relationship to symbolically establish that their relationship was committed and akin to

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[19] Same-sex partners could register their relationships with local authorities from 2001 when a number of local councils across the UK set up same-sex partnership registers to offer public, but not legal, recognition.

'marriage':

> *'Quite early on in our relationship we um made vows to each other, sort of thing, along the lines of marriage, to be faithful to one another [...] I thin*k we were in bed at the *time, we made, just said that we'd love, cherish, and sort of support each other sort of fairly along the lines of what's obviously said during a straight marriage ceremony sort of thing. Um we went and um bought um rings' (Eric, 42).*

For Oscar and Eric these ritual actions strengthened and defined their relationship. Indeed, although these actions meant nothing 'on paper' and were concealed from family and work colleagues[20], they saw themselves as 'married' and were committed to loving, cherishing and supporting each other, and to sexual fidelity.

While rituals of resilience can define and strengthen relationships, they do not offer any concrete protections. For this reason, many participants also drafted legal agreements between them prior to the availability of CP. These legal agreements included wills and enduring power of attorney agreements which would allow them to specify their wishes in terms of inheritance and make medical decisions on each other's behalf in the event of illness or death. Several participants, particularly older participants, and those in established relationships, took these intentional steps beyond the joint accounts and mortgages which had 'cemented' or financially bonded relationships together. Over half of the men in established relationships spoke about the legal arrangements they had put in place before CP became an option. As William, who sustained a relationship with his partner for nearly forty years prior to the introduction of CP, explained, this was usually seen by participants as a way to 'protect' themselves, their partners and their relationships:

> *'As we accumulated property and so on over the years, it became necessary to make* sure that we protected ourselves if one of us died so we wrote wills *in one another's* favour. In due course we executed, uh you call them enduring powers of attorney, in one *another's favour uh and to do all we could to make sure that uh you know we were treated as a couple, in the days when that was still not possible' (Wi*lliam, 72).

Like William, many older and established couples wanted to 'make sure' that they were 'treated as a couple in the days when that was still not possible'. It was unclear from his narrative however, from whom he and his partner were protecting their relationship but presumably this was from medical authorities and potentially unsupportive family members. Indeed, many

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[20] For example, the rings they exchanged had been carefully chosen on the basis that they did not resemble wedding rings, and therefore Eric could 'deny it was a wedding ring' to his work colleagues.

participants who legalized their relationships did so for fear of how their families might react or behave in the event of illness or death. For example, Jens said that he and Daniel made legal arrangements because they were unsure of how their families would react:

> *'When we bought our first house together um we made wills and we bought it in a way* that um if something would happen to one of us, the house and everything would go *completely to the other person [...] That was just to get us situated, to know that if something was going to happen to one of us that the other one wasn't going to be thrown out of the house. Because we didn't k*now how our parents would react or what *would happen' (Jens, 51).*

Apart from possibly having a joint bank account or mortgage, it was less common for younger participants' relationships to involve a legal or contractual dimension prior to entering CPs. A few, however, spoke about the life insurance policies and/or wills they established with their partners prior to their CPs. These arrangements were seen as the sensible thing to do, for any couple, and were not about 'protecting' their same-sex relationships from institutional discrimination or unsupportive families. Notably, most of the younger participants were open about their relationships to their families, who in turn were generally supportive. Given this level of support, they may not have felt the need to protect their relationships. Alternatively, given their age, they may not have felt that planning for illness and death were pressing matters.

5.4. The advent and advantage of CP for ritualizing and legalizing relationships

As discussed in the last section, participants ritualized and legalized their relationships in various ways prior to the availability of a legal framework for same-sex relationships. The advent of CP opened up new opportunities for participants and their partners to legalize and ritualize their relationships - and to do so simultaneously. In terms of legalizing relationships, CP offered participants new legal rights and responsibilities. In terms of ritualizing relationships, CP offered participants a new way of celebrate and receive recognition for their relationships through ceremony and ritual. As this section demonstrates, participants were motivated to take advantage of CP for various reasons.

The advent of CP

For most participants in established relationships it was the very introduction of CP that prompted initial discussions, and subsequent decisions, to enter a CP. Many had been attentive to the politics and media coverage surrounding the introduction of CP. When CP became a possibility it seemed, to some couples, an obvious choice and/or an expected decision and,

therefore, did not require much discussion. Daniel, who had actively campaigned for the CP legislation, felt that the decision to enter a CP with Jens, his partner of twenty years, was a 'foregone conclusion':

> *'I remember saying to Jens, um "You know when this civil partnership legislation comes through, um you know, we're probably going to have to do it just because it's going to be expected", um and I don't think we had ever a big discussion about civil* partnership*, about whether we would or we wouldn't; it was a kind of foregone conclusion' (Daniel, 55).*

For other men in established relationships, CP was not necessarily an obvious choice simply because it was an available option. Rather, it was seen as something 'new' and 'exciting' and something 'fresh' for their relationship. Thanos and his partner Riccardo, for example, had been together for ten years when CP was introduced. The initial 'excitement' surrounding CP - the general media frenzy, celebrity CPs – influenced their decision to enter a CP:

> *'To start with, it was, yeah, it was also the excitement, it was the first year as well that the civil partnerships started so uh, as, as um shallow as it sounds, seeing Elton John getting married, or celebrities, that w*as exciting' (Thanos, 40).

While CP was a 'foregone conclusion' or an 'exciting' and 'new' option for some couples, other couples did not make decisions straight away. Steven and his partner Oli are an example of a couple who felt no 'hurry' to make a decision. When CP was introduced they felt that because they had 'been together so long anyway' and had recently written wills in each other's favour, that CP was 'not going to actually make a difference'. Although they were 'aware' of CP 'as a possibility', they did not have an immediate need or desire to enter one. Eventually, they were 'prompted' to 'get on with it' when 'several' other same-sex couples in their social network entered CPs.

For participants in new(er) relationships, CP represented a genuine prospect when they formed their relationships or at early stages of their relatively young relationships. These participants' eventual discussions and decisions to enter a CP were not prompted by the introduction of CP, a point made clear by Ethan's narrative. Ethan and his partner Conor met in 2004, just before CP was introduced. Ethan remembers the 'media talk' and the appearance of 'groom and groom cards' in local stationary shops, but he said that this 'didn't really encourage anything' because at the time he and Conor were not ready to formalize their relationship:

> *'We both agreed that it [CP] was a good thing, but it was, I mean, back in 2005 we didn't really think about it cuz we hadn't been together that long, it was about, as I was saying, we'd only just moved in together' (Ethan, 30).*

Although participants in new(er) relationships did not always feel ready to seriously consider CP when it was introduced, it remained in their imaginations as a future possibility. Thus, while the availability of a legal framework is a necessary 'pre-condition' to deciding to formalize a same-sex relationship, it is not sufficient and there must also be a 'spark' that prompts consideration and discussions about the 'value' of formalizing a relationship (Badgett, 2009). That is, for many couples, the advent of CP was not enough, they had to consider the advantage that entering a CP would have. As is discussed next, this advantage was related to a range of motivating factors.

The advantage and value of CP: meanings and motivations

While CP opened up new opportunities for participants and their partners to legalize and ritualize their relationships, the legal and symbolic (i.e., ritual) aspects of CP were of varying importance to participants. These equate, respectively, to what Badgett (2009) terms the 'instrumental' and 'expressive' value of legally formalizing a relationship.

While all participants understood CP as a commitment, they held different views as to whether or not CP was akin to marriage, often along generational lines. Regardless of whether participants saw CP as distinct from, or the same as, marriage, they reported that they entered CPs for multiple and complex reasons. Many of these reasons are also cited by heterosexual couples (as outlined, for example, by Eekelaar, 2007 and Hibbs, Barton & Beswick, 2001), while others were seemingly relatively distinct to same-sex couples. The following motivations emerged from their narratives:

Similar to heterosexual couples:

- To express love and commitment to each other and to demonstrate this to their kin and social networks;
- to celebrate and/or affirm their relationships;
- to define relationships to themselves and their kin and social networks;
- to secure relationship permanence;
- to gain social recognition and status;
- to gain legal recognition and status;
- to access financial and legal rights and benefits;
- or, to resolve immigration or visa issues.

Relatively distinct to same-sex couples:

- To make a political statement or take advantage of the fact that they, as same-sex couples, were now able to legally formalize their relationship;
- to 'protect' their relationships from 'horror stories';
- or, to improve the chances of bringing children into their lives.

Many participants cited a combination of these reasons in explaining what motivated them to enter CPs. Ethan, for instance, gave a raft of reasons which are in accordance with the various motivations identified above:

> *'We both knew we really wanted to, it was more just a case of, this is it, I am, I am my* happiest with you *and I want to stay with you forever and we'd quite like to, now that I know we can. It wasn't for like financial reasons or anything like you become my next of kin by default or anything, although that's a good wee bonus, but it was more the* case of I want, no, we actually can make this commitment publicly to each other - instead of just being two jolly good pals living in a flat, we can actually get up and have our relationship recognized by the state, or not by the state, by the government, and by the law. And I really want to, and I want to have a ceremony where we celebrate how much I love you and how much you love me and to promise to be with you no matter what happens in front of all of our friends and family, and have one hell of a party too. Oh and presents as well. That was the other reason - *gifts (laughs)' (Ethan, 30).*

Like most of the younger participants (and a few of the older participants), Ethan equated CP with marriage: a celebration of love, a promise of life-long commitment and a marker of maturity and authentic couple status. Although Ethan mentioned the financial and legal rights and benefits that accrue to couples who enter CPs, he was sure to emphasize that he and Conor were not motivated by these, even if they were a 'good wee bonus'. As such, he distinguished between the instrumental and expressive value of CP and clearly emphasized the expressive value. Although participants usually emphasized either the expressive or instrumental value of CP, for most, the decision was based on a combination of expressive and instrumental reasons.

The expressive value of CP

Participants who valued CP primarily for its expressive value tended to downplay the legal and financial rights and benefits of legal recognition. Rather, they valued CP because it was a way to demonstrate, establish, celebrate and/or affirm their love and commitment, define their relationships, gain social recognition and/or make political statements.

For many participants in new(er) relationships CP was primarily an expression of love and commitment. For example, Bryce, proposed CP to his partner two years into their relationship to 'show' his love and commitment to his partner:

'It's literally just, as far as I can see, something that you do to show your love and commitment […] If you love your partner then it's sort of the next step' (Bryce, 29).

As Bryce's narrative indicates, CP was seen by many participants in new(er) relationships as the 'next' or 'natural' step in their relatively young relationships which were based on love but not yet characterized by a formal or legal commitment. Therefore, for some participants in new(er) relationships CP was not only a way to express commitment but also a way to establish commitment and define their relationships.

Although Cameron is of the older generation he only met his partner Tai a few years before CP was introduced. As he explained, CP seemed the 'right next step' in their relationship because it would allow him to express his commitment to Tai and establish a deeper level of commitment in their long-distance relationship:

'It was a way of me showing to him that I was willing to make the commitment […] it was a way of demonstrating to myself that he and I were committed […] it was a way of justifying it, or, or giving permanence to something that was important to me, and *acknowledging, for both of us that we had something worthwhile […] I suppose I wanted to be identified as his partner as well' (Cameron, 62).*

For Cameron the CP was not merely an expression of love and commitment but also a chance to secure permanence and be 'identified' as Tai's partner. In other words, it was a way to officially define the nature of their relationship to one another. Similarly, Hugh was also aiming for relationship definition, not only for himself and his partner, but also for other people in their kin and social networks:

*'For me it was a way of…it was giving our relationship an identity, I guess. You know, he's not just my boyfriend, or the guy that I live with, or, it gives some clarity to othe*r *people and to us and some definition. That was why' (Hugh, 32).*

The expressive or romantic aspect of CP was emphasized not only by participants in new(er) relationships, but also by a few participants in established relationships. For Oscar and Eric, who had already made private commitments early on in their fifteen year relationship, CP was valued as a public 'acknowledgement' or confirmation of their already committed relationship.

Some participants saw CP as an opportunity to celebrate their already committed relationships, and some went further and linked their CPs to an important anniversary in their relationships. Indeed, Andrew's primary motivation for CP was to celebrate his ten year anniversary with his partner. However, Andrew also valued CP because it was seen as an opportunity to make a particular statement which would validate his same-sex relationship. Based on his perception that 'people might think that gay people are a certain type of person', Andrew felt he had 'something to prove'. He thought that the CP would allow him to convey to others, and receive recognition for, the ordinariness, authenticity and stability of his same-sex relationship:

'I wanted the celebration of the people to kind of recognize that we're together and it's important that they know that because I don't want them to think that we're just this gay rampant sex couple that you know, that there's no, there's no um actual solid relationship to' (Andrew, 33).

For some participants, particularly those of the older generations, entering a CP was partly about making a political statement. Many of them had either adopted or been exposed to the radical and politically-oriented gay identities and agendas of the 1970s gay liberation movement. George, for example, recalls when legal recognition was 'wickedly denied'. He was among the earliest cohort of the thousands of same-sex couples who took advantage of the unprecedented opportunity to form a CP in the UK. In addition to seeking legal status for his relationship he wanted to 'stand up and be counted' as 'two more statistics'. He felt that by entering a CP he and his partner of over 30 years would contribute to a mass social and political movement and thereby express their sexual politics:

'It was almost in a way a political statement, I felt, to say "Fuck you and all your hypocrisy your hatred, your bigotry, your stupidity, we are now legal, it's not quite what we want, it's not quite what we deserve, it's not quite what we should have, but we're legal and there's a legal status and we can do it, and we will do it, and thousands will do it" (George, 65).

For Sunil, CP held expressive value of another form. He felt that asking his partner to enter a CP would signify his support and care for his partner who had recently been diagnosed as HIV-positive. His partner was 'very affected' by the diagnosis and Sunil, feeling a 'sense of duty' and a 'responsibility' towards his partner, wanted to ensure that his partner felt 'loved' and 'secure'. Sunil thought that CP would convey these messages to his partner and so he 'proposed' with 'a couple of engagement type ring-y things' while they were dining out one evening.

The instrumental value of CP

In addition to the expressive value that participants attributed to CP, it also held instrumental value. Many of the older participants, and those in established relationships, valued CP primarily for the legal and financial rights and benefits it offered[21]. Some younger participants, and those in new(er) relationships, also emphasized the instrumental value of CP. In these cases, CP was seen either as a means by which they could resolve immigration and visa issues or as a way to bolster their chances of being successful in the adoption process.

All participants indicated that love and commitment were the 'bedrock' of their relationships and should underpin the decision to enter a CP. However, some participants did not subscribe to the idea that because they loved their partners they should enter CPs or 'marry'. These men were primarily motivated by the instrumental value of CP and tended to downplay the emotional reasons to enter CP. Klaus, for example said:

> *'The whole security um point of view was for me, one of the major reasons why I* wanted us to get married, um obviously because I love him as well. But, um for that you *don't have to get married' (Klaus, 52).*

For some participants in established relationships, the expressive value of CP was of some importance but they felt they had to rationalize these feelings with practical aspects. For example, Mark said, 'a big part of me did want the romantic side of it'. However, Mark also thought it seemed unnecessary or 'daft' to express his love and commitment to his partner Irving after the twenty years they had spent together. Instead, he justified his desire for CP 'rationally,' as a way to 'protect' his partner Irving. Indeed, several participants wanted to enter CPs to gain legal status in order to protect their partners and relationships in various ways.

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[21] Stonewall (2014) provides the following overview of the rights and responsibilities of civil partnership:

> Upon registration of a CP: Joint treatment for income-related benefits; joint state pension benefits; ability to gain parental responsibility for each other's children; recognition for immigration purposes; exemption from testifying against each other in court.

> Upon dissolution of a CP: Fair arrangements for property division; residence arrangements; appropriate contact with children.

> Upon the death of one partner: Right to register the death of a partner; right to claim a survivor pension; eligibility for bereavement benefits; compensation for fatal accidents or criminal injuries; recognition under inheritance and intestacy rules; tenancy succession rights.

In some cases the motivation to enter a CP was related to finances. For example, George's 'prime practical motivation' was to ensure that he and his partner of forty years were protected financially:

> *'I think like many, many people of our age-*generation or, or backgrounds of course it has...very definitely we decided, I mean, that the prime practical motivation would be *the financial aspect [...] And having worked and saved for our forty odd years together, obviously it's important that through marriage and civil partnership you can protect one another' (Ge*orge, 65).

As George suggests, among older men and men in established relationships, CP was valued as a means to gain financial and legal rights that would 'protect' their otherwise established and committed relationships.

Commonly, the desire to protect partners and relationships was related to participants' fears that their families and/or medical authorities might challenge or disregard their rights and wishes in the event of a partner's illness or death. In some cases this fear stemmed from the fact that their families were generally unsupportive, in other cases it was related to the 'horror stories' participants had heard about other gay couples who had been prevented (e.g., by family or medical authorities) from: attending their partner's funeral, visiting their ill partner in the hospital, or making medical decisions on their behalf. These stories made participants wary that even if their families seemed supportive and respectful of their relationships and partners, things might change in the event of illness or death. For example, Klaus was thinking along these lines:

> '*You've heard these stories where the, the two families are happily together and then* one partner dies or something happens to one partner and they suddenly turn around and become the bi*ggest nightmare' (Klaus, 52).*

For participants who had already made arrangements to protect their relationships legally, CP was valued because it was an umbrella status that would simplify the 'intricate' arrangements couples had made over the years. Furthermore, the legal framework of CP was seen to provide a 'firmer, legal footing' to their relationships so that arrangements could not be questioned or challenged by family members.

In Kumar's case, the instrumental value of CP was related to his plans to adopt children with his partner Ian. Indeed, Kumar said the adoption was the 'key' reason underpinning their decision to have a CP. After ten years together, they were 'keen' to construct a family and, having weighed the various options, began to consider adoption. Despite the fact that they felt they had 'already committed' to one another, the resounding message they received from the

various people they informed of their plans to adopt was that their personal and joint financial commitments were not enough for adoption agencies:

> *'The adoption I think was one of the key things actually. A lot of, we, we were keen that* we wanted to adopt and we were being told by a lot of people that they will be querying *why haven't we committed to each other [...] everybody who spoke to us said 'they're going to ask why you've been together ten years and why are you not civil partnered'* (Kumar, 40).

For this couple then, CP held more instrumental value than expressive value, which they were reserving for equal marriage (in terms of political message). Indeed, they had no intention of 'showing levels of commitment' to themselves, friends or family by having a CP. Rather, it seemed to them that CP would be useful in demonstrating that their relationship was based on love and commitment to adoption agencies and thereby increase their chances of success in bringing children into their lives. Kumar noted that he thought that for gay couples demonstrating commitment was 'slightly different' and to avoid being 'judged' unfavourably on that basis, that they would go ahead and formalize their relationship. Although Kumar admits that the initial motivation was 'largely' about adoption, the CP became 'something we wanted and we were looking forward to'.

As noted earlier, six participants in the study were in relationships where either they or their partners were subject to UK immigration control. While some of these men had other means to stay in the UK and were considering CP for other reasons (i.e. an expression of love and commitment), others indicated that they began to consider CP only when the continuity of their relationship was threatened. This was the case for Ryan who said that the matter of entering a CP arose 'practically' and was, therefore, relatively 'unromantic'.

Ryan and his South African partner Kurt met at a gay club in 2006. After about six months of seeing each other, by which point they had professed their love for one another, the continuity of their relationship was threatened because Kurt's two year work visa was nearing expiry. Faced with the prospect that Kurt might have to return to South Africa, Ryan said that he was overcome with a 'sense of fear and urgency about kind of the need basically to enable him to stay and enable the relationship to continue'. Thus, Ryan suggested they have a CP, which was seen as a practical solution to their conundrum and justified by romantic feelings which Ryan explains:

> *'The main motivation from my side in suggesting it, cuz I was the one who suggested it,* was kind of that I was kind of in a relationship that was clearly going well and that I wanted to um basically commit myself to for the long-term but would not be able to do

that if he got sent back' (Ryan, 33).

Based on their love for one another, and their long-term vision of their relationship, Ryan and Kurt came to the conclusion that they were simply 'accelerating' something that 'would have happened anyway'. Overall, the narratives presented here, including Ryan's, illustrate that while participants were motivated to enter CPs for a variety of reasons that were not necessarily romantic, all emphasized that the decision was not purely instrumental as it was also based on genuine love and a desire for and/or an expectation that their relationships would continue.

Informing and inviting others: a process of managing disclosure

Having decided to enter CPs, for a variety of reasons, participants and their partners were then faced with making decisions about who to inform and who to invite. These were often carefully managed disclosures as participants' social and kin networks varied in the extent to which they were aware of, or accepting of, their sexuality or same-sex relationships. Consistent with previous research (Smart, 2007), participants reported supportive, unsupportive or ambivalent responses from kin and social networks. In some cases, participants noted that informing others about their plans for CP was a process on par with 'coming out':

> *'It was like coming out, yet over again, it was like "Oh no he's marrying you just fo*r *the visa. You are making a fool of yourself. How can you marry a man? This doesn't* happen*"' (Kareem, 28).*

For the most part, those who were open about their sexuality and relationships reported positive reactions from those they informed – although this did not mean that they told everyone. Indeed, some participants only told those they imagined would be supportive. Bryce, for example, reported positive reactions from 'everyone' he and his American partner Jason informed. The couple had been on holiday in Canada when Bryce proposed to Jason and the next morning, while in transit to visit Jason's family in the United States, they announced their news to their respective families:

> *'Everyone was really pleased for us […] didn't have any negative responses a*t all. Um *my parents were really pleased when I told them that I'd got engaged […] we went to Jason's parents'[home] then the day after we got engaged and his mom, with the* typical sort of over-the-*top American style was just like hugging me for hours' (Br*yce, 29).*

Although Bryce said that 'everyone' was really pleased for them, the 'everyone' he referred to only includes those family members that he informed. Indeed he did not inform, or invite, his generally bigoted grandparents who he describes as 'homophobic and racist and everything

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else'. He actively managed the announcement so as to guard against negative responses from those he suspected would be unsupportive.

Beyond families and friends, several participants reported supportive reactions from work colleagues and/or neighbours. Of course this implies that they were comfortable enough to be out in those settings. A week before their CP Mark and Irving hosted an evening of drinks with their neighbours to inform them of their imminent ceremony. In the next few days they were 'touched' by the outpouring of support they received from their local community:

> *'We started finding bottles of champagne on the doorstep and cards pushed through* the door, and there was a lovely Muslim family down the road, and, and um, they came *up and shook our hands'* (Irving, 60).

Mark and Irving were again touched on the day of their CP because as they left their home they were greeted by a chorus of support. Irving says: 'all the neighbours were outside and they were clapping and we couldn't believe it'. However, their experience was not completely positive. When they informed Irving's mother she made it clear that she would not be attending and that she did not want them to inform or invite Irving's other family members. Like Irving, and consistent with Smart's (2007) findings, a number of participants reported that they experienced fairly negative responses from at least one person among their families and friends, indicating that even within otherwise seemingly supportive families, there may be residual levels of latent homophobia or intolerance.

Usually there was considerable overlap between those who were informed and those who were invited. However, this was not always the case. In composing their guest lists participants often considered who would likely accept, who would likely refuse, who might begrudgingly attend and thereby cause uncomfortable situations. In other words, many participants sent out invitations on the basis of perceived levels of support. In doing so they were minimizing the chance that they would receive rejections and refusals to attend. Therefore, most participants reported generally positive responses to their invitations. However, some of the participants who were less selective in sending out invitations did experience negative reactions and refusals to attend. The attendance and absence of guests at participants' CP ceremonies and celebrations had implications for the meaning of these events for participants, a point which will be considered in the coming chapters.

While I would largely agree with Heaphy, Smart & Einarsdottir (2013) that gay lives may be more 'ordinary' than ever and are no longer defined by stigma, participants' narratives were reminders that the stigma against homosexuality remains. Indeed, all participants either expected or directly experienced, to varying degrees, external and/or internal homophobia and

relatively low levels of support for their relationships from kin and/or social networks. Despite this, participants displayed resilience in their own lives and created and sustained, ritualized, and legalized their relationships. Throughout the following findings chapters the tone is more positive but themes of residual anxiety, vigilance, and accounting for being a same-sex couple pervade their narratives. The chapter also explored the range of meanings and motivations participants articulated in describing why they entered CPs. These were reflected in the size and format of the CP ceremonies and celebrations, discussed in the next chapter, which participants creatively constructed.

Chapter 6: Planning, constructing and participating in civil partnership *ceremonies and celebrations as 'Two Men'*

This chapter focuses on participants' experiences of planning, constructing and participating in CP ceremonies and celebrations. As the title of this chapter suggests, participants' narratives were permeated by the fact that they were same-sex couples, 'two men', engaging in a new social form based on, and socially intelligible as, marriage. Many participants noted how they felt, and/or were made to feel, that they were treading on foreign and heterosexual symbolic terrain. As such, all participants' experiences of planning, constructing and participating in their CP ceremonies and celebrations were tainted, to varying degrees, by some level of awkwardness, anxiety, discomfort or vigilance. These feelings and responses were related to the perceived heteronormativity of marriage, the gendered-ness of particular wedding rituals and roles, the heterosexist assumptions of others and the fact that planning and participating in their CPs made their sexuality and same-sex relationships visible.

Although the activities and processes involved in planning, constructing and participating in CP ceremonies and celebrations overlapped I found it useful to distinguish them, and to structure the chapter accordingly. In the first section I consider participants' experiences of planning their CPs. This includes how participants divided the labour and costs of planning their CPs, as well as the joys, stresses, freedoms and constraints they experienced in planning purely 'civil' ceremonies in conjunction with family, friends and service providers. In the next section I employ the theoretical concept of bricolage (Duncan, 2011) to explore the intricate process of how participants creatively constructed meaningful ceremonies that also reflected the fact that they were 'two men'. I also draw on participants' narratives to illustrate how their CPs often took on familiar formats (i.e., 'weddings') despite the contrasting ways in which they conceived of, and cognitively and discursively constructed, CP. With regard to participation, in the third section I discuss how participants' CPs served as expressive forums in which participants displayed various aspects of their identities and conveyed particular messages about their relationships. I also consider the varying levels of comfort that participants experienced when participating in their CP ceremonies, or enacting certain rituals or roles. Their participation in these events, as well as the participation and support (or lack thereof) of others is also discussed. The section concludes by considering the often unexpected and powerful emotional responses that participants experienced as a result of their participation in these ceremonies.

6.1 Planning ceremonies and celebrations

Planning a same-sex CP ceremony and celebration, like planning a heterosexual wedding, requires time, money and energy, and generally involves making countless decisions. Given the

amount of work to be done, and decisions to be made, planning a CP was a process that required shared decision-making and the distribution of labour. It was an enjoyable and stressful enterprise. While participants' experienced similar joys and challenges, their narratives revealed that their experiences of planning their CPs might stand out, compared to their heterosexual counterparts, in several ways. Firstly, they seemed to share the labours involved in planning their CPs more equitably than the literature suggests most heterosexual couples do (Sniezek, 2005). Seemingly, participants were also less likely to expect or receive, relative to heterosexuals, financial and practical support from families. Furthermore, in planning their CPs some participants felt they had to consider or accommodate others who were not supportive of their CP or who had not been to one before and might find it uncomfortable. Several participants spoke about how the process of planning their CPs made their sexuality and same-sex relationships visible not only to those they informed and invited, but also to service providers with whom they interacted and, to an extent, the wider public. Alongside this visibility, some participants were vigilant of enacted stigma and heterosexism. Finally, participants simultaneously felt that they had considerably more freedom in planning and creatively constructing their CPs than heterosexual couples and that they faced unique constraints arising from the legal limitations and religious restrictions of CP.

The un-gendered and un-traditional division of labour and costs

The process of planning a heterosexual wedding usually benefits from the practical and financial support of families and friends. It is also a process guided by a long history of tradition and gendered protocols. For example, the labour involved in planning a heterosexual wedding is generally seen as 'women's work' and is typically not shared equally between the bride and groom (Sniezek, 2005). Rather, the bride and her female friends and relatives bear the brunt of the labour. Furthermore, it is customary in heterosexual weddings for the bride's and the groom's families to contribute to, if not foot the entire bill for, the costs of the wedding, although the bride's family usually contributes more. As revealed by participants' accounts of planning their CPs, these traditions and customs were not always desired nor relied on. Moreover, there was no gendered protocol on which they could base the division of labour.

Participants received varying degrees of practical support from their families and friends in the process of planning their CPs. For participants who received less familial support this was often felt to be related to, if not directly related to, their sexuality and same-sex relationship. For example, both Oscar and Jens held this view, although they felt differently about it. Although Oscar's parents had died, and could not offer practical support even if they wanted to, he nonetheless attributed the lack of familial support to his same-sex relationship:

'If it was a boy and a girl getting married, the parents would all be in, taking, you know organizing this, organizing that. We had to do it all ourselves' (Oscar, 72).

While Oscar seemed to lament the lack of familial involvement, Jens, on the other hand, seemed to relish the lack of familial 'interference'. Although Jens also identified the lack of familial involvement as a 'difference' to a 'traditional' wedding, he saw it as a positive and liberating difference:

'In traditional weddings it's just a done thing because the parents usually organize the weddings and pay for it, and that's probably a difference as well cuz we paid for it all ourselves. So it's not parents kind of interfering, or kind of having some kind of role in the actual uh preparation of it all' (Jens, 51).

While some participants (usually older) commented on the lack of familial support they received in planning their CPs, others (particularly younger participants) reported that their families and friends were involved, or became involved, and lent practical and/or financial support to participants:

- *'Most of the actual planning um was from after, Sunday afternoons sat at me mum's, just talking about things'* (Sean, 31).

- *'It got to the stage where my mother was more excited than I was and she was off buying this that and the other for it'* (Bryce, 29).

- *'We were very lucky to have a lot of friends that wanted to help us'* (Hugh, 32).

Another point of divergence that was noted by the majority of participants was that they tended not to expect, want or receive financial help to cover the costs of their CPs from their parents or wider families. For example, Bryce said: 'We weren't going to expect our parents to pay towards it because we just wanted to do it ourselves'. Some participants' families, however, did contribute although they did not cover the entire cost of the CP:

- *'Our parents were generous and gave some money to help out with paying for it but, ultimately, I think we're still paying for it'* (Ethan, 30).

- *'My mother felt quite strongly that my sister had had a white wedding provided and she wanted to have, do something for us, so she gave us um £3,000'* (Nathan, 51).

Despite the fact that there was no gendered protocol to guide the division of the labour involved in planning a CP, participants and their partners did not always share the work equally. Just as previous studies on the division of household labour among same-sex couples have found (Kurdek, 2005a; Peplau & Fingerhut, 2007; Carrington, 1999), the division of the labour involved in planning a CP could be based on interest and time. Indeed, some participants planned their CPs primarily on their own, either because their partners were not particularly interested in the details, or because they were not working at the time and could devote time and energy to the pursuit. While some participants almost single-handedly planned their ceremonies, for many the planning process was seen as a joint project in which they and their partners shared tasks and made decisions together. For example, Thanos and his partner Riccardo, who were accustomed to approaching the 'next steps' in their relationship as 'life projects', took the planning on as their 'next project together'. They enjoyed 'making decisions together':

> *'Making decisions together was nice, um, making decisions together of, of, simple* decisions – *who are we going to invite? Um, the venue, the photographer as well […]* Uh the tables, how they got to sit, the names of the tables, uh who was going to sit with *who, uh the cake, again find the cake, what are we going to put on the cake?' (Thanos,* 40).

Like Thanos, many participants found the process of planning and preparing for their CPs enjoyable. These participants often invested, and had, considerable time, money and energy. For example, Sean and his partner Phil spent two years planning the 'ins and outs' and 'details' of their CP. Over the course of two years they bought and stored anything and everything that would be 'right' for their CP. It was a cumulative, consumptive and enjoyable process; a time period Sean described as 'fun'. While many participants, including Thanos and Sean, enjoyed the joint enterprise of planning their CPs, some participants found it stressful. This stress was related to time or financial constraints or, more commonly, to the tension arising from trying to balance their own visions and desires for their CPs with their partners. For all of these reasons, Ryan, who was planning the CP on a 'shoe-string budget' and in a 'condensed time-scale,' found the planning process 'tiresome' and 'difficult' and fraught with 'arguments' about 'unimportant' matters. Similarly, Ethan also reported that the process was fraught with tension and resulted in 'bickering'. This was related to making decisions together:

> *'Ugh, god, the invitations, the menus, the centre*-pieces, the table plan, all of it, geeze, *everything you've heard is true from planning one of these together and that's when the* bickering started, the flowers*, ugh' (Ethan, 30).*

While most participants understood the process of planning their CPs, with its attendant joys and stresses, as a joint project, in many cases, family and friends were also involved, or became

involved. The involvement of others meant that guest lists tended to swell, and that CP ceremonies and celebrations became more elaborate, and, in some cases more 'wedding'-like than they had planned, a point to which I return (see section 6.2). Even if family was not directly involved in the planning process, they were often considered or accommodated.

Some participants felt they had to consider or accommodate their guests who might be unsure of what to expect, or who might find the idea of a same-sex ceremony uncomfortable. Indeed, some participants took into account the fact that most, if not all, of their guests had not been to a same-sex wedding or CP. For example, Bryce received an overwhelmingly positive response from everyone that he invited. However, because they had 'never been to a civil partnership before,' he planned his CP to be 'exactly the same' as a wedding. He wanted to manage his guests' expectations and ensure that they saw it as 'absolutely normal':

> *'Because there was so many people coming that had never been to a civil partnersh*ip before I wanted to have it sort of perfect so their sort of view of what it would be like *would be you know, absolutely normal, it's no different to anything else' (Bryce, 29).*

While Bryce accounted for the novelty of the experience for his guests, some participants made particular arrangements to accommodate unsupportive family members who would, despite their lack of enthusiasm or support, be attending the ceremony anyway. For example, Kumar and his partner Ian decided that they would not have the traditional 'top table' at the communal meal following their CP because they did not want to sit with Ian's mother who had never been supportive of Ian's sexuality or his relationship with Kumar:

> *'We didn't want a top table [...] we didn't want to sit with certa*in people and, you *know, I didn't want to sit with his mom who's not been particularly gay friendly'* (Kumar, 40).

Visibility and vigilance

Visibility and vigilance were recurrent themes in participants' narratives, including their accounts of planning their CPs. The process of planning a CP made participants' same-sex relationships visible, not only to those they informed and invited, but also to the service providers that they consulted in planning their CPs. Furthermore, in planning their CPs some participants took into consideration that on the day(s) of their CP ceremonies and celebrations their relationships would be made visible not only to the guests attending their ceremonies and celebrations but also the venue staff, and potentially, the wider public. Most participants felt a degree of anxiety, awkwardness or discomfort with this level of visibility. Andrew summed these feelings up in an emblematic manner:

> *'I imagine most gay people, that want to get married, or civil partnered to be a little uncomfortable about it, a bit like we were, and a little bit worried about how people might react' (Andrew, 33).*

Like Andrew, some participants' concerns about the visibility of their relationships on the day of their CP ceremonies figured into their planning. For example, Sean and his partner Phil, who is a vicar, felt they had to limit the size of their ceremony, and consider the location, so as to keep a 'low profile' for the church at which Phil worked:

> *'It wasn't a big do, um partly because um Phil didn't wa*nt anything that was going to get *too much publicity in terms of obviously keeping a low profile for the church' (Sean, 31).*

Although Sean's experience was clearly related to his partner's employment as a clergyman, it nonetheless highlights the social constraint that some participants felt in relation to the visibility of CP. As will be discussed further in section 6.3, some participants were unsure of displaying their relationships to their families.

In planning their CPs, some participants were vigilant of the potential for enacted stigma and actively made decisions to avoid it. Other participants reported that they had been vigilant of, or had experienced, heterosexism in their daily dealings of planning and organizing their CPs. To avoid enacted stigma, and heterosexism, some participants were vigilant in terms of choosing venues and service providers. Indeed, as mentioned in the previous chapter, Eric and Oscar's expectations of enacted stigma influenced their plans for their CP ceremony. They expected that if they had their ceremony at the registry office in the local town centre, that they would be 'ridiculed' by presumably homophobic passers-by as they exited the building 'holding hands':

> *'We didn't want a civil partnership at the registry office [...] it's not quite in the town centre, but it's quite close, um yeah we, we would have stepped out of there um holding hands, we weren't quite ready for that obviously because we didn't want to be ridiculed by passing motorists' (Eric, 42).*

To avoid this potential, Eric and Oscar chose a more discrete venue located just outside of town. Other participants also chose particular venues to avoid enacted stigma, or heterosexism, although this was not always on the basis of location. For example, Thanos and his partner chose a venue that had already hosted CPs because this meant that the venue staff would be accustomed to seeing and serving 'two men':

'The venue we chose again, it was a venue that they had the experience of a few civil partnerships there, so it was*n't a matter of "oh god today we'll have two men here"'* (Thanos, 40).

Like Thanos, most participants wanted to limit awkwardness and ensure that they, and their guests, would be comfortable during their CP ceremonies and celebrations. Indeed, Bryce sought out 'lesbian photographers' who specialized in same-sex events because he was 'worried' that he would feel 'awkward' and '[un]comfortable' if he had a standard wedding photographer, who he presumed would be 'a straight old man':

'I was a bit worried about the fact that, you obviously have to have all of these couple *photographs taken, and whether we'd feel comfortable having this sort of straight old man taking our photographs and whether it would make us feel a bit awkward' (Bryce,* 29).

While many participants were vigilant to avoid enacted stigma, heterosexism, or otherwise awkward situations that they expected might arise, some reported that they experienced these situations nonetheless. These 'awkward' situations were usually related to heterosexism rather than overt homophobia. Jens, for example explained that because he and Daniel were the first couple to have a CP at their venue of choice, that the 'wedding coordinator made a few faux-pas'. Indeed, because she had never spoken to 'two men' who were planning a ceremony, she constantly referred to the 'bride and bridegroom'. Similarly, Andrew provided a poignant story about confronting heterosexism when he and his 'best mate', who happened to be female, attended a wedding fair to get ideas for his CP. This heterosexism was not only blatantly apparent on 'every form' he filled in but also in the heterosexist assumptions of the various service providers, some of whom were 'shocked' to learn that he was planning a 'gay wedding':

'What I hated, was going to the wedding fairs cuz I went with my best mate [...] uh and everything is you know, the wedding fair is, you fill in every form and its bride's name, groom's name, and you know, it was pissing me off cuz I was like "there's no bride here" and then they didn't know how to deal with that. Every time [I] said "it's a gay wedding" [...] in the end it was easier for me to just say that I was with Marie and we were getting married together. I, cuz that, they could take that, they understood it, they *didn't have to loo*k all shocked. Um and one of the photographers, that I really liked, we *were just standing there looking at his albums and um and he said "oh when's the wedding", and all the rest of it, "uh so uh are you the bride?" And I said, "oh no, he's at home". And again, it just, he didn't know quite what to do, and he said "hang on a second" and he went down underneath his display and he pulled out an album and he*

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may sort of blown the dust off the top and said "take a look at that" and that was his lesbian couple album, as if somehow I was now going to use him, but that had to be *hidden, that album' (Andrew, 33).*

Aside from the heterosexist assumptions that Andrew dealt with, his narrative (above) revealed that he also faced the assumption that what might suit a female same-sex couple would necessarily translate to what would suit a male same-sex couple. After a series of similar experiences, Andrew was 'over trying to explain the fact that it was a civil partnership' to the various service providers with whom he interacted. To prevent any more 'uncomfortable' and 'embarrassing' situations, Andrew decided to be upfront about the same-sex nature of the ceremony he was planning. To do this, he felt that he had to push 'the gay thing' at an early point in any interaction with service providers.

Freedom and constraint

Most participants felt that they had considerable latitude in planning and constructing their CP ceremonies and celebrations. Some felt that they had more freedom than they expected heterosexual couples planning weddings to have. Jens, for example, said:

'A traditional wedding is very set, formal, certain roles and certain people doing certain roles and we felt we don't have to do any of that because there is no pattern for civil partnership we can just do w*hatever we like, what we like, and let's just create' (Jens, 51).*

As Jen's narrative illustrates, this sense of freedom to creatively construct CP was linked to the lack of a 'pattern' for CP. Similarly, several participants cited the lack of a 'model' or 'tradition' for CP:

- *'We had nothing as a model, it was really what it meant to us' (Thanos, 40).*

- *'There is no such thing as a traditional gay ceremony…But, that's the thing, there's no tradition - you can do what you like' (Ethan, 30).*

This freedom did not necessarily result in a departure from tradition. Rather, participants felt freedom to creatively construct their ceremonies in ways that were both similar to, and distinct from, heterosexual weddings. With no distinct model to draw on, many participants felt a sense of entitlement to embrace or eschew wedding conventions:

- *'What we wanted to do was take the best out of heterosexual weddings and leave any of the crap' (Kumar, 40).*

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- *'We used the traditional ceremony as a basis, or the traditional wedding as a basis...we didn't go out of our way to deviate from it, we just sort of used it as a guide and stuck to it pretty much' (Sean, 31).*

While there was no proscribed way for a CP ceremony to go, a number of participants did not embrace this freedom. Bryce, for example, had bought a book specific to same-sex couples planning ceremonies. However, he disregarded the book's suggestion to 'throw out the rule book' and do things 'completely different[ly]' because he wanted to have a 'normal' wedding:

*'When I was read*ing this sort of planning guide, it said you can do anything you want you can be completely different you can throw out the rule book and whatnot, but I was, I mean, and Jason the same, we were just quite happy to go *along with what we'd seen before to be honest' (Bryce, 29).*

While participants felt freedom to creatively construct their CPs in desired ways, this sense of freedom was not unbounded. Indeed, many participants also reported how their experiences of planning their CPs were constrained in some way. Like heterosexual couples, some participants had limited amounts of time or financial resources with which to plan, or the venues they had chosen restricted the number of guests they could invite. In addition to these common constraints, many participants felt the process of constructing a CP was different - by virtue of their same-sex relationship - in a few significant ways. Firstly, they faced religious restrictions and thus their CPs were constrained to be 'utterly civil':

'What we had to be careful of was that you mustn't do anything at all which could be related to religion. It had to be utterly civil. Um, so we had to...cut out any of that' (Oscar, 72).

Furthermore, as a 'civil' procedure, the ceremony could only happen at a registry office or at premises which were licensed for CPs. As Hugh's narrative makes clear, there was not a lot of choice in venues beyond registry offices:

'We're quite restricted in terms of um where has actually got a license for civil partnerships. Um unless you want, you want to go down the route of like a soulless *hotel or whatever' (Hugh, 32).*

For this reason, most participants had registry office ceremonies, although a few participants managed to find alternative venues including castles, mansions or hotels that had been licensed to host same-sex CPs.

Some participants were not particularly bothered by the religious restrictions, legal limitations and limited list of venues proscribed by law. Other participants, however, were less than satisfied. Ethan, for example, felt particularly constrained by the 'strict rules' that govern what same-sex couples are 'allowed' to 'do', 'say', and include in their CP ceremonies. These 'rules' meant that he and his partner were not 'allowed' to include some 'things' that they wanted to, while others required, and were subject to, 'approval'. Ethan, who wanted to have a ceremony that was 'as close to an actual marriage' as possible, was particularly 'infuriated' by how pedantic the restrictions were. Indeed, he had to 'edit out' a single word - 'wedding' - from the third verse of a song that he wanted to play during the ceremony. Ethan's experience points to a larger point about the lack of substantive equality between CP and civil marriage. Many participants were dissatisfied with this aspect of CP, a point to which I return in section 7.6. In the next section, however, I explore the implications of having no 'model' or 'pattern' for CP – something that many participants reported in this section.

6.2 Constructing ceremonies and celebrations: a process of bricolage

Many heterosexual couples construct marriage ceremonies, colloquially referred to as 'weddings', when they marry. Similarly, most participants constructed 'weddings' or wedding-like ceremonial events to celebrate the legal formalization of their relationships. Weddings are ceremonial occasions consisting of an often formulaic set of procedures and ritual content. The dominant cultural prototype, promoted by the 'wedding-industrial complex', is the 'white wedding' (Ingraham, 1999: 3):

> *'White weddings, as the dominant wedding form, permeate both the culture and the* industry. Specifically, the stereotypical white wedding is a spectacle featuring a bride in a formal white wedding gown, combined with some combination of attendants and witnesses, religious ceremony, weddi*ng reception and honeymoon'.*

While many heterosexual couples who marry construct weddings that depart in various ways from this popular form, the 'white wedding' remains an ideal model. Unlike marriage, CP is a novel legal institution, albeit based on marriage, created exclusively for same-sex couples. As such, a distinct cultural framework, such as the 'white wedding,' does not exist for same-sex partnerships/marriage (Ellis, 2007). Therefore, in constructing their CP ceremonies and celebrations participants had little choice but to draw on, assemble and adapt wedding traditions and rituals to creatively construct desired and personally meaningful CP ceremonies that were also appropriately tailored to reflect the fact that they were 'two men'. In the analysis that follows I employ the theoretical concept of bricolage (Duncan, 2011), to explore this intricate process of ceremonial construction. As outlined by sociologist Simon Duncan (2011), bricolage can be understood as a dynamic activity in which social actors:

'Consciously and unconsciously draw on existing traditions– styles of thinking, sanctioned social relationships, institutions, the presumptions of particular social groups and places, lived law and social norms–to "patch" or "piece together" responses to changing situations.' (Duncan, 2011: section 5.1).

Bricolage then, is a process of assembling and adapting – consciously or unconsciously - existing traditions for a new purpose (Duncan, 2011), and/or in a new context. In the context of participants' accounts of constructing CP ceremonies, bricolage involved the piecing and patching together of various wedding traditions and rituals to creatively construct desired and personally meaningful CP ceremonies. These wedding rituals were not only assembled, but also adapted to render them appropriate for a same-sex occasion.

Consciously constructing ceremonies, meaningful moments and memories

Many participants approached CP with the sense that it would be a significant event in their lives and relationships. Like heterosexual couples who marry, participants wanted to imbue the formalization of their relationship with meaning. In addition to constructing meaningful ceremonies, some were also deeply invested in creating meaningful moments before and after their CP ceremonies, and, lasting memories. Emin, for example said: 'It was a day that I wanted to remember'.

As many participants were invested in constructing lasting memories, and meaningful moments beyond their ceremonies it is perhaps unsurprising that several participants, like heterosexual couples who marry, made efforts to extend ritual time. For example, one couple had a stag-do, another couple followed 'tradition' by spending the night before their CP ceremony apart in separate hotels with their friends. Other couples disregarded this tradition but created meaningful moments nonetheless by spending the night before their CPs together in hotels where they treated themselves to champagne, and pampered themselves with massages, facial treatments and haircuts. To extend ritual time after their CP ceremonies several participants went away on what they referred to as 'honeymoons':

> *'We did have what we called a honeymoon […] it wasn't designed as a honeymoon, but* it was, it *became a honeymoon' (Steven, 45).*

In some cases these 'honeymoons' were for weeks at a time, including trips to various European destinations, skiing vacations, and exotic beach holidays. Others simply enjoyed a few days of relaxation and reflection. For example, Emin and his partner Lee were en route for a short stay at one of their favourite European destinations within a few hours of their ceremony. He described what those few days meant:

'For us it wasn't about you know being Mr. and Mr. on you know a honeymoon, it was about Emin and Lee chilling out, having gone through, you know a really emotional experience but you know just something that was really lovely and just being able to *reflect on it' (Emin, 35).*

Emin considered that trip, four years prior to our interview, 'only a little honeymoon'. He then spoke about the 'proper' honeymoon that he and his partner were due to take a few days after our interview. Indeed a few participants had just been, or were planning to go, away on 'proper' honeymoons when I met them for interviews. Their desire to create ritual time, even if it was years after their CP ceremonies, signifies the legacy that CP had in their lives, a point developed further in the next chapter (see section 7.4).

When it came to their ceremonies, participants actively considered how to construct their ceremonies to 'celebrate' their relationships in ways that included but went beyond the formal procedure of 'signing a register'. For example, Daniel said:

*'What we talked about was, was, was ho*w, how do we celebrate who we are together in, in a kind of a formal, a formal context of, of a forty-five minute ceremony that includes *signing a register' (Daniel, 55).*

As Daniel's narrative made clear, CP ceremonies, as binding legal commitments, had to include, and often revolved around the signing of the CP contract. However, most participants did not feel that this was sufficient. They made conscious choices and efforts to make their ceremonies meaningful:

- *'We made it much more of a big thing, much more of a wedding rather than sign papers' (Thanos, 40).*

- *'We did everything that we could do because I mean you can kind of basically go and just have a, you know, you can sign a contract and it takes two minutes' (Hugh, 32).*

Because signing the register could take only 'two minutes', as Hugh noted above, most participants wanted to 'dress up' and 'pad out' the basic civil ceremony by incorporating ritual elements to attribute meaning to what was otherwise seen as the signing of a legal contract:

*'We put so*me readings into the ceremony to pad it out cuz the, when you look at the wording of a civil partnership it is very dry and very bland actually, we had to try and *dress it up in a way with a few sort of love poems and funny stories' (Bryce, 29).*

Reproducing tradition: assembling ritual content

The ritual content that participants included in their ceremonies was assembled from a vast array of sources including: consultations with wedding and CP planners; conversations with friends, family and acquaintances; meetings with the council registrar; memories of weddings and CPs they had attended; and books, magazines and online research.

Although signing the register could take 'two minutes', as Hugh noted above, it was, nonetheless, a significant event for participants and their guests. Participants often arranged for special and 'romantic' music to be played while they were signing the register. Indeed, music was commonly included to fill time, create atmosphere at particular points in the ceremony, and communicate personal and couple identity and history. Readings often served a similar purpose, and because they had to be 'approved' and 'secular', they tended to be about love and commitment, taken, and sometimes adapted (as the next section discusses), from generic or 'traditional' sources. Some participants, however, incorporated same-sex specific readings. Cameron, for example, had a friend read 'a nice Elizabethan poem about, Shakespeare I think, probably about...which you can interpret as two men committing to each other'.

Beyond signing the CP register the most common rituals that participants included were the exchange of vows and rings. Vows offered the chance to explicitly communicate to their partners and the guests attending the ceremony the nature and depth of their feelings. Some relied on conventional vows, whereas roughly half of participants chose to write their own vows. Most participants considered the vows they exchanged - about love, commitment and the continuation of their relationship into the future – similar to the straightforward standard vows at any other (heterosexual) wedding. Hugh for example said:

> *'The vows, that we had, they were very, very similar to you know the vows that a* heterosexual couple would have spoken to each other and said *to each other' (Hugh,* 32).

For some participants in established relationships, particularly those who had made their own private commitments before CP was available, it did not seem appropriate or necessary to make these vows again in the context of their CP ceremony. Irving and Mark, for example, had been together for over twenty years when they had their CP. As Irving explained, all the 'promises and the vows were all set in concrete in the relationship anyway', so during their CP 'the only thing' that 'made sense' was to talk about the 'continuation' of their relationship and their 'love and support' for each other. As Mark explained, they felt that this made their vows 'quite different' to the 'standard' vows at a heterosexual wedding:

> *'We talked about it and decided after 27, after 20 odd years together, there's no point in making the standard vows that most people make at a wedding [...] we didn't have*

any of the "I promise to never row with you or I promise never to do this, I promise to do that", it was just about the continuation of our existing relationship so that's quite different' (Mark, 45).

Participants also commonly exchanged rings during their CP ceremonies. Although two-thirds of participants reported that they exchanged rings during their ceremonies, it was most common among younger participants and those in new(er) relationships,[22] many of whom exchanged rings unquestioningly as a standard wedding practice. Several of the older participants, on the other hand, had some reservations about exchanging rings either because they did not 'wear jewellery anyway' or because they were reticent about the heteronormative meanings associated with the practice, and therefore did not want to 'copy a wedding':

- *'We didn't exchange rings or any kind of jeweller*y. Um, that was just something we *agreed we wouldn't do for no real reason that, just simply that I don't wear jewellery anyway' (Steven, 45).*

- *'We had chosen not to have rings, we, we weren't going to COPY a wedding' (Daniel, 55).*

For others, the exchange of rings was seen as 'an important bit of symbolism' that signified 'official' commitment. As discussed in section 5.3, some participants had exchanged rings with their partners to ritualize their relationships and symbolize their commitments before CP was available. However, some of these couples took advantage of CP to 'upgrade' the rings in line with a deeper level of commitment and the 'official' nature of that commitment. For example, Thanos and his partner, who had 'exchanged a few rings over the years' for anniversaries in their relationship, thought that CP was an opportunity to exchange 'official' rings. Thanos claimed that the exchange of rings, and vows, were 'the only traditional' elements in his CP ceremony:

*'We actually exchanged a few rings ov*er the years, for our anniversaries. Uh, this is the one we kept since then, but um, we wanted to yes, because it was a good time to, to change our rings we were wearing, to take official ones and to have the names and the *date on them and stuff [...] I woul*d probably say that the only thing that was traditional *was the exchange of the vows and the exchange of the rings' (Thanos, 40).*

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[22] Nine of the ten younger participants exchanged rings whereas only half of older participants did. In terms of relationship duration, eleven of twelve couples in new(er) relationships exchanged rings during their ceremonies whereas only five of twelve established couples did (although some of the established couples who did not exchange rings during the ceremony did exchange them at a later date).

Following the exchange of vows and rings, and signing the legal register, many participants also included other rituals to signify their legal union symbolically. A few couples signified the union of their souls with candle-lighting rituals. More commonly, particularly among the younger participants, this was achieved with 'the kiss.'

In a heterosexual wedding the ritual of 'kissing the bride' is not only expected but also taken for granted by the bride and groom, and their guests, as an action that symbolically confirms that they are joined in union. Indeed, Bryce said that the kiss served to 'seal the deal,' signifying that he and Jason were 'married':

> *'It sort of seals the deal really, doesn't really? You've just made your vows, then there's your kiss and then you're married' (Bryce, 29).*

Similarly, Andrew, felt that it was 'obvious' that he and his partner would kiss during their ceremony. He had seen same-sex CP ceremonies on television before and thought they were 'awkward' because they ended with a hug rather than a kiss. He wanted his CP ceremony to be 'just what it should be':

> *'Obviously we kissed at the end [...] it wasn't* like a hug, you know, cuz I when I *watched them on TV every now and again and you see them hugging and I think that's just awkward, I wanted it to be just what it should be' (Andrew, 33).*

For most of the younger men who decided to kiss it was seen as a standard wedding practice to which they were entitled. Nonetheless, some felt that they had to ensure or 'insist' that they got the opportunity to kiss:

- *'I just wanted to make sure that they put it in there so we got the opportunity to do that [...]* in my mind *that's what is part of a wedding ceremony' (Bryce, 29).*

- *'We did kiss each other…because we insist[ed]. The registrar didn't say but we insisted' (Chen, 30).*

Like exchanging rings, kissing during ceremonies was reported much more commonly by younger participants than older participants.[23] While this may simply be an artefact of the interviews – younger participants may have been more likely to mention the kiss - I think a more plausible explanation is that younger participants felt more comfortable to kiss in front of their guests than older participants. Indeed, as I discuss in section 6.3, the kiss was a discomforting prospect for some participants while for others it was a particularly important

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[23] Six of the ten younger participants reported kissing during their ceremonies whereas only two of the eighteen older participants did.

symbolic action.

Having been joined in legal partnership, participants were often cheered and applauded. A few reported that they were greeted with confetti or bubbles as they left the ceremony. In every case, participants' ceremonies were followed by a meal and/or reception. The meals ranged from lunch with the two witnesses to grand three-course catered meals for upwards of 100 people. In most cases these post-ceremonial events occurred directly after the ceremony, or a few hours later, although in some cases they occurred a few days later. Generally, participants invited a larger group of people to these celebrations than were at the ceremony itself.

While ceremonies were restricted to licensed venues, these post-ceremonial events were hosted in a variety of venues including a planetarium, a sea cadet training venue, mansions, sea-side resorts, golf clubs, family homes, restaurants, pubs and bars. In any case, it was at these post-ceremonial events that a whole range of typical wedding accoutrements appeared including: champagne toasts, speeches, first dances, the cake, and in one case, the throwing of the bouquet.

While the construction of CP ceremonies and celebrations was largely up to the couple who chose which rituals to include, the assemblage of rituals was also influenced by others. Drawing from shared understandings of what a 'wedding' should be like, family and friends had their hand in reproducing tradition. Indeed, some participants were influenced by family and friends to incorporate rituals they had not planned to include or would not have otherwise chosen:

- *'We did exchange rings, we got really nagged into that, mainly by my mother'* (Mitchell, 49).

- *'We didn't want a first dance, and we weren't going to have one and then my best man's husband was like "oh I've just told everybody you've come to do your* first *dance", so we had to go in and do a first dance' (Andrew, 33).*

Upon reflection, most participants were usually happy that others had stepped in to ensure that particular rituals were included. These impositions signalled that others not only supported what they were doing, but also considered it an occasion in which to expect the ordinary rituals associated with weddings, even if they were two men.

Innovation: adapting and subverting gendered roles and rituals

In addition to relying on existing traditions and wedding rituals, participants were also innovative in constructing their CP ceremonies. Some participants consciously adapted

gendered roles and/or rituals to render them appropriate for a same-sex occasion. The gendered and heteronormative connotations of other rituals and roles were subverted unintentionally.

Many participants spoke about the gendered roles they associated with 'walking down the aisle'. In a heterosexual wedding the tradition is that the bride is escorted down the aisle by her father and 'given away' to the groom. The bride is the focus of attention. As such, entering the ceremony or 'walking down the aisle' was something that many men felt needed to be adapted because there was no bride. Some participants found this particularly problematic. For example, Andrew and his partner Ben were 'really conscious' about the role of the bride:

> *'Neither of us wanted to be the bride walking down the aisle, that was like a big thing...I mean we didn't want t*o have like these defined roles*' (A*ndrew, 33).

Participants had various strategies to circumvent these apparently defined roles. Some made plans to be in the room together before guests came in to witness their ceremonies. Others chose to 'adjust things' by walking in together, or made sure to have appropriate music playing (rather than the typical 'Here comes the bride'):

- *'The walking in was a bit like the bride walking in with the father, but we were walking in together so we adjusted things too' (Thanos, 40).*

- *'We had traditional music to come down the aisle to, obviously not "*Here comes the bride*" but it, I can't remember "Canon in D"*, or something, it was called' (Bryce, 29).*

A few men were less concerned with the gendered assumptions of who should/would walk who down the aisle. For example, both Kareem and Adam spoke about being 'given away' by their mothers. This slight innovation nonetheless subverted the gendered tradition of the father of the bride giving his daughter away to an expectant groom. Others participants, including Bryce, considered having their mothers, rather than fathers, walk them down the aisle:

> *'We decided not to have the fathers walking us down the aisle or whatever cuz you don't, I mean I, you don't tend to have fathers walking sons down the aisle anyway, and um then we toyed with the idea of having mothers walking down with us' (Bryce, 29).*

Ultimately, however, Bryce and his partner decided that their 'bridesmaids' would walk down the aisle first, as a 'warm-up act' before they entered together.

Some participants dealt with gendered rituals and roles with irony and playfulness. Andrew and his partner, who were particularly concerned with the gendered roles of walking down the aisle, decided to 'take the piss out of the moment.' They came in together to

traditional wedding music. However, they had arranged with the DJ that when they were halfway down the aisle the music would transition to a song, ironic for the occasion, given their worries, called 'Here Come the Girls.' Andrew said that this action 'completely changed the atmosphere' and 'put everybody,' including him, at ease.

Thanos described another situation where gendered roles surfaced. After the ceremony he and his partner went home, the photographer documenting every moment on camera. As they were entering their home she wanted to know who would carry who across the threshold. He described how they dealt with the situation:

> *'We did it to each other...I carried him in and then we went out and he carried me. Because you don't want to take the roles...you're aware that you're both men...you don't want to actually give the role of the bride to somebody' (Thanos, 40).*

Bryce and his partner, perhaps the couple with the most traditional 'wedding', were also innovative. For instance, Bryce adapted a particular reading he wanted to include by removing all the 'her references'. He effectively 'rewrote' the story: make it gender appropriate:

> *'We had a reading from a...child's book, it's about two dinosaurs that meet and fall in love, but I rewrote it, so I took out all the her references and we had two male dinosaurs falling in love, which was quite nice' (Bryce, 29).*

In addition to 'rewriting' this particular reading to make it appropriate for his same-sex ceremony, he and his partner Jason also subverted the gendered and heteronormative connotations of the ritual of 'throwing the bouquet':

> *'Jason insisted on throwing the bouquet, like the bride. So we built that in. The photographers said it was the first time they'd seen that at a civil partnership' (Bryce, 29).*

Many participants wanted to involve and acknowledge important family members, friends and others by assigning them roles on the day of the ceremony. Participants drew directly on traditional, and gendered, wedding roles and terminology in assigning these titles which included 'bridesmaids,' and 'best men'. However, just as some rituals were adapted because they were not suited to a same-sex ceremony, the genderedness of the roles they assigned to others was subject to subtle subversions. Bryce, for example, explained: 'we had bridesmaids who we kept referring to as "bridesmaids" in inverted commas because obviously there was no bride.' Similarly, Andrew and his partner agreed to assign each of their closest female friends the role of 'best man'.

While some participants did not feel the need to alter the terminology of various rituals or roles, even if they did not reflect the same-sex nature of their ceremonies and events, others were innovative and came up with new terms (which I have incorporated into my own lexicon). For example, in the run-up to their CP Andrew called his partner Ben his 'boy-ance'. Not only did this term deviate from 'fiancé', it also served as a reference to the singer Beyoncé Knowles, a gay icon. Andrew and his partner Ben also had a joint 'stag-do' which they called a 'fag-do'. Not only did they change the name of the event, they also chose to do it together, to include both male and female friends as well as their parents, and to avoid activities like 'strip-clubs,' thereby disregarding the gendered protocols and 'pressures' they associated with the traditional form of a stag-do:

> *'We did a joint fag-do, so it was friends, male and female and we went clay-pigeon shooting and my mum and dad were there and then we all went out for dinner…so just a nice fun thing without all these extra pressures of it being you know male and female do's and going to strip clubs and stuff, it was, you know, just a night out with everybody. We wanted to share everything together with everyone as opposed to go off in little groups' (Andrew, 33).*

'Signing some papers': basic civil ceremonies

While most participants constructed ceremonies containing ritual content to give meaning to what they otherwise considered the signing of a legal contract, a few participants constructed basic civil ceremonies. They had CPs primarily for instrumental reasons and, as such, did not see the necessity of ceremonial display.

Two participants chose to have basic registry office ceremonies attended only by the two mandatory witnesses and followed by a pleasant meal. They did not include any ritual content beyond the signing of the register. For example, George and his partner of 40 years, Patrick, decided to have a CP to access financial and legal protections. Although gay friends of theirs 'spent an absolute mass of money and did things extremely glamorously and bought all new clothes and had exotic holidays and big celebrations, and big parties,' for their CPs, George and Patrick opted for a simple registry office ceremony attended by his partner's brother and wife:

> *'All that we wished to do was the formality in a pleasant sort of manner…it was quite brief […] I think we weren't even there for more than 15 minutes and we didn't want any special music or special guests' (George, 65).*

George summarized his CP as a relatively mundane and 'routine' event; a 'little bit of a formality' in which he and his partner 'signed some papers':

> *'We'd simply, that morning got on a train, gone to [town], gone to an office, gone* through a little bit of a forma*lity, signed some papers, and then we had lunch […] It* could have been any day, we would have just been going and doing some other routine *thing' (George, 65).*

Like George, Klaus and his partner Peter were primarily intent on the legal and financial securities provided by CP and had a simple registry office ceremony. They felt the CP was a private affair, something between them that did not require the presence of a wider audience beyond the two required witnesses:

> *'Peter's parents were the witnesses. So it* was just the four of us. So we went to the registrar office and afterwards we came back home, had a glass of champagne, all four of us, between the raindrops and then we went to a local restaurant, had something to eat, went back home and sort of had a quiet day, sort of not like in, that you have like, *to celebrate it together with your friends and family and god knows what' (Klaus, 52).*

George and Klaus (and their respective partners) were not the only participants to have basic civil ceremonies. However, they were the only two participants who did not follow a basic civil ceremony with a post-ceremonial celebration with a wider group of people beyond their two witnesses. The next section explores how other participants constructed more elaborate ceremonies and celebrations.

Contrasting conceptions, discursive distinctions, familiar formats

Apart from the few participants who simply 'signed some papers' and had basic civil ceremonies, most participants included ritual content to imbue their CPs with meaning. Although most participants included a range of ritual content, drawn from weddings, in their ceremonies this did not mean that they conceived of, or desired, their CPs to be 'weddings'. Indeed, participants conceived of their CP ceremonies in contrasting ways. While some participants embraced having a 'wedding,' others made distinctions between marriage and CP and were discursively critical of 'weddings'. A key feature of bricolage is that social actors can be discursively critical of some aspects of tradition even as they unconsciously accept others (Duncan, 2011). Despite the variation in how different participants conceived of, and cognitively and discursively constructed CP, their ceremonies and celebrations tended to follow familiar formats, that is, they ostensibly took the form of a 'wedding' or wedding-like event.

Consciously constructing CPs as 'weddings'

Some participants, particularly the younger participants, fully embraced the idea of a 'wedding,' as well as the traditional language, roles and rituals that are often associated with 'weddings'. They consciously constructed their ceremonies as 'weddings' and rarely made discursive distinctions between CP and marriage. Bryce's and Ryan's narratives are typical of younger participants' experiences of constructing 'weddings'.

A few years after Bryce and his partner Jason began dating, some of his heterosexual female friends became engaged; this inspired him to propose to Jason. Following the traditional script for marriage proposals he got down on one knee and asked 'will you marry me?' although he gave Jason a neck chain rather than a ring. Upon Jason's acceptance, they announced the news to their supportive families, who were also keen for what they expected would be a 'wedding.' Indeed, Bryce claimed that 'hardly anyone ever called it a civil partnership…it was always "our wedding."' They spent two years saving and planning for their CP which was envisioned all along as a 'wedding':

> *'We just imagined any wedding that we'd ever been to really. I'd* got one of *these sort of civil partnership planning books...in there it talked about "well you can do whatever you like because it's your day and you can be different and you can do this that and the other" and I was like "well I don't want to do* it any di*fferently, I just want a wedding like anybody else has a wedding"'* (Bryce, 29).

Although Bryce and Jason lived together, they spent the night before their CP ceremony apart. During the ceremony, hosted at a golf club and hotel, they exchanged vows and rings, and performed a candle ritual and readings in front of their 80 guests. They kissed to 'seal the deal.' The ceremony was followed by a reception, meal, cake and speeches. Jason even decided to throw the bouquet, 'like a bride'. To make their 'wedding' experience complete they went on a 'ridiculously expensive' honeymoon abroad and double-barrelled their surnames.

Ryan and his partner Kurt also thought of and 'treated' their CP as a 'wedding'. Ryan said that there was 'no conscious choice that things would be different'. Over the course of three months, and on a 'shoe-string budget', they organized what Ryan described as an 'intimate' ceremony including the exchange of vows and rings. The 16 family members and close friends who were invited to their ceremony, at the local registry office, then joined them for lunch. Later that evening they had a party for 100 guests. Overall, Ryan felt that his CP was a 'wedding like any other':

> *'There was no conscious choice that things would be different. So, the* ceremony looked and felt exactly, to me, like a registry office wedding would

do. The party afterwards was, I think, exactly the kind of party that I would have wanted to have at any kind of wedding regardless of whether or not I was gay or straight. Everyone dressed up, we bought suits...we bought wedding rings and everything else...we treated it as, and it felt very much to be a *wedding like any other' (Ryan, 33).*

While most of the younger participants conceived of, consciously constructed, and referred to their CP ceremonies and celebrations as 'weddings', some older participants did the same. For example, seventy-two-year-old Oscar did not use the term 'civil partnership' once in our interview. Rather, he preferred the terms 'marriage' and 'wedding'. In planning his CP ceremony he did a lot of 'research on weddings' which enabled him to construct a CP ceremony that he felt was 'just like an ordinary wedding'.

'Wedding-like' events: discursively constructing CPs as distinct

For some participants, the heteronormative connotations they associated with weddings left them with feelings of ambivalence, anxiety or awkwardness. Therefore, they did not want their CP ceremonies to be construed as weddings. In order to avoid such misconceptions, they discursively distinguished their CPs from marriage and weddings. However, even as some participants were discursively critical of weddings they drew on, embraced and unconsciously accepted some aspects of 'weddings' - a typical feature of bricolage (Duncan, 2011). Indeed, while the general trend among this group, comprised mostly of older participants, was to emphasize how they were departing from what they considered 'traditional' weddings, they all included ritual content drawn from weddings.

The legal, technical and semantic differences between CP and marriage enabled participants to construct their CPs as distinct from weddings, discursively and cognitively. For example, Nathan and Adam, who did not want to 'copy over straight marriage' and did not want their CP ceremony to be 'like a wedding' felt that the legal and semantic distinctions were important:

> *'We didn't want it to be like a wedding. We wanted it to be something that we actually wanted [...] I think the difference was a quite important for me because I didn't feel* like I wanted to copy over straight marriage. I wanted it to be a bit special and a bit *different' (Nathan, 51).*

The 'difference' between CP and marriage allowed Nathan and Adam to make their CP a 'bit special and a bit different', that is to make it distinct, at least discursively, from a marriage and wedding.

Similarly, Irving and Mark also distinguished their CP ceremony from a wedding. They had been together for over 20 years when CP became an option and while they had different motivations to enter a CP, they both agreed that their CP would be 'anything but a marriage'. As such, they envisioned a CP ceremony that would not be too 'wedding-y.' Mark stated: 'we decided to try and not make it too much like a wedding - for other people's sensibilities, also for ours, it's not a wedding, it's a civil partnership.' To make their CP distinct from a wedding they kept their ceremony 'pretty brief' and did not exchange rings or include any other ritual content apart from the vows they exchanged. However, although they did not make what they considered 'the standard vows that most people make at a wedding' they nonetheless said 'I do'. After the ceremony they joined their 40 guests for a champagne reception followed by a communal meal, which they considered the 'really important bit' of the day. They also had a cake which, although a hallmark of 'weddings,' Mark insisted was not too 'wedding-y':

> *'Instead of it being floral and a wedding cake…it was more oak leaves and* acorns with just a few lilies in, sugar icing sort of thing...not too wedding-y...we *didn't want, no I don't think either of us would have felt too comfortable if it had been too much like a wedding' (Mark, 45).*

Jens and his partner Daniel did not want a 'traditional wedding thing' either. The CP they constructed, as distinct from a wedding, consisted of a 45-minute ceremony with harp music, readings, and an exchange of self-written vows in front of 100 guests at an elaborately themed seaside resort. The ceremony was followed by champagne and a decadent three-course meal with speeches between each course. Unlike Mark and Irving, they forwent the cake.

While the tendency was for older participants to construct their CPs as distinct from weddings and marriage, some younger participants did the same. For example, although Andrew was not discursively critical of weddings, he did not want to construct his CP as a wedding. Rather, he and his partner Ben 'deliberately' intended to make their CP 'really different' to a 'straight' wedding. The couple had 'always planned a ten-year-thing' to mark the passing of ten years together. Coincidentally, CP was introduced the same year as their ten year anniversary and so they decided to integrate the CP into their existing plan to celebrate their relationship. However, Andrew emphasized that their CP 'never was meant to be a wedding'. Rather, he wanted his CP to be 'markedly different' because he did not want his CP ceremony to be a 'half-assed attempt' or a 'gay version' of a wedding:

> *'We didn't want to wear white, we didn't want a wedding cake, we didn't want a* photographer...all of the things that you see, speeches, all of the really big wedding *things, I just didn't want…I didn't want it to be a half-*assed attempt at something or

like a gay version of it, I wanted it *to be different, you know, a marked difference'* (Andrew, 33).

However, despite Andrew's intention to make his CP 'markedly different' to a wedding, he said that his CP 'became a wedding'. He attributed this to the involvement of his friends and family, who, all drawing from the common tap of knowledge of what a 'wedding' should be like, made his CP more 'wedding'-like. Andrew described how the CP he and his partner had originally planned as an elaborate three-day celebration at a country mansion with 80 friends and family members became a 'wedding':

> *'It became a wedding through circumstance, not through our own planning [...]* as time went on and as we were telling people, all of a sudden we ended up with *wedding rings, a cake and then with a pink theme' (And*rew, 33).

Although the narratives in this section have illustrated that some participants constructed their CPs as distinct from weddings and marriage, not all of these participants sustained these distinctions over time and, in some cases, engaged in typical wedding practices after their ceremonies. For example, after their CP Mark and Irving went on a 'honeymoon,' double-barrelled their surnames and exchanged rings (a year later).

Overall, participants' accounts illustrate that it was difficult for them to make their ceremonies feel (to themselves) and seem (to others) different from a 'wedding' even if they intended to. Indeed, Mark, who had aimed to make his CP 'not too wedding-y' stated:

> *'It's very hard for it not to be like a wedding because you've go*t a ceremony, *you've got food, you've got people, add them together you've got most of the main elements there' (Mark, 45).*

While some participants emphasized how they were sticking to, or departing from, what they considered a 'traditional' wedding, what they regarded as 'traditional' varied. For example, while Mark and Irving chose not to recite 'standard wedding vows' because they wanted their CP to be positively distinct from a wedding, they nonetheless said 'I do'. Bryce, on the other hand, embraced his CP as a 'wedding' but said: 'there was no sort of "I do" like you'd have at some weddings'. Another example of the differing conceptions the participants had for what counted as 'traditional' was the cake. While Jens and Daniel felt it was important to forgo a cake so as not to 'copy a wedding', Mark and Irving had a cake which they considered 'not too wedding-y'. In contrast, Eric considered his CP a wedding but distinguished between a 'wedding cake' and the cake he had at his CP. He said: 'we had a partnership cake, so it stood in for a wedding cake'.

Regardless of how participants conceived of their ceremonies, and even if they discursively constructed them as distinct from weddings and marriages, they ostensibly took the familiar form of, and were socially intelligible to their guests as, 'weddings'. Indeed, the only significant differences participants, and their guests, noted between their CPs and weddings had to do with the lack of religious content, and the same-gendered nature of the ceremony. For example, Cameron said that his CP ceremony was 'conventional' and felt 'exactly the same' as he imagined a 'straight wedding' would be, apart from the facts that there was no religious element and they were 'two blokes'. Similarly, Bryce's narrative revealed that 'apart from the fact that there was no bride' his CP was intelligible to others as a 'normal' wedding:

> *'A lot of the guests who had been there said, afterwards actually, they had no idea of what to expect but they couldn't believe how sort o*f normal it all felt. Apart from the *fact there was no bride walking down the aisle, it was like any other wedding they'd* been to really'* (Bryce, 29).

Overall, this section has revealed that participants' experiences of constructing CP ceremonies is consistent with previous qualitative work showing that same-sex couples do not build commitment ceremonies from 'scratch' (Smart, 2008), but instead draw on wedding traditions and rituals (Lewin, 1998).

6.3 Participating in ceremonies and celebrations

Whether participants attempted to construct CP ceremonies that departed from or emulated weddings, their narratives exemplified how CP ceremonies operated as discursive arenas (Lewin, 2004). Indeed, participants displayed various aspects of their identities, including their gay identities, during their ceremonies. They also implicitly and explicitly conveyed meanings and messages about their experiences of being gay men and same-sex couples. Some participants took advantage of the visibility that CP provided, whilst others were uncomfortable with this level of visibility, particularly when it came to demonstrating their same-sex love and affection publicly. While the spotlight was on participants and their partners, other people played important roles and contributed to the construction of meaningful ceremonies. In most cases, participants garnered considerable social support on the day of their CPs which contributed to the often powerful and unexpected emotions they experienced.

Displaying identities

Like heterosexual weddings, participants' CP ceremonies served as forums in which they expressed and displayed various aspects of their identities including faith, ethnic, cultural and national identities. Participants expressed these aspects of their identities through music and readings, decorations, clothing and other bodily adornments.

While several participants and their partners chose to wear clothing that 'matched,' others chose to display their individuality or distinct heritages through their clothing. For example, Ethan wore a Scottish kilt to reflect his national heritage. Kumar and his partner Ian chose to wear 'Anglo-Indian' outfits to reflect their different ethnic heritages, but also for Kumar to comment on his mixed-race identity.

For many of the participants who differed from their partners in terms of ethnicity and/or national heritage it was important that their ceremonies and celebrations reflected their distinct heritages. For example, Chen and his partner Miles organized their CP around an 'Eastern-Western fusion' theme to reflect their different heritages - Chinese and English, respectively. They adorned the room in which their ceremony took place with Chinese decorations, and during the ceremony they read poems in their native languages - Chinese and English. After their ceremony they led their guests in a traditional Chinese dance which was performed to Chinese music. This was followed by an evening disco where they played Western pop music.

As a strictly civil procedure CP is not meant to have a religious component. Many participants were happy with this because they were not particularly religious. Other participants, however, found it 'slightly upsetting' that they were legally prohibited from displaying their faith identities. For example, Eric, a practising Christian involved in his local church community said: 'being Christians that was slightly upsetting that we couldn't have any religious elements during our partnership'.

Despite the legal limitations and religious restrictions some participants found ways to express their faith identities or incorporate a religious component in their ceremonies. Kareem, for example, expressed his faith identity by painting his hands in henna for the ceremony, a Muslim tradition. Sunil was less subtle in expressing his faith identity. Indeed, during his CP ceremony he and his partner were joined by their guests in singing Christian hymns. Sunil described his ceremony as 'Christian-based' because it was led by a pastor from a prominent church serving the LGBT Christian community. Similarly, William, whose partner Damian is a Methodist preacher, said: 'we also made sure from a religious point of view that it was attended by one Methodist minister…and uh, two other Methodist local preachers, as well as Damian. So we had all the proper approval in place there'.

While most participants did not intend to create 'gay weddings,' their CP ceremonies and celebrations nonetheless served as forums in which their gay identities were displayed. Some participants did not want to, or did not feel the need to, emphasize their gay identities. Others thought that their CPs were 'camp enough' by virtue of the fact that it was a ceremony celebrating the relationship of two gay men, or because they had invited other gay people from

their social networks. Indeed, Liam thought it would be 'stereotypical' to make his CP ceremony gay. For example, Liam explained:

'It would almost be stereotypical to, you know, having some sort of flamboyant, outrageously pink fluffy thing' (Liam, 45).

Similarly, Ethan's partner was keen to have a Broadway theme at their CP, which Ethan thought was too demonstrative of their gay identities in a stereotypical way:

'He wanted like a different Broadway legend on every table and I was thinking, "how gay do you want t*his to be?"' (Ethan, 30).*

Many participants, however, incorporated elements that reflected their gay identities or interests. For example, some participants made references to what they regarded as 'gay' interests, such as 'Broadway' and 'Eurovision' songs. Other participants chose to include common gay symbols like the 'rainbow flag' and the 'pink triangle'. Although some participants incorporated these elements they did not feel that their CPs were necessarily 'gay weddings'. For example, Kumar said:

*'So*me of it was a bit high-camp you know, uh and the sparkles and those kind of, but it *wasn't particularly a gay wedding' (Kumar, 40).*

Sunil, on the other hand, felt that while the 'actual process' and format of his CP was 'very traditional,' that 'the actual feel of it was very gay' and 'camp'. Indeed, Sunil said that the reception following his CP ceremony was 'done in a more sort of camp way'. The venue was decorated with 'bright pink bows' and a 'rainbow flag', they sang along and danced to songs by gay icons while wearing wigs and 'shocking blue feather boas'. Sunil felt that all of this was simply reflective of his identity as a gay man:

*'It was done in a more sort of camp way (chuckles) [...] We sang a Donna Summer song cuz she's my favourite, from the ga*y artists *[...] Some people were wearing wigs, men* wearing wigs and I had on a blonde wig at one point, and um I had a big feather boa, big *turquoise, shocking blue feather boa [...] It was just a process of who we are you know, it's what we wanted, shocking!* We wanted bright pink um bows on the chairs, and um, a *rainbow flag draped over the front of the top table and things like that, and it couldn't have been any other way' (Sunil, 49).*

Demonstrating the validity and ordinariness of being gay

While CP ceremonies allowed participants to display, often unconsciously, their gay identities and interests, it simultaneously allowed them to demonstrate, assert and claim that they, and their relationships, were ordinary, authentic and normal.

Liam, for example, regarded CP as something special for the gay community; he said: 'there is something a bit more gay about it. It's definitely ours and it's gay.' However, he and his partner Craig did not feel the need to make their CP a 'flamboyant, outrageously pink fluffy thing.' Indeed, he thought to do so would be 'stereotypical'. Furthermore, he did not feel that CP was 'the right place' for that. Instead, they wanted to show that their CP, based on love, was 'the most natural thing in the world'. Liam explained how they made this statement:

> *'We did a full traditional works of you know formal dress, button holes, table deckies* (decorations), formal invites, RSVPs, three-tier cake...the full works, you know...music and readings...the less traditional...two puffs, both in tar*tan' (Liam, 45).*

By relying on the 'full traditional works' Liam and Craig constructed their CP ceremony as an authentic wedding, naturalizing their same-sex love and effectively making their CP ceremony seem (to others) and feel (to themselves) like 'any other' wedding:

> *'Yes it was a civil partnership, but for all intents and purposes it was as good as...as* any other marriage or wedding would be. There was no distinction in our minds about that, there was no distinction clearly amongst the staff of the hot*el...our friends and family were very blasé about, "yeah, well it's a wedding"' (Liam, 45).*

While Liam used the overall context of his CP ceremony to demonstrate that his relationship was the 'most natural thing in the world', some participants relied on specific rituals to demonstrate that their relationships were ordinary, authentic and normal. The kiss was one such ritual. While some participants thought the kiss was a straightforward ritual to include, as noted earlier, for others the kiss was a particularly 'important' act because it was a rare chance to publicly demonstrate to others the ordinariness of same-sex love and physical affection. Kumar, for example, saw the kiss as a chance to 'normalize' same-sex physical affection:

> *'The kiss was important...there was a lot of people in that room who'd never seen us kiss...because you just tend not to I guess. We might hold hands or support each other or have a cuddle, but actually I don't think most of those people have seen us have a* kiss, and again they started cheering and stuff so it was quite nice, so again to normalize *that' (Kumar, 40).*

Similarly, although George, who had a basic civil ceremony, did not include any other ritual content in his CP, the kiss was the one particular wedding ritual he included to assert that he and Patrick, despite being two men, were an authentic and ordinary couple:

> 'The one thing that I was determined to do, which every other married couple does when they marry, you know, we kissed' (George, 65).

In addition to displaying the ordinariness of being gay men and same-sex couples, some participants also wanted to explicitly convey messages to their guests. Participants typically conveyed these messages in the context of speeches. Some wanted to explain to others the hardships of their journeys as gay men and as same-sex couples. For example, Daniel, who had undergone electric shock aversion therapy to treat his homosexuality in the 1970s, saw his CP as an unprecedented 'opportunity' to comment on this hardship and the immense social change he had experienced in his own life:

> 'We'd been able to say things that we never said before or rather we took it as an opportunity to say it [...] I talked about, you know, in, in, in the short period of my lifespan we'd gone from giving people electric shocks to being able to get married' (Daniel, 55).

Similarly, William and his partner Damian both gave speeches at their CP. They spoke about the 'difficulties' that they had endured over the course of their 38-year relationship. These difficulties had to do with the fact that they were a same-sex, and bi-racial, couple:

> 'He made quite a strong sort of a you know gay defensive speech at the ceremony [...] talking about the history and how it had been difficult, and indeed we did, we both talked about the *about the difficulties we've been, because of the racialism when we started out*' (William, 72).

Other participants used their speeches to address publicly the lack of social support they had received from family members over the years. Eric acknowledged the absence of his unsupportive family members during his speech. Although Eric's mother attended his CP, his father, aunties and uncles did not. In his speech he told the audience that while he 'understood' their reasons for not attending, he wished they were there.

> 'I spoke from the heart and said I was glad to see people there and sort of understood that some people didn't feel able to come and I sort of talked about how it was new to everyone' (Eric, 45).

Discomfort in displaying same-sex love and physical affection

While some participants took advantage of the visibility of their ceremonies and captive audience to assert the ordinariness of their relationships, others felt awkward and anxious with the level of visibility that participating in a CP ceremony necessitated. Several participants were wary about publicly displaying the nature and depth of their love and commitment, or physical affection during their ceremonies.

Some participants' discomfort was related to displaying their same sex-love in front of particular people. In Bryce's case these were friends from his childhood who, although aware of his sexuality, had never seen him with a man:

> *'They'd never really grown up with me having a boyfriend or whatever, so in a way it* was the first time they*'d ever seen me with anybody so in the back of your mind, you sort of think "god what are they going to be thinking about this?" (Bryce, 29).*

For some participants this discomfort was not related to displaying same-sex love and physical affection in front of particular people, but related to participating in particular rituals in front of others, particularly rituals that signified love, intimacy, closeness and physical affection. Andrew, for example, felt that it would be 'awkward' saying vows in front of all of his guests. He and his partner chose to recite 'friendly' vows rather than the 'really romantic' and 'soppy' ones. Similarly, William explained how his partner Damian was 'very anxious' about expressing his same-sex love publicly:

> *'Damian was very anxious to avoid the word love for some reason. He's perfectly happy to tell me he loves me when we're in private together, but he doesn't like to say it in public' (William, 72).*

As discussed earlier, for many of the younger participants, the kiss was an 'obvious' ritual to include in their ceremonies. For other participants however, it was a discomforting prospect. Some participants, particularly the older participants, chose not to kiss in front of their guests. Instead, some chose to hug or embrace during their ceremony while others kissed in a private moment after the ceremony:

- *'We didn't kiss during the ceremony, but we did embrace' (Steven, 45).*

- *'We agreed that we would do the kiss afterwards so we just done the kiss after the ceremony had finished' (M*itchell, 49).

There were a few younger participants who were uncomfortable with the kiss as well, although ultimately they decided to kiss during their ceremonies. For example, Hugh explained that his partner was 'anxious' and 'worried' about kissing, on the lips, during their ceremony:

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'He said "I'll give you a peck on the cheek", and I said "if you give me a peck on the cheek", I said, "you've got a problem", um and he said "oh I can't do that in front of everybody" [...] he actually got quite anxious about that' (Hugh, 32).

Some participants also felt uncomfortable participating in 'the first dance'- another ritual common to heterosexual weddings. Some participants felt 'self-conscious' about dancing in front of their guests while others were concerned about how their guests would react to this spectacle:

- *'I did feel slightly self-conscious with um, dancing with Adam (chuckles). I don't know why cuz it was our reception, but I did' (Nathan, 51).*

- *'Connor was of the opinion [that] at least his dad was not going to be comfortable watching the two of us slow dance, arm in arm' (Ethan, 30).*

Social support and the participation of others

While participants and their partners took the leading roles in their ceremonies, there were other cast members whose participation was integral to the construction of meaning. These included the family members and friends that they had chosen to play particular roles or perform particular functions or rituals, and the registrar who conducted the ceremony.

Nearly all of the participants commented on the important part played by the registrar. Registrars not only led participants' ceremonies, but also contributed to the construction of meaningful CP ceremonies. Some participants reported that their registrar had 'acknowledged' their same-sex relationships as being of equal value to heterosexual relationships. Nathan, for example, said that his register had said 'it's about time that gay relationships got any recognition' and then proceeded to speak with them about that, which Nathan though was 'really very nice' and 'really good'. Other registrars recognized and commented on the extraordinary 'life stories' and 'journeys' that many participants, as gay men and same-sex couples, had had to traverse in order to arrive at CP. For example, Kareem said:

'Even the registrar started crying, because she said "you know, I'll be honest with you, this is my first civil partnership and it's very obvious that you guys really love each other and I don't know your life stories but it seems like some kind of journey has been made here today"' (Kareem, 28).

Registrars also served as an expert who knew, from experience, what would make participants' ceremonies more meaningful. For example, Thanos explained that the registrar who officiated his CP had 'refused' to give him a copy of the vows before the ceremony. While he was initially

'quite angry' with the registrar because he wanted to 'practice' the vows, he later understood why she refused to let them practice:

> *'She was very, very right because it made the vows much more important [...] the fact* that for the first time we were hearing those vows, and we were saying those vows it *actually made it much more important' (Thanos, 40).*

Generally, participants' were able to garner support from their families as a result of their CP ceremonies. Supportive family members demonstrated their support by assisting in the process of planning CP ceremonies, or by contributing financially towards the cost of the event (as noted in section 6.1). On the day of the CP ceremony family members displayed their support by attending the event, participating in various rituals, fulfilling designated roles, and, in some cases, by giving impromptu or unsolicited speeches which explicitly communicated their support. For example, despite the fact that Andrew did not want to have speeches at his CP, his father took it upon himself to give one, an expression of his support:

> *'It was nice because my dad was saying about how he loves the fact that that's, just the* *fact that we're happy and he's happy [...] so that was nice that he was stood up saying* *those things' (Andrew, 33).*

Similarly, Jens and Daniel were overwhelmed by how many of their guests wanted to 'say something' at their CP. According to Jens, some of these speeches were 'really poignant, really moving speeches, some very political ones, um, but some very personal ones as well'. In particular, Jens remembered a speech given by a former university colleague and friend. Jens found this speech to be 'very emotional' because his friend had said that Jens and Daniel had been 'brilliant role models' for his son who had recently come out as gay.

While most participants reported that the majority of their family members willingly demonstrated their support, other family members seemingly did so out of social or moral obligation. In these cases, the garnering of support seemed to be only for the day, and related to social pressure or moral obligation rather than out of genuine support or acceptance. In other cases support from family was not expected but demonstrated nonetheless in the run up to the CP and/or on the day of the CP (although it could later be rescinded). Kareem's case is an example.

Kareem's parents were generally unaccepting of his homosexuality and were, therefore, less than enthused when he informed them that he would be 'marrying' a man. Kareem said that his parents expressed their disapproval 'up until the wedding day' and had no intention of attending the event. However, the night before Kareem's CP ceremony his mother had a change of heart, as illustrated by the following story, which Kareem told with his usual dramatic flair:

'Up until the wedding day my parents were like "no we're not coming" and on the *night before the wedding I was getting my henna done at a friend's* place, I was having *a henna ceremony. And my mom was like "where are you going? It's like the night before your wedding" and I said "oh I am going to my friend's to get my henna done" and she was like "don't you want me to do it?", cuz literally an older w*oman would do *it, and I said "yeah I would actually", and so I went over to my friend's place first, had that done and then came home and my mom did my other hand, and then she said "you are going to be on your own tomorrow", like my sister was in [foreign* country], my dad *wasn't coming so therefore my older brother wasn't gonna come and she said "look, I really want to come" and I said "you know you are welcome anytime. If you come, you come, if you don't come I don't have any, any um, I won't have any hat*e towards you *guys, you are my parents I could never hate you. You've been on this journey with me as well and it's been probably tough for you guys but I understand". Um t*o cut a long story short she argued with my dad all night and up until the last poin*t she wasn't going* to come and I was getting ready, I was literally getting ready while World War III was happening in my house. Honestly, it was the most dramatic day. I get the taxi, I get into *the cab and my mom literally, goes "no", she stops the cab and she goes "wait ten minutes, I am getting ready, I am coming" and I was like "mom, you can't" and she was like "I don't care if I get busted, I am coming", she literally got herself into like a* pink sari, literally powdered her face as quickly as she could, lipstick, got into the cab, *came and I was the last person at my wedding [...] we had the ceremony, beautiful, um, my mom gave me away' (Kareem, 28).*

Although Kareem's mother attended the ceremony and 'gave him away', she and Kareem's father seemed to have unresolved issues with his sexuality. Indeed, Kareem feels that when he announces his plans to adopt children with Irfan that it will be 'another stage of coming out' to his parents who he presumes will have 'an issue' with his desire to be a parent as a gay man. Kareem's narrative is a reminder that while family could demonstrate their support on the day it was not always an indication of their acceptance as this support was not always sustained and did not, therefore, necessarily translate to a change or improvement in their family relationships. However, as will be discussed in the next chapter, in some cases these expressions of support could foreshadow a change or improvement in the quality of family relationships.

Unexpectedly emotional experiences

Most participants discussed the intense and unexpected emotional response that they had during their CP ceremonies. For example, Kumar and his partner had decided to enter a CP primarily to

boost their chances of a successful adoption (as discussed in section 5.4) but also for inheritance tax reasons. Because they were entering CP 'for all these practical reasons' they 'were both looking at it quite light-heartedly' as 'just a big party and a bit of a dress-up'. They were caught off guard when their CP ceremony proved to be an 'emotional awakening':

> *'It's all of these practical things, which you think, but actually when you're getting married it becomes emotional, actually. And it's actually "we are now doing this and this actually does mean something" and i*t, it is actually an emotional reason to it, but you *can't really describe it because you didn't, I didn't, we didn't, neither of us expected it to* hit us like that (Kumar, 40).

Several other participants commented on the intensity and unexpectedness of their emotional response:

- *'I didn't expect to be emotional…we were both really upset, but in a good way, but ridiculous, I've never felt that sort of emotion' (Andrew, 33).*

- *'It was more emotional than we thought it would be and we just thought it would be an*d *we just thought "oh it's just going to be a, you know, a legal contract, signing your name on the form," you know, but no, it meant much more' (Steven, 45).*

Thanos, on the other hand, expected to feel emotional but was surprised by how powerful his response was. For Thanos, the novelty of the experience, the presence of others, and particular rituals worked in synergy to arouse a powerful emotional response:

> *'We knew that it was going to be quite important and emotional but during it, yes it felt* much mor*e powerful than you imagine it, it's something that you've never done before,* something like this, ha*ving your friends around, exchange of vows, looking at each other's eyes, exchanging rings' (Thanos, 40).*

Some men cited certain rituals as the culprits effecting emotion (e.g., walking down the aisle, hearing a piece of music, exchanging rings or vows, speeches). For some participants however, it wasn't necessarily particular rituals or the presence of others, but the overall context of the day which caused an emotional response. Mitchell, whose 'eyes were a bit red with emotion', said: 'I think it was just the day to be honest, I don't think there was any real reason, I think it was just all what was happening on the day.' For Mark, the CP was an unprecedented situation in which he and Irving 'publicly proclaimed' who they were, as a gay male couple:

'It's the only time that we really publicly proclaimed who we are, what we're doing and our love for each other. So I think that's part of what made it such an emotional time' (Mark, 45).

Emotions were for the most part positive, however, negative emotions were experienced when family members were absent because they were either unaware the ceremony was happening or because they did not support it. Rishi, who was not yet out to his family in India, said: 'there was a bit of sadness that I couldn't involve my family'. Similarly, Eric, whose father refused to attend the ceremony, described how his father's absence affected him on the day:

'We were very happy, as I said, twinged with some sadness. My father wasn't there which we would have wanted him to be part of the day but he didn't feel able. I was disappointed' (Eric, 45).

A few participants indicated that they did not experience intense emotions on the day, but this did not diminish the significance of the event. For example, Ethan, who said 'I wasn't necessarily overcome with emotion', nonetheless regarded his CP as 'the happiest day' of his life. This was a common, if not 'cliché', sentiment:

- *'It's these cliché things – the happiest day of my life – but it was!' (Jens, 51).*

- *'When they say it's the happiest day of your life, it really is' (Sunil, 49).*

In addition to considering it the 'happiest day' of their lives, most participants regarded CP as a 'milestone', a 'benchmark', a 'defining moment,' or a 'highpoint' in their lives and relationships:

- *'There've been a few sort of highpoints in my life and that's certainly one of them' (William, 72).*

- *'It's a milestone, definitely a milestone, it's like, you know, any major events in your life and I guess it's important in your life to have those' (Steven, 45).*

Once through CP they were simultaneously 'among the ranks of the few', or 'just like everyone else who gets married', or prepared for new 'stage' or 'level' in their relationships. It was comments like these that confirmed my sense that CP was a rite of passage, or at the very least, an important ritual event in participants' lives. The next chapter discusses participants' reflections on the meaning and impact of this important ritual event, of becoming and being civilly partnered.

Chapter 7: *'The icing on the cake':* meanings, impacts and the legacy of civil partnership

In this chapter I draw on participants' reflections on the meaning and impact of CP in their lives and relationships – of becoming and being civilly partnered - as well as their speculations about the wider implications (the 'socio-cultural legacy') of CP for future generations of gay men, gay culture and society generally.

Theoretically, my analysis in this chapter is informed by rites of passage (van Gennep, 1960; Meeks, 2011) and theories of the functions and power of ritual (Imber-Black & Roberts, 1992), and the cultural power of law (Hull, 2003; 2006). Berger and Kellner (1964) argued that marriage is 'one of the few traditional rites of passage that are still meaningful to almost all members of the society' (5), a view that I maintain. Rites of passage are often deeply symbolic, emotional and transformative events which bring a new sense of self and identity, social roles and obligations (van Gennep, 1960; Meeks, 2011). While rituals are symbolic acts of meaning used to celebrate and construct meaning in people's lives, they also have additional functions or impacts. Indeed, rituals can have healing and transformative powers and may have implications for relationships (Imber-Black & Roberts, 1992). With regard to the legal dimension of CP, the law also has cultural power (Hull, 2003; 2006). The cultural power of law can be tapped by same-sex couples to define their relationships and commitments to themselves and others, to give them 'social legitimacy' and to render them 'socially normal' (Hull, 2003). Overall, the socio-cultural and legal dimensions of CP worked in various ways, and at times in synergy, to have impact and generate meaning in participants' lives and relationships.

In the first section I discuss the social intelligibility of CP as marriage. The majority of participants felt, considered, and referred to themselves as 'married', or had come to after a period of initial resistance and active distinction-making. I then discuss the immediate legal and practical impact of CP which all participants were granted, although it was of varying importance to them. I then discuss the various other meanings and perceptions of change that participants reported at personal, relational and social levels. I then discuss the theme of dissatisfaction that several participants expressed during the interviews and their hopes for future legal reform.

7.1 'Marriage in all but name': the social intelligibility of civil partnership

The first point to make in this chapter is that although CP is technically, legally and semantically distinct from marriage, it was nonetheless socially intelligible to most participants, and their kin and social networks, as marriage. Indeed, most participant's thought of CP as like marriage, essentially marriage, or equivalent to marriage. Furthermore, these participants used

the language of marriage to describe themselves and their partner, their marital status and their CP ceremonies. Although participants commonly used the language of marriage, they did so differently. Some embraced the language of marriage, some used it assertively or for 'convenience's sake' depending on the social contexts they found themselves in while others slipped into it accidentally and occasionally. In any case, I would argue that to some degree their use of the language of marriage reflects how they conceptualized CP. Many of them referred to their CP ceremonies as 'weddings', their civilly partnered status as 'married' and their partners as 'husbands'. For example, Ethan said 'I call it a wedding, I call myself married, I call him my husband'. These sentiments were echoed in both younger and older participants' narratives as illustrated by the following quotations:

- *'For me it's such a big milestone because of cultural and religious reasons, for me it's* that equivalent to it, um I know my civil partnership is a civil partnership, a legal civil partnershi*p, but I don't see it as any different to being a marriage' (Kareem, 28).*

- *'It was marriage in my eyes whether it's called civil partnership or marriage' (Hugh,* 32).

- *'It's called a civil partnership, um but it's a marriage in that, in everything but name'* (Eric, 45).

- *'I'm not sure I see the difference between this and marriage, frankly' (Cameron, 62).*

- *'As far as we're concerned it is marriage, it is a marriage in everything except the word' (Oscar, 72).*

Participants also felt that, for the most part, their CPs were seen by kin and social networks and wider society as effectively marriage. Recall Bryce's quote from the previous chapter in which he explained that when his family and friends were referring to his CP ceremony they 'always' called it a 'wedding' and that 'hardly anyone ever called it a civil partnership'. In addition to considering CP ceremonies 'weddings', most participants noted how their civil partners were regarded as, and referred to as, 'husbands' and that they were recognized by most of their kin, social and professional networks as 'married'. Ryan, for example, said:

'All of my colleagues and friends will have no difficulty with calling Kurt my husband and like referring to our wedding as a wedding and everything that goes with it' (Ryan, 33).

The intelligibility of CP as marriage was underscored by the finding that some participants, who were initially resistant to equating CP to marriage, later acquiesced to referring to and/or seeing themselves as 'married'. As discussed in section 6.2, not all of the participants who cognitively and discursively constructed their CP ceremonies as distinct from 'weddings' and marriage sustained these distinctions over time. Some engaged in typical wedding/marriage practices after their ceremonies and began to use the language of marriage. Indeed, Jens and Daniel ended up exchanging rings post-ceremony despite their initial reservations about doing so. Jens also stated that over time he and Daniel had acquiesced to the language of marriage and had come to consider themselves 'married':

'For a long time we used the term civilly partnered, but now I think we are just talking about being married' (Jens, 51).

A few participants maintained clear discursive distinctions between CP and marriage throughout their interviews. Although they did not see themselves, or describe themselves, as married, they acknowledged that others in their social and kin networks might see them in this way and refer to them accordingly. William, for example, said:

'Sometimes people speak to me, ask me about my husband but you know, that sounds odd to me, I know what they mean, but I don't think of him as a husband […] we don't call one another husband, we call one another partner, and we had a [civil] partnership not a wedding' (William, 72).

7.2 'Just a piece of paper': the legal meanings and impact of civil partnership

Like civil marriage, CP provided all participants with a common set of rights and responsibilities which had legal, practical and financial benefits or implications. As discussed in the first findings chapter, these rights and benefits were the primary motivating factors behind some participants' decisions to enter CPs. For those who entered CPs for instrumental reasons, these were borne out. The legal status of civil partner provided rights and benefits including inheritance, pension, and next of kin rights. For participants subject to immigration control, the CP was not only a means to remain in the UK with their partners, but for some it was literally a pathway to citizenship. Indeed, after CP and three years residence in the UK Cameron's partner, originally from Thailand, was granted British nationality. In a few cases, including Chen's, the

right to remain in the UK as a civil partner had the added benefit of enabling participants to lawfully gain employment and feel like they were contributing to their relationships financially. CP also had implications for participants who had already made arrangements to legally protect their relationships through wills and enduring power of attorney agreements. Indeed, Daniel felt that CP 'put a seal on' the arrangements that he and Jens had made over the years to legally protect their relationship. Furthermore, CP simplified these 'intricate' arrangements and fortified them by making them 'non-challengeable.'

While some participants had been instrumentally motivated to enter CPs for the rights it provided, others, particularly younger participants, had valued the expressive and romantic side of CP (as discussed in section 5.4). As such, these participants saw the rights conferred by CP merely as a nice accompaniment to the symbolic meanings and perceived psychological benefits of CP. Indeed, as mentioned earlier, Ethan said that he did not enter CP for 'financial reasons' or for 'next of kin' rights. However, he considered these to be a 'good wee bonus'. Similarly, Hugh said that legal rights were not a 'reason' to enter CP but rather a 'benefit' of doing so:

> *'From a legal perspective, it gives us some rights […]* they *weren't a re*ason to do it, it *was a benefit of doing it […] that wasn't the reason why I wanted to do it. Um, but if you asked me do I feel happier, you know with knowing that we've got legal rights and things like that, yeah absolutely'* (Hugh, 32).

As Hugh's narrative (above) reveals, exercising citizenship, that is, gaining legal rights, could also contribute to participants' well-being. Presumably, Hugh felt 'happier' because he, like several other participants, associated the legal rights and responsibilities attached to CP with feelings of increased safety, security and stability (this theme will be revisited in subsequent sections).

A few participants reported that CP held little to no bearing in their lives and relationships beyond the legal rights and material benefits it conferred. In other words, it was a 'piece of paper' which did not change them, their lives or their relationships. Klaus, for example, attributed only legal meaning to his experience of CP and denied that he felt different or that anything had changed:

> *'I don't think that it's changed the way we live with each other in any form or shape, as such. So it's not like, certainly um with um, I didn't change my name, he didn't change his name, so it's, it's a piece of paper, the, the, the life before* is the same as the life *after so not, in, in that point of view nothing has actually changed'* (Klaus, 52).

It is unsurprising that CP held only legal meanings for Klaus. As discussed previously (see section 6.2), he and his partner had a basic civil ceremony attended only by the two mandatory

witnesses. They did not include any ritual content to imbue the occasion with symbolic meaning and they received only a limited amount of social recognition.

Unlike Klaus, most participants acknowledged that CP 'wasn't just a piece of paper'. Beyond the concrete changes participants experienced as a result of the legal rights conferred by CP, the majority of participants' reported that CP had generated new meanings in their lives and relationships, that they felt different, and that something had changed after their CP. These new meanings and feelings of difference and change were often subtle and a matter of perception, as Nathan explained:

> *'It did make a difference [...] there aren't any real practical differences or ch*anges that I can think of, I think it is more perception. I think I feel like we are more established as a *couple [...] which is probably a feeling cuz I think in reality that shouldn't really have* changed from when we moved in together but it somehow does*' (Nathan, 50).*

Participants generally struggled to articulate the meanings generated by CP and these perceptions of change precisely because they were a matter of perception. Hugh, for example, said 'somebody said to me once, you know, 'does it feel different?', and I went 'yeah, but I can't tell you why'. Similarly, Thanos said 'it's difficult to describe. That's why I keep saying it's how you feel rather than where you are, because you can't actually prove it to anybody'. Although participants found it difficult to describe or explain the perceived change or difference resulting from CP, my analysis revealed that these meanings, this sense of change and 'feeling different' was experienced at multiple levels: personal, relational and social. This is consistent with the findings of Green's (2010) qualitative study of civilly married Canadian same-sex couples. He found that same-sex civil marriage 'bears in significant ways upon the self, the dyad, and one's relationship to the larger social order' (416). The next three sections of this chapter focus on these three levels in turn.

7.3 Personal meanings and perceptions of change

In line with the power of ritual and the nature of rites of passage (as outlined in the introduction to this chapter), most participants reported that their experiences of becoming civilly partnered were more meaningful and more emotional than they had expected and that they were transformative, fulfilling and, in some cases, healing experiences which validated them as 'normal' and provided them with feelings of 'inclusion', 'belonging' and 'acceptance'. Like heterosexual individuals who marry, several participants, particularly younger ones, felt they had fulfilled a commonly held life expectation/aspiration to marry. CP also had a transformative impact on personal identity as many participants said that they, as individuals, 'felt different'. This sense of 'feeling different' at the personal level was experienced as a new sense of identity,

level of maturity, or sense of responsibility. Older participants' narratives revealed that their experiences were also distinct as CP had made them feel 'normal' 'accepted' and included in wider society, and some spoke of coming to peace with a re-evaluated understanding of their gay identities. Overall, CP provided participants with new understandings of themselves, a new social status with attendant labels, and access to new and normative identities which several participants wanted to assert and display in various ways, for various purposes, and in various contexts.

Fulfilment, reconciliation, validation & well-being

On a personal level CP had a range of meanings for participants some of which seemed to be related to their age/generation. Because nearly all of the younger participants equated CP to marriage, the process of entering a CP represented a fulfilment of a life expectation or aspiration which is common to most people in society. There was a sense of this as well for older participants, but the dominant theme in their narratives was that of validation. For many of the older participants CP seemed be a validating, normalizing and, to some extent, healing experience. Some participants felt that CP had been instrumental in allowing them to reconcile aspects of their identities which had previously felt at odds. CP seemed to have different, and perhaps more significant, meanings for older participants who, in some cases, had had to 'wait' for decades before they could legally formalize their relationships.

Unlike older participants, younger participants came of age in socio-historical contexts in which they were able to understand their sexuality as relatively 'normal' and could, therefore, imagine and expect futures which included committed same-sex relationships, marriage and families of their own. Indeed, most of the younger participants claimed to have had normative expectations for their lives, based on their perceived ordinariness (see preface to the three findings chapters and section 5.2). As such, their entrance into CP was an enactment of their perceived normality and also represented the fulfilment of their, arguably (hetero)normative, life expectations/aspirations. For example, Chen, who had 'dreamed' of marrying a man with whom he could spend the rest of his life, said that entering a CP with his partner Miles was 'like a dream come true':

> *'It's just like a dream, like a dream come true. Can you imagine that? It's just like one* day you can marry a man, the guy you love and I [am] still like dreaming when, for now, I still think I am in t*he dream, sometimes, it's like just not real, for me to stay in the UK, have a civil partnership and a husband' (Chen, 30).*

Like Chen, Kareem, a second-generation British-born Pakistani and practising Muslim, said that he had envisioned, and indeed 'promised' himself (when he was 18), that he would

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'settle down' with the 'man of [his] dreams' in a 'long-term relationship' that was 'akin to marriage'. His ordinary aspirations for a committed relationship and marriage stemmed from his cultural background and his perceived ordinariness as an 'average Asian Muslim'. Not seeing himself as 'any different' to his heterosexual peers Kareem felt entitled to the 'same rights' and 'exactly the same thing[s]' – marriage and children, and even promised himself at 18 that he would eventually get married, albeit to a man. While Kareem had 'promised' himself that he would marry, this dream seemed a more likely possibility a few years later when CP was introduced, as he explained: 'when the whole civil partnership act came in I said "yeah, that's something I want to do"'. Kareem's life expectations, however, were called in to question when he was 24. It was then that his parents, who were harbouring their own expectations for his life (i.e. heterosexual marriage and children), found out that he was gay and arranged for him to marry a young woman in Pakistan. He initially agreed to the marriage and was, at that point, resigned to thinking that there was not a 'long-term solution to being gay and Asian and Muslim'. After seeking counselling and speaking to his gay Asian friends including his current civil partner (who was at that time an ex-boyfriend), Kareem concluded that he could not marry a woman to appease his parents. Shortly after telling his parents that he would not go through with the arranged marriage Kareem received a call from his ex-boyfriend Irfan who had been doing some 'soul-searching'. Although Kareem and Irfan had broken up after a 'summer of love' in the UK because Irfan wanted to return home to Pakistan they both still had feelings for each other. They had kept in touch for a year and 'joked' about marriage but it was during this phone call that Irfan unexpectedly 'proposed' that they enter a CP for real. After Kareem accepted the proposal, a week later, they began the arduous year-long process, replete with setbacks, of getting a proposed civil partner visa for Irfan. Given the trials in Kareem's life story, it is no wonder that entering a CP was a profoundly meaningful experience for him. Some of this significance manifested itself emotionally during his CP ceremony, as he explained:

> *'I think there are times in your life where words can't describe the human emotions you* are feeling um and for me I mean my life had been such an incredibly painful and happy and joyous journey to that point that I think in that moment everything just came *together' (Kareem, 28).*

For Kareem, his CP was not only meaningful as a fulfilment and 'coming together' of life aspirations that were important to him but also as a 'defining moment' in terms of reconciling his ethnic and faith identities with his sexuality. In the following excerpt he reflected on this aspect of his experience:

> 'It was something I was always going to do very early on in my life, once I found the right person. Um and I think, you know, meeting Irfan, going through that whole

process and marrying, it was quite a defining moment in terms of reconciliation, you know, it was the final ball to drop if you like because first I had to do the whole Asian reconciliation with my society, then with the gay community and then with my British culture and the Asian culture. But then this was one of the last things to fall, and I just felt that, you know, by being married to a guy I was fulfilling my Islamic duties in a way, you k*now, by being married' (Kareem, 28*).

Within the sample there seemed to be variation in the significance of CP along generational lines. Unlike younger participants, older participants' formative years had been spent in socio-historical contexts in which marriage to another man was not only legally impossible but had also seemed inconceivable. As such, for older participants CP not only represented a legal reparation for a previously denied right to citizenship, but also represented a new life course possibility and a new era in life as a gay man. It was for these reasons that CP seemed to have different, and possibly more significant, meanings for older participants. Mark, for example, felt that CP was potentially more 'special' to him than it was to younger and future generations of gay men who would 'miss that magical point when everything has changed and you can do it'. Specifically, he felt that CP would become an 'assumption' or an 'automatic right/rite' whereas it was something he had had to 'wait over 20 years for' since he first met his current (civil) partner Irving. It was in a similar vein that Irving described his experience of CP as the 'pinnacle of thinking':

> *'We both never thought we'd get what we got cuz you don't when you are gay, you didn't,* my generation never thought they would end up like this. As I said at the *beginning, I always thought I would end up a bachelor […] it was just the pinnacle of* thinking, and its only in retrospect that I can say this that that day was the pinnacle for me, *I really felt that this was it, this is what I have waited, you know, forty years for […] I'd got the same as everybody else but it took 40 years' (Irving, 60).*

Like Irving, George's narrative also highlighted the added layers of significance that CP had for many older participants. In George's case, these added layers of significance were both personal and political as they were related to the nearly 40 years that he and his partner had been together before they were no longer 'wickedly denied' the opportunity to legally formalize their relationship:

> *'It was important, it is important, to be able to kind of publicly and legally express and* show and register and stand up and be counted as a couple, as a partnership you know, *and why shouldn't we after, why shouldn't we after six months, let alone after 40 years? You know why should it be, why should it have been so wickedly denied?' (George, 65).*

In addition to the political meanings that CP held for George he went on to explain that he experienced a feeling of 'euphoria' on the day and that he 'felt different right from that day' – a feeling that was sustained over time, beyond the actual day of the CP. He also felt that CP provided 'official validation' and 'approved' him as a gay man, a gay man who, in his words, had become 'just like everybody else' (after 40 years):

> *'I felt different right from that day, I don't know how, or why, but you know, there's a* little bit of an inner glow, a little bit of standing up and being counted, a little bit of *'yahoo, to hell with you!', and a little bit of official validation […] it somehow did feel good to be um, official in a way, or approved, not that I want anyone's approval, you know, but […] that's a kind of good feeling, it's almost, I don't think it's a conscious t*hing as such, but it's almost that you're...you're becoming just like everybody else' (George, 65).

George's narrative highlights the recurring theme of 'validation' that several older participants' felt as a result of the legal and social recognition they received via CP. This sense of validation was commonly expressed in terms of 'acceptance' and 'approval' as 'normal.' In addition to these feelings of validation some participants noted how their experiences of CP seemed to mediate their marginalized status as gay men and provided feelings of inclusion. Adam, for example, felt that going through a CP was a 'positive' experience which led to feelings of 'belonging' and 'acceptance'. As he explained, he felt less like an 'outsider' after CP:

> *'It made me feel* quite good actually. I, I started to feel like I belonged to something for once. *Whereas mostly I'd felt like an outsider. That's a bit of an exaggeration but you do I think* feel like an outsider sometimes. And uh...together with the acceptance that we got from a lot of people, a lot of our friends, um the whole, the whole package really, makes you feel like *you're, you're part of, you've got, you know you actually, you got a right to be there sort of thing. Uh, so, that was, that was very positive' (Adam,* 54).

While for younger participants CP was an enactment of their perceived normality, for older participants it could perhaps be more accurately described as an unexpected but welcomed normalizing process. In other words, some participants felt that CP had been an experience which validated them as 'normal'. Kumar, for example, emphasized this aspect of his experience of CP:

> *'It's like a sense of normality and actually 'this is alright, this is...', sometimes even to* ourselves perhaps we need something to *happen and say "this is normal" […] it was* like every sense of um...wrong, I guess, that we may have grown up with, that this was

wrong, two gay people were wrong, or we'd heard about or thought about it or even internaliz*ed [...] the only thing, retrospect*ively reflecting on it, I think it can be is all of *those things that says that when you're a kid that gay men just don't get married or there's no such thing as gay men and where there are gay men they have this kind of* lifestyle like you see on TV and here you are doing something which you have seen, but *it's been a man and a woman and does that now give you that level of normality'* (Kumar, 40).

The 'sense of normality' that Kumar felt as a result of his CP stemmed from his participation in a ceremony which, according to his childhood experiences and references, had previously only been open to a 'man and a woman' and, therefore, outside the realm of possibility for gay men. Furthermore, Kumar's participation in something as 'normal' as CP seemed to dispel the abnormality and 'wrong'-ness of homosexuality that he had internalized as a kid. Thus, as a validating experience, CP also seemed also to have healing implications. Indeed, Daniel's experience of entering a CP was not only a validating event but also a healing event which assuaged the vestiges of the internalized stigma that had plagued him as a younger man. Bearing in mind Daniel's story of struggle to accept his homosexuality (see section 5.2), CP seemed to ameliorate his internalized stigma, an aspect of minority stress:

> *'There was definitely something about "We've arrived, we, we're the norm now. We're, we're part of we're part of normative society" and having felt for such a long time that* I was part of a deviant aspect of society that, that was, that was hugely important in a way that I find it odd to speak about because, because it makes the, I suppose it, it, it *takes me back to how deviant I felt and I, you know I, I don't feel that anymore [...] I* suppose in, in, in the, in the context of, of having been so negative about myself, having been through those experiences, early experiences, uh it was like actually I, I suppose it *was about acknowledging that I was acceptable' (Daniel, 55).*

For Daniel, the social and legal recognition provided by CP was particularly important as it allowed him to acknowledge to himself that he was 'acceptable' and no longer 'deviant'. He also expressed feelings of inclusion in wider society. Indeed he felt he was now a part of 'normative society' rather than a 'deviant aspect of society'. Clearly, Daniel's case is one in which his personal well-being went hand in hand with the new sense of normality and acceptability that he gained from CP.

Whether CP generated feelings of belonging and inclusion in society, validated participants as normal, or fulfilled their aspirations or allowed them to reconcile aspects of their identities, my overwhelming sense was that CP had a positive impact on participants' well-

being. This was commonly expressed in terms of happiness, life satisfaction and, in Oscar's case, a newfound sense of 'peace'. Like Daniel, Oscar had struggled to accept his sexuality. Prior to meeting his current (civil) partner, Oscar had been heterosexually married with children (as discussed previously). While he had enjoyed most of his experience as a heterosexual husband and family man, he did not have 'inner peace'. Oscar explained that being in a CP with his partner Eric had provided him with a sense of peace:

'When I was in, in an ordinary marriage most of it I enjoyed, but I didn't have inner peace, I was in turmoil inside, all the time. Now I have peace' (Oscar, 72).

CP also seemed to have well-being implications for younger participants who tended to speak of happiness and life satisfaction. For example, Ryan had imagined happiness taking the form of the 'get married, live happily ever after stereotype'. He said that his life after CP matched this vision of how he 'imagined happiness to look'. Kareem was also 'very happy' and satisfied with his life. He described the two and a half years since his CP as the 'best years' of his life:

'We've been married now for two and a half years, really. And it's been absolutely superb, you know, *it's been the best years of my life really' (Kareem, 28).*

Other participants did not attribute the level of happiness and contentment in their lives entirely to CP, although they did acknowledge that CP contributed to this happiness. For example, Liam explained that his CP was the 'icing on the cake' of his life satisfaction and happiness:

'I am more profoundly happy and content with my life now than ever before […] my life is very, very secure, you know, things are where I would like them to be, they're not all perfect, but most of the time life is very predictable, very nice, thank y*ou, and I'm, yeah I'm very confident, very happy, very content about that, that's a very positive thing. The* [civil] partnership I suppose has been the icing on that cake, but there was a bloody big *cake there to start with' (Liam, 45).*

Gaining and displaying new and normative identities

In addition to the personal meanings that CP generated, nearly all participants, regardless of age or relationship duration, reported some sense of 'feeling different' at a personal level. In other words, CP had a transformative impact on participants' self-concepts and sense of identity. This sense of 'feeling different' at the personal level was experienced as a new sense of identity, level of maturity, or increased sense of confidence and responsibility. Overall, CP provided participants with new understandings of themselves, a new social status with attendant labels, and access to a new and normative marital identity which several participants wanted to assert and display in various ways, for various purposes, and in various contexts.

Several participants spoke about how CP had transformed their sense of self and identity and how they 'felt different' at a personal level after the CP. Andrew, for example, said 'I did feel very different once we got married'. Although Andrew found it difficult to explain the 'marked difference' that he felt, he did venture to say that it was possibly related to feeling 'a bit more grown up', clearly mirroring the notion that marriage requires or signifies a level of maturity. In addition to the new level of maturity that Andrew felt, he also felt 'different' because CP had provided him with a new marital identity which felt in line with his understanding of himself as 'normal'. Andrew, like most of the younger participants, told a new narrative of normality. He said that he had wanted to enter CP, which he saw as the 'mainstream norm thing,' because he had never seen himself as 'any different.' Although he recognized 'the restrictions' on what was possible for a gay life, he felt his desires to share his 'life or a wedding or those sorts of celebrations with somebody' were ordinary human desires. Being able to achieve those desires, via CP, was important to solidify his understanding of himself as normal:

> *'Marriage for me has been great because I didn't ever think of myself as this big gay person, it was just a part of me, so it's lovely that I've been able to do what everybody else can do' (Andrew, 33).*

Some participants felt that the new and normative marital identity conferred by CP was more reflective of them than a stereotypical gay identity. Liam, for example, said:

> *'There's a bit of stereotype, isn't there, of some gay men just, you know, it's all one night stands, or go and pick up and shag 'em and clear off, you know, and that's not me […] and you know, the whole thing of civil partnership is about having that serious established relationship, which definitely is me' (Liam, 45).*

Liam also reported that he felt more 'secure' after his CP. Indeed, when I asked him if his CP had impacted upon his sense of self he said:

> *'My immediate sort of thing is to just say "no of course not, I'm not changed", but no that wouldn't be right. I probably have changed, I've probably become more, definitely,* no it definitely has. I am definitely much more se*cure about who I am' (Liam, 45).*

Like Liam, several participants described an increased sense of security, comfort or confidence after their CP. As will be discussed at greater length in section 3 of this chapter, this increased sense of security and confidence that participants felt after their CPs carried over to interactions with their families and in social and work settings as well.

Unsurprisingly, several participants said that they felt like 'married men' after their CPs. This feeling was not limited to younger participants (who were more likely to consider CP as marriage), nor those who were in new(er) relationships. For example, entering a CP made 65-year-old George feel 'different' and 'married' even after 38 years together with his partner. Similarly, 30-year-old Ethan, who entered a CP five years into his relationship with his partner, felt like he was 'a married man':

> *'I feel like I am a married man [...] I like that I can say I'm married to him and he's my husband [...] like I'm officially his next of kin, I'm his civil partner'* (Ethan, 30).

Ethan's quotation, although short, illustrates several points. Firstly, entering a CP signalled not only a shift in participants' self-concepts but also a shift in how they thought of their partners. Secondly, accompanying these cognitive shifts, many participants noted a transition in the social labels they used to describe themselves and their partners. These included 'husband' and 'civil partner', as will be discussed further in the next section. Furthermore, participants noted the new social and legal roles and obligations that they had to each other as a result of CP. In social terms, participants felt obliged to 'look after' their partners. In legal terms, CP meant that participants became 'next of kin' and had decision-making power in medical/healthcare decisions, and had financial responsibility for each other. Several participants noted how they felt an increased sense of 'responsibility' in their social and legal role as a civil partner:

- *'I felt I had more* responsibility. That I have a part-, a civil partner now and *that felt good cuz that's the kind of person I am I guess so it kind of, it stair-*cased or it, um, it reinforced more of my personality of being a kind of protector *or rescuer'* (Sunil, 48).

- *'I* see it as my job to look after him, um, but actually I can do that legally now *[...] even down to the point of, you know, I'm his next of kin'* (Hugh, 32).

Many participants also wanted to publicly communicate and display their new status as civil partners and the fact that they 'felt different'. Commonly participants chose to display their new marital identity by wearing rings. As discussed in the last chapter, many participants exchanged rings during their CP ceremonies which they wore on a daily basis as a symbol of their commitment. Some of the participants that had not exchanged rings during their ceremonies, for various reasons, went on to exchange them at a later date – a day, or even a year, later. For example, although Jens and Daniel had initially decided against exchanging rings (because they did not want to 'copy' a wedding), Jens explained that after their CP he 'felt different' and 'completely committed' to Daniel and wanted to 'show it publicly' by wearing a ring:

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'The morning after, I said to Daniel, "I do feel differently and I think I would like a ring after all"...I felt "yeah we are completely committed to each other and I want to show it publicly now as well. We've demonstrated and shown it on the day but I want to show it anytime I go out somewhere I want to show that *I am in a relationship and I want to carry a ring, yeah"' (Jens, 51).*

Another, albeit less common, way that some participants chose to display their new marital status and identity was to share the same surname. Unlike heterosexual marriage, where traditionally the woman takes her husbands' surname (Thwaites, 2014, in press)[24], there is no traditional or gendered protocol for same-sex couples to follow when they formalize their relationships. While some participants in this study understood the practice of sharing a surname upon CP as a 'traditional' or 'normal' thing to do, for others the decision to share a surname was a reflexive one in which they had to discuss, negotiate and decide how they would share a surname, what it would signify, and what utility it would have. While the choice of whether or not to amend surnames upon CP represents a choice that is perhaps more free and genuine than in heterosexual marriage, it was still guided by normative marriage practices. Furthermore, the choice was often guided by a desire to feel (to themselves) and seem (to others) 'married'.

Six of the 24 couples represented in the study had amended their surnames in relation to their CP. Another couple had initially planned to change their surname after CP, but then decided to wait until they had successfully adopted children. While many participants wanted to amend their surnames in some way, their narratives revealed that naming decisions were not straightforward and often presented dilemmas including whose name to take, and which name would go first in a double-barrelled name. In two of the six couples who decided to share surnames one partner adopted the surname of the other. More commonly, participants and their partners decided to double-barrel their surnames. In these cases, the order of names was usually debated and was often based on how phonetically and aesthetically pleasing a particular sequence was.

While two participants related their decision to amend their surnames to their plans to adopt children, the most common reason for sharing a surname was to display to themselves and others their new marital identity. Indeed, following the tradition of sharing the same surname as one's partner made some participants feel married. For example, it was for this reason that

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[24] This is discussed further in the book chapter attached in appendix M. The chapter was in conversation with Thwaite's (2014, in press) chapter in the book regarding the continued widespread practice of this tradition among heterosexual married women.

Bryce and his partner decided to 'combine' their individual surnames into a double-barrelled surname that they now share:

> *'It doesn't really feel like you've actually gotten married if you have different surnames,* and so we deci*ded to combine it and go along with that' (Bryce, 29).*

Other couples felt that by sharing the same surname they would seem married to others or be 'making a statement' to their families and wider world. In this sense, the practice of name-sharing among same-sex couples is not simply a nod to tradition, but a bid for the recognition, validation and legitimation of their relationships. These participants felt that sharing the same surname would communicate that they were an authentic 'married' couple and that their relationships were as valid as anyone else's:

- *'We wanted people to reali*ze *that we were as much a married couple as a heterosexual couple' (Hugh, 32).*

- *'I look upon this as a statement that we are married and not just two guys who* share a house. This latter description is how some members of our families and some members of our church would very much prefer it to be. Having to use our *joint name challenges them, and each time makes them face their delusion'* (Oscar, 72).

7.4 Relational meanings and perceptions of change

For most participants, CP seemed to be an important and transitional point in their relationships both practically and cognitively. Practically, it served as a foundation to structure aspects of their joint lives and also guided action. At a cognitive level, most participants reported that the legal formalization of their relationships made them 'feel differently' about their relationships and their partners. Almost resoundingly, participants expressed the impact of CP on their relationships in positive terms and commonly used the following words as descriptors of the meanings and perceptions of change generated by CP: 'cemented,' 'connected,' 'consolidated,' 'strengthened,' 'comfortable,' 'reassurance,' 'security,' 'closer,' 'confirmation,' 'established,' 'permanent,' and 'stability'. Unsurprisingly, many of the meanings and perceptions of change that participants reported at the relational level are similar to what heterosexual couples who marry would likely experience. However, some of the meanings and perceptions of change generated by CP seem to be unique to same-sex couples.

As noted earlier, some participants downplayed the significance and difference that CP had made to their relationships. Indeed, a few participants thought that their experience of forming a CP had simply been a formalization of their relationships which they felt had already

been developed and defined, or even celebrated, in some way. Sean, for example, said: 'we were a partnership before we had the ceremony it wasn't as though we needed it to say "yes, we're now a couple" we had been a couple for a long time.' Similarly, Liam said:

> *'The [civil] partnership was just the formal tick box, done. You know, the fact that all* the groundwork had been sorted beforehand and developing the relationship and you know beginning to think about moving together, living together, celebrating life *together, you know, the civil partnership was the top end of that' (Liam, 45).*

Although a few participants thought of CP simply as a formalization of what they already were, most acknowledged that it had made a difference at a cognitive level. Thanos, for example, noted this change which he described as a transformed 'emotional state':

> 'Nothing has changed in our relationship, or where we are or where we started or what we do, but in an emotional state it has, you just feel, you feel a stronger bond, for sure. *It's not just sharing rings and photos and memories, uh, this, this, this idea keeps* *coming in my mind of 'we're in it together' [...] y*ou go to the next stage, it does feel *like a stage, you, of your relationship [...] it's not that much different to how it was* *before, it's just that there you feel like, cuz obviously the civil partnership you kind of* made a commitment, uh to do that, so you feel like you have to stick to your promise, uh and you get a reminder all the time that um you have kind of a duty to do, to do that and *to show that' (Thanos, 40).*

Thanos's quotation highlights a few themes which are developed further in the remainder of this section. These themes include strengthened couple commitment ('stronger bond' and 'we're in it together') and the relational legacy of CP ('sharing rings and photos and memories' and 'sticking to your promise'). In addition to these themes I also discuss the new ways in which participants, including Thanos, thought about and referred to their partners after CP. I then discuss the validating impact of social and legal recognition and the distinctive meanings this had for participants as members of same-sex couples. I then consider the potentially negative impacts that CP had for a few participants' relationships. Finally, I consider how some participants were influenced by marital conventions and how others resisted or departed from these conventions.

Becoming 'civilized': reconceptualizing and re-labelling partners

Not only did participants perceive a shift in how they thought of themselves (as the last section discussed) but they also thought of their partners in a new light. After CP, their partners were not simply 'boyfriends' and 'partners' but had become 'civil partners'. Kumar, for example, noted this transformation which he felt was 'really weird':

> *'It seems really weird cuz of course he's been my partner for ten years, but now he's my* civil p*artner' (Kumar, 40).*

In line with the new legal status and social identity as 'civil partner,' participants adopted various social labels. While some participants were insistent on or content to use the term 'civil partner' others felt it was cold or clinical and devoid of meaning and instead favoured the term 'husband' which carried social meaning. Indeed, George, who highlighted the inadequacy of the 'terminology' associated with CP, felt that 'husband' was a more 'accurate' descriptor of his partner than 'civil partner':

> *'The terminology is a bit difficult to work around, but I have a civil partner, it's probably more accurate to say I have a husband, so I have a husband now' (George, 65).*

While some participants used 'husband' nonchalantly or routinely as a matter of course, others used it 'facetiously' to joke around, while others used it assertively in various contexts to convey the seriousness of their relationships or the similarity and parity of their relationships to heterosexual married relationships. While some participants used 'husband' others were reticent about using the term and actively avoided it. Nathan, for example, said that he 'sometimes,' but only in a 'jokey way,' used the word 'husband' to describe his partner Adam. Outside the context of humour, Nathan preferred to use the term 'partner' which seemed, to him, a more accurate descriptor of their relationship which he understood as an equal partnership. Indeed, the word 'husband,' which has connotations of a dominant and masculine provider and protector, does not fit with how he sees their relationship, as he explained:

> *'I sometimes call him my husband but that tends to be more in a jokey way. I refer to him as my partner [...] I think we tend to avoid the husband thing a bit because -* I *don't* know why really - *doesn't seem right. I feel like, more like we are partners. I think husband makes you feel like someone is looking after you a bit, when it's more equal'* (Nathan, 50).

Whatever terms participants used, most of them noted that previously preferred referents, no longer seemed appropriate and did not reflect or convey that something had changed, or the level of commitment they associated with CP. Furthermore, some felt entitled to use the word 'husband'; that this was a 'right' conferred by CP:

> *'It feels, because of the civil partnership, I have the right to say "my husband"'* (Thanos, 40).

Memories, mementos and the relational legacy of CP

As Thanos's quotation at the beginning of this section revealed, participants' CP ceremonies and celebrations often left a relational legacy by way of memories and mementos. Participants' memories of the day served as intangible reminders of the event and the commitments they had made, as Thanos explained:

> '*We're sharing memories as well together, phot*os around and things all over the house *for the civil partnership […] people refer to it back again, memories, it's nice going back to photos and things*' (Thanos, 40).

In addition to memories, participants could also revisit the day through photos and various other physical relics from the day that were either kept somewhere safe or displayed in their homes. Indeed, the centrepiece of Thanos's living room (where we held our interview) was a portrait of him and his partner dressed in their finest on the day of their CP. He, like several other participants, also showed me a photo album of the event. Other participants also had photos and mementos displayed around their homes which I had a glimpse of during our interviews. Bryce and his partner Jason had displayed the cake toppers – rubber ducks dressed in British and American regalia to represent his and his partner's respective national heritages - from their 'wedding cake' with 'pride' in their bathroom. Ethan pointed out the 'unity candles' that he and his partner had lit during their CP ceremony which are now displayed in their dining room. Nathan kept a 'big box of happy memories' full of the cards and small gifts that various guests had given to him and Adam or their CP. He spoke of the 'warm feeling' he gets when he revisits these mementos.

Some participants spoke of the continuing importance of the vows they had exchanged during their CP ceremonies. Chen, for example, felt that the vows 'meant everything for the relationship'. Liam acknowledged that although his relationship with his partner is surely subject to change, that the 'old-fashioned marriage vows' about 'in sickness and in health, for better, for worse, for richer or for poorer' served as an 'abiding commitment' to 'stick to each other'. Nathan and Adam had specifically chosen a set of vows which they felt they could 'live by'. Thus, CP was not only a special day to remember but also something that some participants 'lived by'.

Strengthened couple commitment

Whether CP established, cemented or consolidated a couple's commitment it was an event in participants' relationships that symbolized, and was often perceived to strengthen, their commitment to one another. As such, many participants, including those in already established relationships, felt that they had moved to a new level, stage or phase in their relationship after

CP. Several participants reported that they felt more secure in their relationships which they perceived to be stronger and more permanent and stable. Some also felt closer and more connected to their partners. These relational impacts were often experienced as a package of multiple, rather than discrete, feelings. Ryan, for example, explained that his CP made him 'feel different' about his relationship. Indeed, he felt that CP had 'cemented' and 'strengthened' his relationship and 'elevated' it to a new level:

> *'It [civil partnership]* actually made me feel different about the relationship. It felt like something which cemented it and which elevated it to a level *which it hadn't* previously been on and made me have kind of more respect and reverence for it than I would have *otherwise have had, I think [...] the process of actually kind of* making that commitment kind of led to us collectively kind of evaluating the relationship in a different way from if it had just kind of um...you know, gone on open-endedly without that kind of process to kind of formalize *the way that we were thinking about it [...] I think* it strengthened it *[...]* like the strength of my feelings about the relationship definitely changed (Ryan, 33).

Because Ryan had only been with his partner for a year before entering CP, CP was a way of 'making' a commitment. Establishing commitment in this way at such an early stage in their relationship caused both he and his partner to evaluate their relationship in a different way. Kumar, who had been with his partner for ten years, expressed similar sentiments to Ryan. Kumar said that in addition to the unexpected 'cementing' impact that CP had, it also had a connecting impact in his relationship as he felt 'closer' to his partner and that their relationship was 'stronger' and 'more positive':

> *'It actually ended up showing us it meant a lot more than we ever thought it could have* done, I guess. Um it cemented us a lot more, we just feel stronger, more positive. We *smile and laugh a lot more actually after the day [...] we were close before but I think* we have become closer since*' (Kumar, 40).*

Although CP was a way to 'make' or establish commitment for new(er) couples (like Ryan), it was a confirmation or consolidation of commitment for more established couples which not only had the effect of making them feel closer (as in Kumar's case), but could also make them feel more secure. Steven and his partner Oli, for example, had been together for 22 years before their CP. Over the course of their long relationship they 'cemented' their commitment in prosaic and practical terms through 'milestones' such as buying a home together. Nonetheless, Steven regarded his CP as an 'important milestone' that brought him and his partner closer 'together.' Steven went on to say that his relationship feels more 'permanent' and 'secure' given 'the fact that it's on a legal basis' now. Like Steven, several participants commented on the perceived permanence, security and stability that they felt as a result of CP.

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For some participants this was a general feeling, but others related it to the fact that there were legal ties that made it harder to exit the relationship. This was generally seen as a positive barrier rather than a restrictive one:

- *'You sort of feel more comfortable and connected I suppose, knowing that you couldn't just walk away from each other tomorrow and it would be as easy as that, they're gone forever, cuz legally there are ties there now' (*Bryce, 29)

- *'It gives you a security, uh, in the sense that, uh, even, even the worst happens, it's not we break up, bye, bye. Uh, it's not so easy, not that we would, but it makes it much more difficult to actually split up' (Thanos, 40).*

Hugh expressed the new found sense of security that he and his partner felt subsequent to their CP in terms of 'reassurance.' As Hugh explained, this reassuring feeling was backed up by the fact that their love and commitment was not only symbolically confirmed when they signed a legal contract, but also because this symbolic act was performed in front of, and witnessed by, 80 people:

> *'He stood up in front of 80 of our friends and family and told me that he loves me, you* know, he signed a contract which says, you know, that *he loves me' and that, you know, it, it, it was just real, real, real reassurance of what I knew we'd got' (Hugh, 32).*

In Hugh's case CP was a psychological resource that reassured him and his partner that their relationship was based on love and commitment. Social recognition was an instrumental aspect of this reassurance. Like Hugh, Sean felt that the social recognition of CP also had important implications for how secure he felt in his relationship. Indeed, Sean felt that there had 'always been an element of insecurity' in his relationship with Phil prior to their CP. This insecurity was related to the fact that for the first few years of their relationship he had felt 'hidden' and was unsure of whether he would ever be 'acknowledged openly'. Indeed, it took a number of years before Phil felt comfortable enough to come out about his sexuality and relationship with Sean. Apart from having a mother who 'never would have understood it,' he was wary of telling his family because he had only recently left a long-term heterosexual marriage. Furthermore, he had been wary of coming out professionally given his job as a vicar. For Sean, it was Phil's eventual willingness to have their relationship socially recognized which was particularly meaningful, and which quelled his feelings of insecurity in their relationship:

> *'I suppose there'd always been an element of insecurity with me, um up to the point of* us having the civil partnership as I say I never expected him to do it [...] I suppose that *went when we'd had the* partnership because it was, you know the ultimate recognition

of well yeah we are in a partnership and this is it' (Sean, 31).

As the last two cases have illustrated, the social recognition that participants received was particularly important for bringing them a sense of security in their relationships.

Validation: official and legitimate relationships

If legal and social recognition could make couples feel more secure and stable in their relationships, it also had the impact of validating their same-sex relationships. Indeed, as Ethan explained, the very act of legally formalizing a relationship validated it as 'official':

> *'It honestly did feel different, it felt more enclosed, it felt like it had been underlined, if* you know what I mean, you know made o*fficial' (Ethan, 30).*

While heterosexual couples might feel that their relationships have been validated as 'official' through recognition, for same-sex couples there is an added dimension due to their marginalized social status and position in society. Indeed, both the legal and social recognition afforded by CP signified to participants that their relationships were not only 'official' and 'legal' but also of 'equal value' and accepted by friends, family and wider society and its laws and institutions as 'valid' and 'legitimate' relationships. Indeed, Daniel felt that CP was a validating experience:

> *'I*t was something about validity, it was something about being acknowledged as a couple i*n a way that we hadn't before' (Daniel, 55).*

As Daniel's quotation (above) reveals, he felt that his 25 year relationship with Jens had finally been 'acknowledged' and that this legal recognition not only made their relationship 'legal' but also 'different,' 'totally upfront' and 'totally legitimate'. Similarly, Adam said that he and his partner Nathan felt a 'distinct difference' after CP. He also expressed this sense of difference in terms of the legitimation of his relationship which he related to 'recognition by society':

> *'We've been recogn*ized, and we're, we've got a le*gitimate place in, in the world* *whereas before it was more informal somehow. So, in that sense it's different […] there* *is that sense of you're, you are part, recogn*ized by society, uh as having a legitimate *sort of relationship' (Adam, 54).*

The validating and legitimating experiences highlighted here tie in with the cultural power of law, which can be tapped by same-sex couples to define their relationships and commitments, to themselves and others, as 'social[ly] legitim[ate]' and 'socially normal' (Hull, 2003).

Claustrophobia and complacency

While most participants reported the generally positive impacts of CP on their relationships, there were exceptions. For example, Mark and Irving, who had sustained their relationship for over 20 years before their CP, both spoke about the 'rough patch' that they experienced as a couple after their CP. Irving said that he had temporarily felt more 'claustrophobic' in the relationship. Mark confirmed that Irving had 'started to feel a bit trapped' but was unsure of why this had happened. Mark speculated that Irving's 'claustrophobia' might have been related to 'the fact that there was now a piece of paper' or that he had become 'more possessive' after the CP. It seemed, however, that Mark's first hunch was correct. Indeed, Irving attributed the feeling to the fact that the CP had made their relationship undesirably 'respectable,' as Irving explained:

> *'It was just this feeling, a claustrophobia that I'd got, and I think it's because* everything had sort of been made, dare I use the word, respectable. And, um, but, but, I *got over that, got over that and I wouldn't have it any other way now' (Irving, 60).*

In any case, Irving's feeling of claustrophobia in the relationship passed and Mark feels that they are now 'well and truly through the woods.'

A few participants spoke of how their sex lives had changed after their CP. These participants usually mentioned a decline in sexual activity which seemed to be related to complacency and the security of knowing that sex could always be had, if not today, then tomorrow. Chen, for example, commented that he and his partner had sex less often after their CP than they did before their CP:

> *'Our sex life, we do (chuckles) after our civil partnership, I don't know, we're just kind* of an old married couple. *It just, I, I don't know I just think it's like, you know he will be there. He'll always be there so you just don't think, ok "I was too tired today, we'll do it tomorrow, uh too tired again, do it tomorrow" and so basically, it's once a week'* (Chen, 30).

Although Chen maintained that sex with his partner remained very 'passionate,' he equated their sex life to that of an 'old married couple' because it had diminished in frequency to once a week. This idea of being, and behaving like, a 'married couple' was a common trope in participants' narratives and the various meanings, including sexual, this held are discussed next.

(mis)Behaving like a 'married' couple: convention, resistance and innovation

As CP was socially intelligible to many participants as marriage, participants found themselves rooted in a shared system of meaning which tends to associate marriage (and CP, by extension) with a range of normative expectations and practices including unconditional love, life-long

commitment, cohabitation, financial interdependency, monogamy and children (Nock, 2001; Kitzinger & Wilkinson, 2004). As such, some participants felt that they, as civilly partnered or 'married' couples, should do certain things or behave in certain ways which are, arguably, quite conventional of marriage. These included wearing rings and name-sharing to display that they were 'married' (as discussed earlier), living together, sharing or merging finances, sexual fidelity and considering family formation. However, not all participants were compelled by the norms of marriage. Rather, given that gay men are 'dually-socialised' (Green, 2010), in both mainstream and gay 'culture', participants grappled with and reconciled an array of arguably discordant relational discourses and norms into meaningful arrangements in their own lives. As their narratives revealed, some participants embraced perceived marital norms over perceived gay norms, while others did the complete opposite. Others combined aspects of the two sets of norms to construct lives and relationships which reproduced and offered resistance to the norms of marriage.

Domestic partnerships: cohabitation and conjugal cash

Married couples are expected to share a home and money. This normative expectation also had its influence on the couples represented in this study, especially those who were not already living together or sharing money before they entered CPs. While participants in established relationships reported that not much had changed with regard to their domestic or financial arrangements after CP[25], it seemed to be a seminal point at which participants in new(er) relationships felt obliged to make changes to the domestic aspects of their lives. For example, Kareem and his partner Irfan opened their first joint bank account the day after they returned from their 'honeymoon', and then moved into their first home together the following week. Like Kareem, other participants in new(er) relationships reported that they opened joint bank accounts or moved in with their partners after – or, in some cases, just prior to - their CPs. As Bryce and Ryan explain in the following quotations, they felt that they 'should do' these things which were seen as 'obvious' behaviours for married couples:

- *'We kept our bank accounts separate until the civil partnership and it's only* then we opted to get a joint account afterward just cuz it obviously seemed like *something we should do at that stage really' (Bryce, 29).*

- *'We didn't move in together until kind of a month before the wedding [...]* you *obviously can't sort of be married and then not living together' (Ryan, 33).*

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[25] Most established couples had cohabited prior to their CPs and had set up joint accounts or had other arrangements for sharing money.

While CP prompted a number of new(er) couples to open joint accounts, even those couples who maintained separate accounts seemed to note a difference in terms of how they thought about money after the CP. For example, Adam and Nathan did not open a joint account after their CP but did notice a difference in how they thought about money after their CP. Indeed, Nathan explained, that after the CP he felt that 'what money we've got is our money' and not 'one or the other's':

> *'Now it feels like it's how, everything we've got is ours; it's not one or the other's. So that's, that's made a big change. I suppose that's come from the civil partnership'* (Nathan, 50).

While most couples had joint bank accounts and lived together, not all did. Indeed, a few couples strayed from these marital conventions. Mitchell and his partner Leo, for example, maintained separate bank accounts because Mitchell preferred to 'pay [his] own way' and go 'fifty-fifty' on expenses including dinners out and holidays abroad even though his partner made more money and had more money saved. They are also the only couple represented in the study who do not live together. Instead, they have what sociologists term a living apart together relationship (Duncan & Phillips, 2010). Although they have maintained separate homes for the duration of their fifteen year relationship they speak every evening on the phone and spend weekends together, alternating between their respective homes. It was because of this 'unusual' living arrangement that Mitchell was initially ambivalent about entering a CP. This ambivalence underscores the perceived normativity of CP. Indeed, Mitchell had felt that it would not be 'right' to enter a CP because he and his partner's relationship departed from the conventional, and perhaps romantic, ideal that a 'married' or soon-to-be-married couple should live together.

Mandatory monogamy?

In a domestic and financial sense, most participants' relationships were rather conventional. However, when it came to their sexual arrangements (monogamy or non-monogamy) there proved to be greater variation. Indeed, several participants' relationships departed from the marital convention of monogamy.

Sunil and his partner appeared to be like any ordinary married couple in a domestic sense. They lived together, they each contributed financially to their joint household and they shared domestic labour and cared for a cat together. However, Sunil explained that although he and his partner continued to love each other and live together they sleep in separate bedrooms and are no longer sexually intimate. Sunil went on to explain that after six years together he and his partner were not having sex 'very often.' Sunil was conflicted over his desire to continue his relationship with his partner and his desire for more frequent sex and sex with other men.

Although Sunil enjoyed the comforts of coupledom he became dissatisfied with the frequency of sex in his relationship. He also felt that his 'desire to be a man' was constrained; he missed the sexual freedom and adventurism that he had enjoyed in his singlehood. Sunil and his partner agreed, through mutual discussion, that in order for them to continue their relationship they needed to establish an 'open relationship' in which they were free to have sexual encounters with other men:

> *'We have an open relationship, if you like, we're almost like two brothers. And I love him, you know, as my partner, but we don't share, we don't s*leep in the same rooms *even [...] I don't see that as surprising [...] I think particularly with men they want their* cake and eat it too. So it was wonderful being in this relationship with someone, and having all the trappings of that, someone to go home to, eat meals or do things together, and help you do things and to be together. But the other side of that of course is that *you've also got the desire to be men' (Sunil, 48).*

As Sunil explained, he did not find it 'surprising' that his relationship had transitioned to being non-monogamous. Rather, he thought that non-monogamy was common among gay male couples by virtue of their gender-composition. Indeed, he thought that gay men, as men, valued sexual freedom and variation. Non-monogamy was a way for Sunil to have his 'cake and eat it too' – it was a solution that allowed him to enjoy the domestic pleasures of his relationship while also allowing him to pursue sexual pleasures with others when sex was no longer a part of his relationship at home.

While Sunil's non-monogamous relationship is a clear departure from the norms of heterosexual marriage, it is not that unusual in the context of gay male relationships. For example, McWhirter and Mattison (1984) found that 95% of the gay male couples they interviewed had arrangements allowing sex with other men. More recent research has shown about a third of gay male relationships are monogamous and two-thirds are non-monogamous (Shernoff, 2006; Spears & Lowen, 2010). Research on male couples who have formalized their relationships suggests that they may be more likely to endorse and practice monogamy than their unmarried counterparts (Solomon, Rothblum & Balsam, 2005).

In this study, just over a third of the couples represented in the study (including Sunil and his partner) had arrangements which allowed for some degree of sexual contact with other men[26]. Participants who reported non-monogamous relationships tended to be older and in

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[26] I had information on the sexual arrangements of 23 of the 24 couples represented in this study. Of these, eight couples reported a degree of sexual non-exclusivity in their relationships and the remaining fifteen couples (including one that had formerly had an open relationship) reported that their relationships were currently monogamous.

established relationships. Like Sunil, participants in non-monogamous relationships tended to draw on masculine and gay male discourses and perceived norms of gay male relationships to explain that they felt monogamy was an unrealistic and/or undesirable ideal. For example, Steven thought that monogamy was an unrealistic ideal that was difficult, given 'human nature,' to sustain in practice. Mitchell said that 'most gay relationships' he knew of involved a degree of sexual openness. With regard to sexual openness, participants' non-monogamous relationships ranged from completely open - allowing each partner to have independent sexual encounters with other men – to semi-open. These semi-open relationships were constructed on the premise that both members of the couple would be present in any sexual encounter with other men. Overall, non-monogamy was constructed either as a 'bit of fun' or as a necessary arrangement that allowed them to have their competing, incompatible or unfulfilled sexual needs and desires met. While these participants were non-monogamous in the strictest sense of the word, they privileged emotional fidelity to their partners and their relationships. Indeed, irrespective of the specific arrangements these men had for sex outside their relationship with their civil partner, all prioritized the primacy of their relationship and sought to protect their relationship, and partner, from emotional harm, psychological distress and sexual infection through an array of implied and negotiated norms, boundaries, ground rules and disclosure policies, findings consistent with previous research (e.g., LaSala, 2005).

About two-thirds of participants reported that their relationships were currently monogamous.[27] While non-monogamy was reported most commonly by older participants in established relationships, participants who reported monogamous relationships were mixed in terms of age and relationship duration. Indeed, Irving and Mark were both of the older generation and had maintained a monogamous relationship for the duration of their 27 year relationship. Irving's narrative was typical of most participants in monogamous relationships.

'It's definitely just one-to-one, with us [...] it was what we both wanted. It was the commitment thing um, we, we've seen too much of other people that have gone on opposite roads to us and it's not, it's caused so much trouble in other peoples' [relationships] [...] it's a one-to-one and it's always been like that. But we've never looked at it as sex, it's always been love-making for us' (Irving, 60).

Like Irving, most participants in monogamous relationships conflated monogamy with commitment and tended to link sex with intimacy and love, to be relatively satisfied with their sex lives, and to consider non-monogamy a risky alternative. In addition to conflating

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[27] This included one participant whose relationship had previously been non-monogamous. However, after a short time period of non-monogamy he and his partner went back to monogamy after one of them was diagnosed with HIV.

commitment and monogamy, they also linked monogamy and marriage. For example, Cameron wondered what the 'point' of marriage was if there was no sexual commitment and Rishi found it 'very difficult to fathom' having 'multiple partners' in the context of a CP. Overall, monogamy was seen as a 'normal' and taken for granted 'assumption' of marriage, and therefore CP, as Kareem's and Andrew's narratives illustrate:

- *'Maybe it's that whole normalness thing again that sort of eats at me every time.* I just assume that monogamy is what life should be. Um, so *we'*ve never had a conversation about that*' (Andrew, 33).*

- *'For me monogamy is really important in a relationship, in a marriage. I grew up with* the concept, you know, I saw my mom and dad and I assume they have a monogamous relationship. I guess the assumption *of marriage is that you commit to each other'* (Kareem, 28).

Although these participants perceived monogamy to be an assumption, and norm, of marriage, they did not perceive it as the norm for gay male relationships. Indeed some participants thought they were 'strange' or 'different' because they were monogamous. Oscar and Nathan both commented on this:

- *'We're* strange. *We're monogamous. That's very* strange*' (Oscar, 72).*

- *'I think we're* different to some men that we know that are in civil partnerships because *they have open relationships' (Nathan, 50).*

Although many of these participants associated monogamy with CP, few were ideologically opposed to non-monogamy. While some were committed to monogamy and did not see their arrangement changing in the foreseeable future, a few participants were open to the possibility that their relationships might transition to non-monogamy even if they were not 'ready' for it presently. For example, Rishi said:

> *'I've got nothing against open relationships. I think it is somethi*ng that happens over *time but I don't think I am ready for it to be open' (Rishi, 24).*

Overall, the narratives of participants', whether monogamous or not, revealed that monogamy was not a mandatory feature of CP although it was the reported behavioural norm in this sample. Although monogamy was the behavioural norm in the sample, current monogamous practice did not preclude the possibility of future non-monogamy.

Potential parenthood and figments of family

In addition to the normative domestic and sexual expectations and practices discussed thus far, there is another powerful cultural narrative which associates marriage with parenthood - ideally with children following marriage. This cultural narrative is evident in the popular children's playground rhyme: 'first comes love, then comes marriage, then comes baby in the baby carriage'. It seemed that this cultural narrative, despite the availability of alternative narratives and models of adult gay lives, exerted some influence on participants. Indeed, CP seemed to encourage discussions about children between participants and their partners. Furthermore, CP was perceived by some participants as something which would support their efforts to become parents.

Several participants, particularly younger ones, reported that they had discussions about whether or not to have children with their partners after they had entered CPs. Thus, it seemed that CP prompted or encouraged participants to consider, or reconsider, the ideas of children, becoming fathers and having families of their own. As the following quotations illustrate, several participants mentioned that they had 'recently' discussed children with their partners, that is, they had these discussions after they had entered CPs:

- *'Recently he has sort of spoken about it but we haven't gone in to great detail, you know, cuz he said 'if you do want to have kids or start having kids or adopt we need to kind of do it soon' cuz he said 'cuz I'm not getting any younger [...] and this was after we got married' (Emin, 35).*

- *'It's only sort of fairly recently that we've mentioned it' (Bryce, 29).*

Although CP may have encouraged some participants to consider potential parenthood, even if they did not make a definite decision straight away, it also seemed to be something which supported the existing plans and active efforts that some participants were making to become fathers. Indeed, as discussed earlier, Kumar and his partner decided to enter a CP primarily because they wanted to adopt and felt that doing so would demonstrate their commitment to adoption agencies and therefore increase their chances of a successful adoption. In Kumar's case, his plans for parenthood were the prompt for CP, rather than the result of CP.

Apart from Kumar, Andrew was the only other participant who was actively engaged in the adoption process at the time of interview. His narrative illustrated how CP not only encouraged he and his partner to discuss and make a decision about children, but also how CP was perceived to support their endeavour to become parents. Andrew and his partner Ben entered a CP three years prior to our interview. Within six months of their CP they made the 'difficult decision' to pursue parenthood. After discussing the various ways in which they could

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achieve parenthood they settled on adoption as the 'perfect option.' Andrew explained how he felt that CP was a 'benchmark' that had to be reached before he and his partner could more seriously consider the prospect of bringing children into their lives. He also felt that CP was 'enabling' them to adopt, as he explained:

> *'Now that we've got that sort of* benchmark out of the way, we then started looking at *children […] I like the fact that we're married. I like the fact that it's enabling us to do other things, like obviously adopt'* (Andrew, 33).

As discussed earlier, Andrew had always seen himself as 'normal' and, as such, had never thought he would not be able to marry or have children even though he acknowledged that his pathway to these normative life achievements would be more 'difficult' than his heterosexual peers. Indeed, he did not think his life had to be 'different' and wanted to have a family just like his (mostly heterosexual) friends were doing:

> *'I never really did massively see my life having to be different...all of our* friends *around us have got families and things, it just struck us both that that's something that we would like to have...that's the way that other people's lives go and I see our life should go in that same direction' (Andrew, 33).*

Just as entering a CP had confirmed his perceived normality (as discussed before), it seemed that having children also fit in with the normative life trajectory that he, and many other younger participants, imagined, desired or expected.

Although parenthood was an imminent possibility for Andrew and Kumar, for most of the younger participants family and fatherhood remained as abstract and future figments of their imaginations. Their plans to have children ranged from 'definitely' to 'maybe' to 'unlikely'. Participants' plans for parenthood, no matter how tentative or definite, were usually delayed because they did not feel 'ready' to have children. Some did not feel mature enough to raise children, and others felt that they needed to establish a more stable foundation for children in terms of establishing a career, having an appropriate home and a secure financial situation. While these participants were usually delaying parenthood, some participants were unsure if their desires for parenthood would be realized because they either had partners who were significantly older or partners who simply did not want children.

Other participants had considered children after their CP but then decided against the idea. Hugh and his partner, for example, had decided to start the adoption process as the next logical step after their CP. However, after they had been approved as suitable adoptive parents they had a frank discussion in which they decided that having children was a 'risk' that might change their relationship in undesirable ways. As such, they rescinded their application.

Although Hugh and his partner decided not to have children of their own, Hugh went on to explain that he and his partner would be content to support their nieces and nephews emotionally and financially, thereby achieving a more desirable semblance of paternal care:

> *'We have nieces and nephews that quite frankly will need our support in the future,* emotionally and financially um and you know we are very close to them, so we decided *that actually that is fine for us' (Hug*h, 32).

While younger participants, like Hugh, had the relative luxury of choosing, postponing or rejecting fatherhood in social and legal contexts which have only recently become conducive to gay male parenting, older participants did not. Indeed, as discussed in chapter 1, parenthood had been as inconceivable as marriage for many older participants. Because their desires for parenthood had been unfulfilled, a few of the older participants nostalgically and painfully recalled past imaginings of having children. This was the case for Irving, who lamented the fact that CP had not been available twenty years earlier, underscoring the link between marriage and parenthood:

> *'The only thing we do regret is that the civil partnership didn't happen twenty years ago and then we could have, we wouldn't have wanted a young child, but we would have wanted a child that needed a lot of love...we do regret that we can't give some child the knowledge and the love that we've got. But we're much too old now' (Irving, 60).*

As Hugh's and Irving's narratives suggest, the idea of family seemed to hold importance even for those participants who had decided against having children or those who felt they were too old to become fathers. Like marriage, family and parenthood are pervasive ideals and it seemed that some participants tried to create a sense of family in alternative and innovative ways. For example, Sunil explained that although there was a time when he 'really wanted children' that he had come to be content with sponsoring a dozen children across the world, volunteering at a children's charity, and caring for a cat. Similarly, Thanos said:

> *'Somehow you make a family, we feel like our cat is our daughter and we have our own, uh, family' (Thanos, 40).*

7.5 Social meanings and perceptions of change

Beyond the personal and relational impacts resulting from CP, participants also spoke about the impact that CP had at the social level. As such, participants discussed the perceived impact of CP on their relationships with various family members. CP seemed to be a chance to garner support from families, which changed and often improved strained relationships over time. Even those with supportive families reported that CP clarified the nature of their relationship or

depth of their commitment, or authenticated them as family. Participants also spoke about the implications of their CP status in wider social networks (friends, colleagues) and in everyday social interactions (doctors, barbers) where it was felt to be a useful status. Many participants felt more comfortable to be out and open about their sexuality and relationships after their CPs. Related to this, some participants reported that their social networks had expanded after CP to include more gay friends. Participants' also speculated about the socio-cultural legacy of CP, that is, the wider implications of CP for society, and for gay people in society, gay culture and future generations of gay men.

Within the family: the implications of CP for family relationships

With regard to how CP affected, or was felt to affect, relationships with family members the common themes in participants' narratives were improving relationships and becoming family. This fits in with the transformative and healing power of rituals which often have implications for relationships with family members (Imber-Black & Roberts, 1992). There were, of course, exceptions and a few participants spoke of the deterioration of already strained family relationships. Additionally, a few participants reported that their CPs had not had any effect on their family relationships precisely because their families remained unaware of their CP.

Changing and improving family relationships

Some participants felt that their CPs had been a turning point in their relationships with certain family members. Some participants felt that their relationships with minimally tolerant or relatively unsupportive family members had changed or improved after their CPs and related this to the support that these family members had demonstrated on the day of their CPs. Other participants felt that their legally and socially validated status as civil partners had signalled to families the nature of their relationship and depth of their commitment, or had brought some reassurance to certain family members who had been sceptical of their same-sex relationships. In any case, participants often re-evaluated their family relationships in different and more positive terms after the CP.

The narratives of Adam and Sean illustrate how the supportive actions of previously minimally tolerant or unsupportive family members (fathers, in this case), could lead to a re-evaluation of these relationships in more positive terms. Adam felt that as a child and teenager his relationship with his father had been 'difficult' and riddled with 'friction' and 'tension,' some of which was related to his aversion to the traditionally masculine trait of enjoying sport.

Adam kept his sexuality from his parents for over twenty years and only came out to them in his late 40s, after he and his partner Nathan had become a couple. Adam said that his parents were 'ok' with his newly-disclosed sexuality and relationship. However, Adam noted his father's discomfort at his CP ceremony a few years later. Indeed, Adam said that his father seemed 'uncomfortable' at the ceremony during which he 'stood at the back looking a little bit nervous and (chuckles) um, and a little bit confused'. Given that his father was 'reticent' and 'uncomfortable' during the ceremony, Adam was pleasantly surprised when his father 'got his wallet out' to buy a 'slap up meal' for the newlywed couple and the small ensemble of guests who had attended their ceremony. Adam considered this gesture of support 'a pretty amazing thing' for his father to do. Adam's CP seemed to have a longer term impact on his relationship with his father. Indeed, as Adam explained, in a typically modest manner, ever since his CP his father has been 'fine' with him, his partner, and their relationship. Adam also felt that he and his sister became 'closer' since the CP.

Several participants felt that their civilly partnered status had a positive effect on relationships with their families because it had clarified the reality and nature of their relationships which had previously been 'denied' or 'hidden' or 'known about but not talked about.' In other words, CP defined them as loving, committed and sexually intimate couples rather than 'just friends' or 'two guys living together.' Participants explained that although their families had been aware, either explicitly or implicitly, of their same-sex relationships which had, in some cases, persisted for decades, the CP was an explicit reminder of participants' sexuality and same-sex relationships. Steven and his partner Oli, for example, began their relationship in the late 1980s and met each other's families soon thereafter. Neither of their families seemed to have any 'issues' with their relationship then, nor at any other point during their relationship. Although their relationship had persisted for 22 years prior to the point at which they entered a CP, Steven felt that their relationship had always been 'unspoken' and 'never mentioned' as anything more than 'just living together' although everybody knew 'what it was'. As Steven explained, the CP changed this:

> *'It's actually brought the issue of our sexuality more into the open, actually with our family [...] I don't think it was an issue before, but it, you know it's just out in the open and that's kind of good. Before, you know, it was never mentio*ned*, you know, I mean everybody I think knew what it was, but it was never said, it was never spoken because you know basically we were just living together I suppose' (Steven, 45).*

Steven went on to explain that his and Oli's relationship and CP are indeed now talked about at family events.

While participants generally viewed the clarification of the reality and nature of their

relationships positively, it could have a negative effect on relationships with minimally tolerant or unsupportive family members. Indeed, the reality-making function of CP seemed to be particularly problematic for the family members of a few participants (as will be discussed later).

Even participants who had families, or family members, who were not particularly enthused that they had 'married' a man felt that their families recognized the virtues of their relationship. Cameron, for example, said that his partner Tai's family in Thailand would be 'sorry that he hasn't married conventionally and had children'. However, he also said Tai's family were 'fine' with their relationship which they 'recognize' as being a 'good relationship'. Similarly, Thanos felt that although his mother did not approve of or attend his CP, her knowledge of it, as much as she did not like it, was a reassurance that he was settled:

> *'As much my mom didn't like it, also it gives her a security that actually yes, I'm not kind of sleeping around or still looking, or I'm alone - I am with somebody' (Thanos, 40).*

Some participants reported a growing level of support and acceptance from certain family members over time, even if they had initially reacted negatively to their CP. For example, Eric noted that his relationship with father took a turn for the worse after he and his partner Oscar entered a CP. This 'frostiness,' as Eric called it, lasted for a few years and was accentuated when Eric, but not Oscar, was invited to his parents' golden wedding anniversary celebration. This led to a confrontation in which Eric asserted that he and Oscar were now 'husbands' and, as such, he expected the same 'treatment' as his heterosexual brother whose wife had been invited. Despite Eric's plea his father still refused to invite Oscar which meant that Eric did not attend the event either. Eric said that over time things have improved. Indeed, after Eric and Oscar attended several other (subsequent) family rituals and bereavements, the wider family became more 'accepting' and there was an eventual 'thawing' in Eric's relationship with his father to the point that both he and Oscar had spent the last few Christmases with Eric's parents.

Becoming 'part of the family'

Notwithstanding the notion of 'families of choice' (Weston, 1991), in the contemporary Western kinship system relatives are usually defined by either blood or law (Schneider, 1980), that is, either biologically through genetics or socially through marriage. Therefore, it is unsurprising that after going through the legal procedure of CP, many participants explained that they felt like they and their partners were seen as family and that they felt more integrated

into one another's families. This was the case for participants in both new(er) and established relationships, as illustrated by excerpts from Rishi's and Kumar's narratives:

> *'It's been amazing just the way his family has really taken me in, and I love the idea of going up there for Christmas and it's the second Christmas I went up there for, and I really feel like I am a part of the family now' (Rishi, 24, together 1 year prior to CP).*

> *'I do think that they see me as "well you're part of the family now" and it is "oh well you're part of the family now", I don't think it's "great you're part of the family".'* (Kumar, 40, together 10 years before CP).

For some participants 'becoming family' was communicated explicitly. Andrew, for example, spoke about how his father gave an unsolicited speech at his CP which welcomed his partner into the family circle. William described a similar experience at his CP celebration when his partner's half-brother welcomed him into the family as a 'proper brother.' Having sustained his relationship with his partner Damian for 38 years already, William found it 'interesting' that it was the CP ceremony which, only then, 'authenticated' him as family:

> *'Damian has a half-brother who we've kn*own for a long time, and uh, he came to me *shortly after the ceremony, and he flung his arms around me, said "welcome brother-*in-*law, you're now my proper brother" […] but uh, you know, the fact that we, you* know, got through this ceremony now somehow authenticated me as his brother - in *law, and that was interesting' (William, 72).*

Some participants actively took measures to 'become family'. Indeed, Emin said that he took his partner's surname to signal his commitment to, and place within, his partner's family:

> *'I felt that becoming Cox would signal my commitment to him and his family. I did feel that this was important in joining his family…I've become a part of him. I've become a part of his family' (Emin, 35).*

'Our relationship really broke down': the deterioration of family relationships

Overall, participants felt that their CPs had a generally positive impact on most of their family relationships. However, CP could affect participants' relationships with their various family members in different, and in some cases negative, ways. As such, a few participants also spoke about the impact of CP on certain family relationships in negative terms. This was usually a case of the deterioration of an already strained family relationship. Sean's narrative, for example, illustrates how some participants felt that CP had had a positive impact on some family relationships and a negative impact on other family relationships.

Sean felt that his partner's family were more accepting and understanding of their relationship as a result of their CP. Furthermore, his father's participation in his CP seemed to be an important turning point in their relationship. Despite these positive impacts, Sean felt that his relationship with his oldest sister has deteriorated since his CP. Sean described his sister as 'homophobic' and explained that although they had 'got on well' previously, their relationship changed for the worse when she found out about his sexuality. Sean said that when he and Phil began their relationship a few years later his sister kept her distance and did not 'deal' with them much. Her stance on his sexuality and same-sex relationship was further exemplified by her awkward presence at his CP ceremony. Indeed, as Sean explained, she did not sit with the other guests during the ceremony. Rather, she situated herself outside the venue and 'peered through the window the entire ceremony.' Her 'excuse' for this 'strange' behaviour was that she could not sit inside because she was allergic to the dog-friendly venue. Although her behaviour was emblematic of her lack of support, Sean said that it was only after his CP that his relationship with his sister 'really broke down' – an outcome which he attributed to her latent homophobia, as the following excerpt from his narrative illustrates:

> *'It seems to have had a rather odd impact on the relationship with my sister in that it* seems to be about the time of our civil partnership that our relationship really broke *down [...] I still think it is because she is, she's very prudish and I think she's, in the* *heart of hearts, she's homophobic, and I still think that part of it is because of the* *partnership because I think up to that point she could pretend it wasn't happening'* (Sean, 31).

Sean's narrative (above) highlights how the reality-making power of CP could be problematic. Indeed, Sean felt that his relationship with his sister had deteriorated because she could no longer 'pretend' that his same-sex relationship did not exist. Their relationship had not improved with time either. Indeed, at the time of interview, Sean felt that his sister continued to struggle to accept his homosexuality and the reality of his same-sex relationship even though its existence had been legally and socially validated by CP, and accepted by the rest of the family. Furthermore, he said that although he and his sister live only 'two minutes' from each other that they do not see or speak to one another.

'They still don't know': family secrets and the non-disclosure of CP

Some participants did not report the impact of CP on family relationships precisely because their families, or certain members of their families, did not know they had entered CPs. As discussed in section 5.4, some participants limited the disclosure of their CPs only to those family members whom they expected to be supportive. As such, several participants did not inform older family members who they presumed would not be accepting. Bryce, for example,

said: 'the bizarre thing is my grandparents still don't know.'

While some participants limited the disclosure of their CPs to certain family members, Rishi and Chen had not informed any of their respective family members. Although Rishi and Chen have introduced their respective partners to their families while on holiday in their countries of origin (India and China, respectively), they have not explicitly told their families they are in CPs. Rishi, for example, said: 'I know that over time I am going to tell my family about it'. Notably, both Rishi's and Chen's families lived abroad. Therefore they could more easily keep the details of their personal lives 'secret.' Furthermore, they may have felt inhibited to inform their families who lived in countries where the socio-cultural contexts were not, according to them, as gay-affirmative as in the UK.

Beyond family: the implications of CP for wider social relationships and interactions

In contrast to keeping family secrets, many participants reported that they, and their partners, felt obliged to be out, or more comfortable to be open about their sexuality and relationships after their CPs. Daniel, for example, felt more 'responsibility' to be out after his CP. Daniel acknowledged that coming out as a gay man on an individual basis was a continuous process that happens 'all the time, every day' to various people and in various situations. However, Daniel felt that CP was 'a different kind of coming out' because it was a coming out as a couple – as a 'we' rather than an 'I' - to the 100 guests who attended his CP ceremony. He felt that this 'public acknowledgement' and celebration of his relationship with Jens gave him a 'responsibility' to 'always acknowledge' their relationship in social interactions rather than 'deny' it which he felt would 'pour scorn on those 100 people who'd made the effort to be there.' Daniel put it this way:

> *'We come out all the time, every day, don't we? I came out in '77 and I'm still coming out but we came out that day in a way that I'd never come out before.* It was a different kind of coming out *[…] I suppose it's, it's abo*ut public acknowledgement, it was *something about all of those people witnessing […] and because they had done that the* responsibility then upon me was never to deny that in a way that in the past I might *have been able to' (Daniel, 55).*

While some participants noted the increased sense of responsibility they felt to be forthright about their relationships after CP, many other participants reported that they felt more 'comfortable' and 'confident' to be. Undoubtedly, the feelings of increased confidence and comfort that participants reported after their CPs were the result of a complex melee of things. I

would argue that these feelings resulted from the combination of public recognition they received, feeling backed up by a legal status, and having access to official and familiar social labels such as 'husband' and 'civil partner'. Indeed, the social label and status of 'husband' or 'civil partner' carried meanings which communicated that their relationships were serious and committed. As such, these labels may have made participants' same-sex relationships more palatable to others. Even though these labels, when used by men, necessarily reveal one's sexuality, several participants spoke about the increased comfort and confidence they felt in being out and in disclosing the details of their private lives and relationships to others in daily life after their CPs. For example, Andrew said:

> *'I was just more comfortable straight away to start explaining to people the situation [...]*
> *but I would say "husband" becau*se I feel like I am explaining to people on the terms that
> *"let's not pretend it's not what it is, so it's, I'll just spell it out to you straight away"'*
> (Andrew, 33).

Like Andrew, Steven also thought that his 'social confidence,' as he termed it, had been 'bolstered' as a result of his CP. However, unlike Andrew, Steven generally uses the label of civil partner rather than husband. Indeed, given his increased 'social confidence', he felt comfortable to say civil partner, even though it also necessarily revealed his sexuality:

> *'It's also a way of saying you're gay, of course, to say "I'm in a civil partnership," which*
> *I don't mind, I don't care really [...] I don't care who's listening, doesn't bother me, I*
> *don't mind about that. So it does, yeah it just he*lps in the sense of your social confidence
> *actually' (Steven, 45).*

While participants were generally more comfortable and confident to disclose and discuss the details of their private lives after CP, they were also wary of the contexts in which they disclosed their CP status precisely because it revealed their sexuality. Sometimes, the ambiguous labels of 'other half' or 'partner' were preferred. For example, while Adam feels more comfortable than ever before with revealing his sexuality to others, and 'increasingly' speaks about his partner and relationship, it also depends on who he is talking to and the context of their conversation, as he explained:

> *'Increasingly I try and use Nathan's name with people who might not know us that well*
> so that they under*stand, or I do say partner if it's, you know if it's somebody I really*
> *can't be bothered getting into a complicated (chuckles) explanation of what that*
> *relationship might be. I say my partner. And I might even not say it's a civil partner, I*
> just say my par*tner, like if I'm having my hair cut, I'll say to the hairdresser my partner*
> *[...] when I'm at the doctor's surgery I'd say my partner and I'd make it clear that it*

was a man [...] so it's a bit flexible, depending on how much engagement I, if I was, I've just done the car insurance and I had to say we're in a civil partnership. And that's enough for them' (Adam, 54).

I believe connected to the feeling that many participants felt more comfortable to be gay, after their CPs, they became involved in social groups and activities for gay men. Consequently, some men's social circles expanded after CP to include more gay friends. For example, Mark felt that he and Irving had been 'very much gay people in a heterosexual world', but after their CP they joined a gay social group and began meeting many more gay friends. Similarly, Eric said:

'We didn't have gay friends before um the civil partnership [...] we still have very few close gay or lesbian friends, although we are, we have a few more now [...] we're a part of a lesbian and gay choir, so um we are, we have more gay friends than what *we've ever had' (Eric, 45).*

Some participants spoke about feeling closer to other couples, heterosexual and same-sex, who had married or had CPs. Emin, for example, explained that he felt 'closer' to a heterosexual couple whose wedding he had attended previously. He also spoke about how his CP served as a common point of reference in his relationship with his brother who had married his wife the same year as he entered a CP. Emin felt that 'the marriage thing' was a point of conversation between them even if they were 'looking at it from two different perspectives.' These feelings of closeness and common understanding, based on shared experiential knowledge, are probably quite typical of anyone who marries.

Some participants noted that the social impact of CP was related to the usefulness of the official legal status of CP in daily social interactions. In the following story, for example, William explains how the 'official' status of CP was useful in dealing with some routine, or perhaps racially motivated (his partner is of Black Caribbean heritage), hassle that he and his partner experienced from immigration officers while travelling abroad:

'It has been useful from that point of view of officialdom. Uh, when we'd been together for forty years we celebrated by going on a cruise which involved flying to [country] and then going on a cruise around [country] and as we came off the plane in [city], Damian was pointed out by uh somebody straight off the plane, some kind of immigration officer and so on, who wanted to stop him because I suppose, black face in amongst all these others, so of course I stopped too with him, uh she wanted to know what we were doing there and why we were together, so I s*aid "we're going on   a*

cruise, we're in a civil partnership". Problem solved, you know, nothing more, "have a lovely time"' (William, 72).

While participants generally highlighted the positive impacts of CP on social relationships and in their daily interactions in the wider social milieu, there were also exceptions and a few noted instances in which CP had negative consequences. For example, Kareem said that he 'lost a lot of friends' over his CP. Sean, highlighted that his partner experienced homophobic abuse from a work colleague 'only after' their CP:

> *'It was only after the civil partnership that we had, have had any real problems in that* Phil started being bullied by one of his colleagues at work. Um he suffered a lot of homophobia and actually ended, *that's why he ended up leaving the job that he was in, uh because of that, that's why we came here. Um…and that caused a lot of problems'* (Sean, 31).

The socio-cultural legacy of CP

Several participants speculated about the implications of CP in wider terms. In other words, they expressed views on the socio-cultural legacy that they thought CP might have. This included how CP might impact societal perceptions of gay people and same-sex relationships, and how gay culture and gay people might change or benefit from CP. Although participants typically spoke in the third-person, it is reasonable to assume that some of the speculations they made, and beliefs they voiced, resonated with their own experiences and those of other participants in the study. Overall, there seemed to be a consensus among participants that CP contributed to a broader view of gay life, identities and relationships.

Most participants thought that CP would contribute to the normalization of gay people by way of changing the wider public's perceptions of gay identities and relationships in wider culture. Cameron felt that 'the public at large is increasingly accepting of gay culture' and that this was, at least in part, related to CP which had 'helped normalize the public perception of gay people in society'. Similarly, Ryan felt that CP was 'the single most important' of the recent legal reforms affecting gay lives because it served as an 'official seal of approval' which changed public attitudes towards gay people, as he explained:

> *'Of all* of the um gay law reforms which have happened over the past fifteen years or so *it's [civil partnership is] probably the single most important in terms of um changing public attitudes towards gay people because it's an official seal of approval'* (Ryan, 33).

Not only was CP an 'official seal of approval' from the law and the state, and by extension society, there was also a sense among participants that it countered the prevailing negative stereotypes about gay men. Thanos, for example, thought that CP 'proved' to 'heterosexual and homophobic people' that the negative stereotypes about gay men - as hyper-sexualized, incapable of loving and enduring relationships, and inherently childless – were incorrect, as he explained:

> '[CP] prov[es] that uh being gay men is not all about being camp and sleeping around and never settling down [...] actually gay men are as normal as you because they can actually have long relationships and be in civil partnerships and, and love each other and even adopt children and have families and stuff without any problem' (Thanos, 40).

While several participants felt that CP provided a positive, if normalized and less sexualized, portrait of gay men to society, several also thought that this same representation would translate to younger and future generations of gay men and would, therefore, have implications for 'gay culture'. Participants thought that CP would offer new patterns for gay lives, and new representations of gay men doing 'ordinary things' and having ordinary lives and relationships. Some participants felt that they had become the role models for gay life that they themselves had never had. For example, Nathan felt that CP would provide a 'higher profile' for gay men as 'ordinary' and contrasted this to his own experience of not having 'positive' role models for gay men:

> 'It has been difficult for me coming to terms with being gay and I think that the lack of positive stereotypes was part of that. And so that, maybe that's something that, good that might come out of civil partnerships, and I a sort of higher profile for gay men just being...doing ordinary things' (Nathan, 50).

Like Nathan, several participants thought CP would provide a 'phenomenally important' model to younger and future generations of gay men. As Steven explained, a key aspect of this model was that it demonstrated the possibility of forming 'long-lasting' and 'socially-recognised' relationships:

> 'It gives young people a vision of where they can be if they want to be, as a possibility, you know, it shows that it's possible to be gay and have, not just a relationship, but actually a long-lasting one, or partnership, an agreement um which is socially recognized' (Steven, 45).

Several participants speculated that formalized same-sex relationships would become a norm on par with heterosexual marriage. However, some participants saw 'gay culture' as a barrier. For example, Kareem, who is self-admittedly 'pro-gay marriage,' said that while he

would 'love for it to become the norm', he nonetheless felt that marriage was simply not 'gay enough' and that it would not become the norm. Apart from the limiting norms of the 'gay community' he also felt that there was still a lot of work to be done to reduce 'internalized homophobia' among gay men and to increase the 'visibility of gay people in the media' before CP becomes a norm of gay culture, as he explained:

> *'I think the concept of marriage isn't intertwined with being gay in the community yet. Some things just aren't gay enough [...] I think socially a lot of work stil*l needs to be done on internalize*d homophobia, on visibility of gay people in the media […] there's* so much more social work to be done in our communities before marriage actually *becomes a norm in the gay community because frankly I don't think it is the* norm, um *even in my generation' (Kareem, 28).*

Like Kareem, some participants held qualified, and arguably realistic, views of where society was at in terms of tolerance and acceptance of homosexuality and same-sex relationships. Although these participants had high hopes for CP, they also recognized that it was not a panacea and that stigma and prejudice are still prevalent and fundamental aspects of gay existence. Cameron, for example, said:

> *'It [civil partnership] shows the so called normalcy of these sor*ts of relationships and it shows that, that society is at least in some way recognizing that gay relationships have *legitimacy. But I think we've got a hell of a long ways still to go with, with enabling* younger people to, to accept who they are and avoid all of the prejudice that is still out *there' (Cameron, 62).*

Similarly, Eric, who remains vigilant to the possibility of enacted stigma, said: 'There are still homophobic attacks [that] go on, um so we still live in fear a bit of our lives'. While he does not think this is 'fair' he seemed to think that it is part of life as a gay man.

Some participants also speculated that CP would have implications for happiness, health and well-being. Notable among these participants were Cameron, a practicing medical doctor, and Kumar who works in a mental health trust. Although they spoke as health professionals, and in the third person, I believe that their views resonated with their own experiences and with other participants in the sample. Cameron felt that CP 'reminded' people of the virtues of relationships and that it had implications for 'emotional well-being' and 'life satisfaction':

> *'I think it reminds people that, that relationships have a value in themselves um for* emotional well-being, um, life satisfaction, *and that they're worth, they're worth protecting' (Cameron, 62).*

Kumar viewed CP as an 'important measure of normality' and 'an important measure of equality' that would have implications for mental health, sexual behaviour and substance abuse. He explained that the 'the way people have had to live has created lots of negative behaviours, which can make it hard for people to sustain relationships and have positive mental health'. The 'negative behaviours' that Kumar referred to were promiscuous, risky and clandestine sexual behaviour ('cottaging'), but he also referred to the propensity of sexual minorities to use drugs and alcohol more heavily ('substance misuse'). He felt that these 'negative behaviours' were 'derived out of centuries of discrimination' and that in the new social era that these negative behaviours would likely start to 'die out' as gay people began to realize that there is 'another life':

> *'The mental health and the well-*being of our community will only enhance if people realize that they *don't have to behave in this way, you know there is another life, there is something else, and it's very different and much more fulfilling' (Kumar, 40).*

This last point by Kumar seems to echo Rotello's (1998) argument that same-sex marriage, and the new and alternative representations of gay life it produces, may contribute to a more 'sustainable gay culture'.

7.6 (compromised) Citizenship, (in) equality and (dis)satisfaction

While for the most part CP was socially intelligible to participants as marriage, the technical, legal and semantic distinctions between civil marriage and CP proved problematic for a number of participants. Indeed, many participants, echoing academic critiques of CP (Wilkinson & Kitzinger, 2006; Weeks, 2008), spoke about CP as a 'compromise' between equality in legal and social terms. As with any compromise, some participants were satisfied with CP and others were not. Some participants were dissatisfied with CP because it did not offer substantive equality. Most of these participants looked forward to 'upgrading' or 'converting' their CPs into civil marriages when legally possible. On the other hand, those who were relatively satisfied with CP felt it offered equality of outcome and, generally, had no intention of converting their CPs into marriages unless the change of legal status also provided additional rights or had beneficial legal implications.

Participants who were satisfied with CP felt that it offered equality of outcome in legal, practical and social terms. For example, William, who had no plans to convert his CP to a civil marriage although he supported the legislation along the lines of 'general equality', said:

> *'As far as the practicalities are concerned, civil partnership does everything you need,* it provides the legal b*asis, which is perhaps what's more important for me, plus the social basis of public recognition of your status, which is also important' (William, 72).*

Legally participants had the same rights and benefits of married people and socially they achieved the same 'outcome'. Indeed, some participants felt that although CP was semantically and legally distinct from marriage it nonetheless provided equality of outcome in social terms. For example, as far as Bryce was concerned his CP was a 'wedding' and he and his partner were 'married'. As such, he felt that he and his partner had gotten the 'same outcome' as anybody else:

> *'You get exactly the same um, I can't think of the word, but you get the same outcome [...] at the end of the day you can grow up and you can get married just the same as anybody else' (Bryce, 29).*

While Bryce thought that CP was marriage 'for all intents and purposes', some participants were satisfied with CP precisely because it was not marriage. Instead, it was seen as something special, different and exclusive for gay people. Sunil, for example, felt that CP was something the unique 'equivalent' of marriage for gay people and he was therefore 'proud' that he had one:

> *'I'm also proud that we have this civil partnership as well. So I am pleased to say, "no I'm in a civil partnership and it's good enough for me." It's saying to society, um, that "that is ours, that's our equivalent and that is just as equal to it being a marriage," if you like. I don't need a marriage; I don't want a marriage, personally' (Sunil, 48).*

Not only was Sunil proud of his CP but he also felt that CP was 'good enough.' He went on to explain that as a 'legal framework,' CP provided him and his partner with all they needed. Therefore, he did not want nor feel the 'need' to convert his CP to a marriage. He felt that converting would simply be an 'excuse for another big party' which would not 'add any value' to his relationship or to his status. Like Sunil, most participants who were content with the legal and practical impact that CP had no intention of converting their CPs to marriages. Emin, for example, said:

> *'I feel happy with what we've done. I don't feel the need to up-, convert, upgrade [...] so we will stay as we are, you know, if we've got the right to take each other's names, if we've got the right to same benefits, we've got the right to this, we've got the right to that' (Emin, 35).*

Others did not feel it would be necessary or that it would add any value. Indeed, some participants felt that it would be impossible to 'recreate' what their original CP had been and meant to them.

> *'We wouldn't do it again, we, as much as anything because we've done it once, it was perfect for us. We couldn't - you wouldn't be able to recreate that' (Sean, 31).*

In stark contrast to participants who were satisfied with CP because it offered equality of outcome, some participants were dissatisfied with CP. These participants felt that CP did not provide substantive equality and represented a 'half-way measure', a 'two-tier system' and 'second-class' citizenship. It was for these reasons that several participants spoke about their intentions to 'convert' or 'upgrade' their CPs to marriage when legally possible. For example, Ethan said:

> *'It is absolutely not good enough. So we're looking forwa*rd to when gay marriages are *actually legal and we get our automatic upgrade [...] that's ultimately what I would have liked to have done, it wasn't an option back then, I mean given the choice between* a civil partnership and a marriage I would have gone for *a marriage. But we weren't* given that choice. Your choice was civil partnership or nothing. So I went with the civil *partnership because at least it's something' (Ethan, 30).*

As discussed in section 6.1, some participants were dissatisfied because of the legal limitations and religious restrictions that prevented them from constructing CP ceremonies as they desired. Other sources of dissatisfaction were related to the limited level of international recognition of CP status or the limited list of venues licensed for CPs. The dominant theme, however, was related to the symbolism of, and the clunky, cold and bureaucratic nature of, the terminology of CP which was devoid of the socio-cultural meanings and connotations of the language of marriage. Ethan said that 'unofficially and informally' he called himself 'married' but found it 'insulting' that 'technically and legally' he could not. Similarly, Thanos was dissatisfied with the terminology of CP. He felt that 'the civil partnership word' was a 'constant reminder' of the difference and inferiority of same-sex civil partnerships as compared to heterosexual marriages, as he explained:

> *'You get a reminder all the time with the civil partnership word that we're not quite there, we're almost there, but not quite there. Uh it's a reminder of that, uh you did something like a wedding but it's not a wedding, you are almost married but you're gay, you're a same-sex couple, it's a constant reminder' (Thanos, 40).*

Thanos hoped to convert his CP and have another ceremony which would be a 'proper wedding'. While he and his partner had decided to enter CP to celebrate their ten year anniversary, Thanos thought marriage would be a nice way to celebrate their twenty year anniversary.

Like Thanos, some participants did not want to simply 'convert' their CPs to 'marriage' but also wanted to have another ceremony. While some saw this an opportunity for another celebration, others hoped that they would be able to gain religious affirmation. For example,

Oscar, who considers himself 'married,' expressed dissatisfaction that civil partnership ceremonies were strictly civil and thus did not provide a religious affirmation of his marriage. As such, he hoped to have another ceremony in his church, as he explained:

> *'We would have liked it to be a normal wedding service [...] if the chance came up we would repeat it in a church [...] it would be an affirmation within our church as much as we've got an affirmation outside our church' (Oscar, 72).*

In addition to the personal, symbolic and religious reasons that participants gave for wanting to convert their CPs to marriages, there were also political undercurrents in most of their accounts. In some cases, this was the primary motivating factor. George, for example, said that although he thought that marriage was a 'fairly discredited institution' and that it was not 'personally of any interest' to him, he was clear that he would definitely convert his CP to a marriage for political reasons:

> *'We would do it again because we'd want to take advantage o*f that, stand up and be *counted as a statistic, we would be able to say, again, "get stuffed, all of you" [...] I* feel strongly about the equality aspect. I believe marriage should be available to gay individuals on exactly the same terms. No special rules, language, time-scales, procedures, consultations. Just equality and the opportunity for everyone to obtain the *same human right [...] As long as we have a* two-*tier system it spells 'second-class' to one party' (George, 65).*

Some participants wanted to convert their CPs to marriages but were not keen on having another ceremony. Hugh, for example, thought the semantic distinction - the 'one word' – between CP and marriage was 'ridiculous'. Although he considered himself 'married' and considered his CP ceremony a 'wedding' he was unhappy with the semantic and legal distinction which is apparent on his CP certificate. He and his partner had already discussed and decided that they would get another certificate but would not have a ceremony because it might 'dilute' the meanings that their first CP ceremony had generated:

> *'I'd be worried about it diluting down what we actually did on that day [...] I wouldn't want to do it again. As much as I'd love to have that day with all of our friends around us I wouldn't want any*thing to ever change what that day meant to me and what is in *my heart and my head' (Hugh, 32).*

Overall, participants regarded the move towards substantive marriage equality positively even if they themselves did not want to convert their CPs to marriages. Mitchell, for example, had no intention to convert, but felt that 'it would be good if the law is changed to say that everybody is married' as doing so would not only make it 'more general for everybody' but would also

remove the 'stigma' denoted by having a separate institution for gay people. While some participants felt that CP should simply be replaced by civil marriage, many were also advocates of retaining CP as another option to legally formalize same-sex relationships. Liam, for example, felt that CP was a 'really good working, albeit compromise, between the current civil partnership and current marriage situation'. Although Liam had no desire or intention to convert his CP to a marriage, he thought it would be 'great' if civil marriage equality became a reality. However, he also felt it would be a 'shame' if civil partnerships were no longer available:

> *'It would be a shame to lose what it exists as a civil partnership, there is something* slightly different, there is something a bit more gay about *it, it's definitely ours and it's gay' (Liam, 45).*

Overall, it seemed that most participants were advocates of the option for same-sex couples to choose between substantive equality via access to civil marriage and the option to have CP which, although constructed as a distinct, 'different', 'special' and uniquely 'gay' institution, nonetheless offered equality of outcome.

Throughout the previous three findings chapters, and particularly in the last, participants' experiences have converged and coalesced around the core themes of this thesis: citizenship, normativity and well-being. The following quotation from Nathan's narrative encapsulates these themes:

> *'I hope it [civil partnership] would give people strength and the feeling that they're* actually equals in society and have the same rights and the same rights to happiness as *well [...] I think it should be just part of society, just another facet of what happens in society so that the, you know, the feelings that "oh we're different and strange", will all fade because really I think we're just people with a life to live and um I think it's been easy for society to forget that. Because, you know, we're all, we might be gay, but we all have our own whole personalities as well, I think it's um, that's just the* same as *everybody else' (Nathan, 51).*

Although Nathan spoke in the third person about what CP might hold for others, what he had to say resonated with his own experiences and the experiences of other participants. As the above excerpt reveals, Nathan emphasized the common humanity of gay people and invoked ideas of citizenship ('rights', 'equals in society'), normativity ('same as everybody else', not 'different and strange'), and well-being ('happiness'). These themes are developed further in the following discussion chapter.

Chapter 8: Discussion and conclusions

In line with its aim, this study has documented and explored the lived experiences of men in CPs in the UK, thereby shedding light on the meanings and impact of CP. Furthermore, the study provides new perspectives on, and representations of, gay men's lives, their relationships, and the gay life course in light of expanded legal rights and new life course options afforded by CP. As such, this thesis contributes an empirical analysis of the lived experiences of 28 men in CPs in the UK which extends and enriches previous empirical findings, and speaks back to aspects of the debates outlined in section 2.5.

Overall, participant's experiences were generally consistent with previous research into LGB people's experiences of various forms of same-sex relationship recognition as outlined in the literature review. Therefore, rather than providing an overview or summary of the findings chapters, in this discussion chapter I first outline how this thesis contributes to, complements, and extends the existing literature on LGB people's experiences of legally formalizing a same-sex relationship. I then, in section 8.2, further develop the recurring and overarching themes of citizenship, normativity and well-being and synthesize the findings under this rubric. Within the section I pay particular attention to discussing well-being. I discuss both the general well-being impacts of formalizing a relationship as well as the impacts which are seemingly distinct and specific to LGB individuals who formalize same-sex relationships, including the participants of this study, given their sexual minority identities and status. As such, I draw on minority stress theory (Meyer, 1995; 2003), the overarching theory influencing my interpretation of participants' experiences, to discuss how participants' experiences of CP contributed, to varying degrees, to their well-being by reducing or ameliorating aspects of minority stress. I then critically reflect on the findings in relation to the extant literature and academic and public debates on the legal recognition of same-sex relationships. I also discuss the significance of the findings in terms of providing new understandings of gay men and their relationships, as well as the implications for public policy and population health. Finally, I reflect on the limitations of the study and offer some suggestions for further research.

8.1 Contributions of the thesis

The original contributions and insights of this thesis arise from the specificity of the study in terms of the distinctiveness of CP as a form of same-sex relationship recognition, the timing of the study, the sample and methodology used to generate data, and my use of minority stress theory to analyse and interpret the data.

As Lewin (2008) has argued, the various forms of legal same-sex relationship recognition across the globe are 'enfolded in very specific cultural and social contexts, situated in distinct historical moments' (781). CP is no exception. Although based on civil marriage, CP

is a distinct form of same-sex relationship recognition specific to the UK, enfolded in the British cultural and social context, and situated in a unique historical moment. Indeed, for nearly a decade CP was the only legal form of same-sex relationship recognition available in the UK. As emphasized in the literature review (see chapter 3), at the time of writing this thesis only four other studies (Gavin, 2007; Goodwin & Butler, 2009; Mitchell et al., 2009; Heaphy, Smart & Einarsdottir, 2013) had documented and explored LGB people's experiences of CP. These studies were conducted earlier than mine, relied on samples composed differently than mine, and employed different methodologies and interpretive frameworks than mine. Thus, the findings of my study complement and extend the findings of these earlier studies.

Although it would be reasonable to expect that CP, as a distinct legal form of same-sex relationship recognition specific to the UK, might be understood as distinct from marriage, and might not have the same effects as marriage, this does not seem to be the case. Indeed, as outlined in section 7.1, CP was socially intelligible to many participants as marriage while a minority appreciated its distinctiveness from marriage. Furthermore, like previous studies of same-sex marriage and CP in the UK, I found that CP had practical impact, and was highly significant at a personal level as well as for participants' relationships with their partners and with family members, and at a social level it affected their feelings of belonging in society and boosted their social status and confidence in social interactions, for example. A range of studies investigating LGB people's experiences of various forms of legal recognition for same-sex couples (marriage, civil union, registered partnerships, and CP) have found largely similar findings. This has led Green (2010) to conclude that 'marriage need not be legal or state-sanctioned to transform same-sex relationships' (430). Further to this, I would argue that legal recognition need not be 'marriage' to have similar effects as marriage. However, the fact that CP was technically and semantically distinct from 'marriage' meant that many participants (even those who regarded themselves as 'married' in practice) spoke of the symbolic shortcomings of CP in terms of inequality, a point considered further in section 8.2.

Regarding timing, three of the studies on LGB people's experiences of CPs were conducted soon after the implementation of CP, when the initial surge of registrations was among older and longer-established same-sex couples who avidly took advantage of an opportunity they had previously been denied. My study joins Heaphy, Smart and Einarsdottir's (2013) study to capture the experiences of a second wave of people who have registered partnerships, including younger people and people who have formed a relationship since the legislation was enacted. These people are likely to have different experiences and attribute different meanings to CP as Goodwin & Butler (2009) have acknowledged. The timing of the study was also significant as I was mid-data collection when proposed legislation for same-sex marriage was announced. Thus, the timing of the study meant that I was able access

participants' views on civil marriage and their thoughts about the possibility that they might convert their CPs into civil marriages.

This study is also distinct from the others because of the narrative-life course methodology I employed and the composition and characteristics of the sample from which data was generated. While all of the other studies on LGB people's experiences of CP have been qualitative, three of them focused on discrete aspects of experience. Such focused approaches were insightful in many ways, but did not allow consideration of the influence of biography. While Heaphy, Smart and Einarsdottir (2013) did consider biographical aspects of their participants' narratives, they interviewed only same-sex couples in which both partners were 36 or younger when they entered CPs. As a result, their findings may be specific to younger same-sex couples in CPs. Similar to their study, the methodology I employed enabled me to consider how participants' experiences were shaped by, and understood in relation to, their biographies. However, rather than limiting my study to younger participants I included both younger and older generations. Thus, my study complements Heaphy, Smart and Einarsdottir's (2013) work by offering empirical comparisons between different generations of gay men. Unlike all four of these studies, I chose to focus exclusively on men's experiences of CP. The all-male sample, I thought, might offer new perspectives on, and representations of, gay men's lives that could counter the often negative ways in which gay men have been perceived (see section 2.1).

And finally, my interdisciplinary study complements the existing studies on CP by offering a public health perspective. My interest and background in public health sensitized me to employ minority stress theory as an interpretive framework and alerted me to the theme of well-being. Although commonly employed as an interpretive framework in research on same-sex relationship recognition in the US, to the best of my knowledge, no other study on CP had, at the time of writing, employed minority stress theory. Minority stress theory proved to be an appropriate framework for understanding both participants' lived experiences in general and their experiences of CP, as evidenced in all three findings chapters. However, I also turned to other theories and concepts to further illuminate the data in ways which minority stress theory could not. As for the theme of well-being that I identified in participants' narratives, I would argue that this theme was probably also detectable in LGB people's experiences of CP as documented by previous research even if it was not identified as a salient theme.

8.2 Recurring themes revisited: citizenship, normativity and well-being

At the close of the final findings chapter (chapter 7) I made the point that participants' experiences had begun to coalesce around the three recurring themes of this thesis: citizenship, normativity and well-being. These themes were sometimes explicit, but more often implicit (and are, therefore, a product of my interpretation), in participants' accounts. In any case,

participants' experiences, or my interpretations of them, resonate with previous empirical findings and claims made in the academic and public debates, in particular around: equality and citizenship; assimilation and normalization versus resistance and radicalism; and, the potential for legal formalization to contribute to psychosocial well-being, reduce minority stress and social exclusion. In what follows, I discuss each overarching theme in turn in relation to participants' narratives. I then refer back to the debates and empirical literature to critically reflect on how the extension of rights and recognition via CP benefits those who formalize their relationships but does little for others, and may even have negative, exclusionary, disparate or hierarchical consequences.

Citizenship

The notion of citizenship is often invoked in debates about same-sex relationship recognition – with full citizenship associated with marriage and 'second-class' citizenship associated with alternatives to marriage such as CP (e.g., Kitzinger &Wilkinson, 2004; Herdt & Kertzner, 2006). Furthermore, researchers commonly use the concept in their interpretations of: LGB people's views and attitudes towards various forms of legal recognition for same-sex couples (e.g., Yip, 2004; Lannutti, 2005; Harding, 2008); and same-sex couples' experiences of formalizing their relationships in legal terms (e.g., Shipman & Smart, 2007; Badgett, 2009). Despite the common use of citizenship, some scholars have claimed that it is a 'fashionable' concept (Richardson & Monro, 2012), with the implication being that it may be used 'indiscriminately simply to add conceptual spice' or 'stretched too far so as to lose its distinctive meaning(s)' (Lister, 2007: 58). Here, I demonstrate how citizenship is a fitting concept for my interpretation of participants' experiences of CP.

Few participants used the word 'citizenship,' but they all spoke of 'rights' and 'equality' or 'inequality'. The most obvious outcome, explicit in all participants' accounts, was that CP granted them legal rights and responsibilities. For some participants, CP was also a very literal avenue to citizenship as it gave them the right to enter or remain in the UK and begin the process of becoming British citizens through naturalization. Many participants also expressed other aspects of citizenship, including feelings of 'inclusion' and 'belonging' as 'equal' members in society.

While some participants were content with the level of equality CP offered, others felt that CP offered neither full equality nor full citizenship. Rather, they felt like 'second-class' citizens because CP was not formal equality and, therefore, represented a 'two-tier' system of legal recognition for couple relationships, with same-sex couples on the bottom tier. Much of the dissatisfaction expressed by participants was related to the limitations inherent in constructing an 'utterly civil' ceremony (as discussed in section 6.1), and the very fact that they

could not technically refer to their ceremonies as 'weddings,' their civil partners as 'husbands,' or their CPs as 'marriages' (as discussed in section 7.6) – even if they did in everyday situations and interactions. Overall, participants' dissatisfaction with CP was related to the symbolic meaning of their exclusion from 'marriage'; CP was a 'constant reminder' of the continuing stigma against homosexuality and the privileging of heterosexuality. As such, most participants looked forward to further legal reform, that is, civil marriage.

Like my study, the majority of participants in Heaphy, Smart and Einarsdottir's (2013) study considered CP to be marriage in practice. However, in contrast to participants in my study, most of their participants seemed to view the distinctions between CP and marriage as 'insignificant' and 'seemed more-or-less fully content' with CP (44-5). As such, it was noted that 'only two' of 100 participants in their study mentioned that they intended to 'formally marry if the opportunity presented itself in the future' (44-5). Several of my participants, on the other hand, had intentions to marry 'properly' even if it would simply be a bureaucratic exercise in paper-pushing to 'convert' or 'upgrade' their CPs into marriages. This difference in findings is likely reflective of the time frames in which interviews were conducted in each study. Heaphy, Smart and Einarsdottir (2013) completed interviews in 2010, well before proposed legislation for same-sex civil marriage (in England and Wales) was announced. I, on the other hand, was in the midst of data collection when the proposed legislation was announced and thus had the opportunity to collect participants' views on whether and why they might convert their CPs to marriages. The debates surrounding the legislation may have heightened my participants' awareness of the shortcomings of CP and implanted the possibility of 'marriage' firmly in their minds as a very real and imminent legal possibility. While some participants indicated that they wanted to 'convert' or 'upgrade' their CPs to civil marriages, others did not think this was necessary or did not want to do it because they thought that doing so might not be as significant as, or might take away from the meanings generated by, the first time they formalized their relationships via CP.

Some scholars have drawn attention to the potential 'tradeoffs' (Badgett, 2009) of seeking legal rights, responsibilities and recognition for same-sex relationships, as doing so also submits their relationships to state surveillance and regulation (Harding, 2008). However, participants were seemingly unconcerned with this and welcomed the recognition, and the rights and responsibilities of CP. While scholars have argued that the procedures involved in dissolving a CP are a form of regulation and government control over when and how a relationship can end (Kitzinger & Wilkinson, 2004), some participants viewed this as a positive barrier that led to an increased sense of stability and security that their relationship could not just end without first trying to work on it, or that if a relationship did end that there was a framework for how assets would be distributed. Thus, this regulation may not be seen

negatively by all same-sex couples. Indeed, as Badgett (2009) notes: 'same-sex couples will find that the state and larger culture have something to say about how they form and end relationships, but they will also have a clear legal framework for those transitions and a cultural framework for defining their commitment to one another' (115-6).

Overall, it is clear that participants' experiences of CP were consistent with the notions of citizenship discussed in section 1.4b. While classic citizenship rights - civil and social rights - were bestowed upon participants when they formed CPs, aspects of cultural citizenship (Pakulski, 1997) and intimate citizenship (1995; 2003) were also accommodated by CP. These forms of citizenship, as discussed in section 1.4b, are concerned with the rights to freedom of expression and choice with regard to 'what we do with our bodies, our feelings, our identities, our relationships, our genders, our eroticisms and our representations' (Plummer, 1995: 17), and claims for 'acceptance and integration' into wider society without necessarily having to assimilate according to prevailing norms (Pakulski, 1997: 80). In line with these aspects of citizenship, the rights and responsibilities of CP were not only bestowed upon those participants who were (arguably) 'ideal' and 'normative' (i.e., monogamous, cohabiting) citizens, but also those who deviated from such ideals (i.e., participants who were non-monogamous or did not share a home or money). While some participants reported feelings of inclusion and belonging in society after their CPs, their narratives were also very clear reminders that the separate-but-equal institution of CP was not a satisfactory option. Indeed, while participants were granted the civil right to formalize their relationships, they were not granted the social right to participate 'to the full in the social heritage' of British society which, arguably, still holds marriage as a prevailing and revered standard (Marshall & Bottomore, 1992: 8).

Normativity & normalization: broadening what it means to be gay and 'married'?

A prominent question in the academic and public debates about same-sex relationship recognition is whether or not gay people, same-sex relationships, and gay culture might be normalized and transformed as new normativities potentially come to be established through same-sex relationship schemes including CP in the UK (Weeks, 2007). Some scholars see the same-sex marriage movement, and presumably the choice of some same-sex couples to legally formalize their relationships, as a disavowal to what they understand as the distinctive culture, alternative norms (but still norms), and political goals of the gay community – formalizing a same-sex relationship is seen as assimilation or normalization, a submission to (hetero/homo)normativity (Warner, 1999; Duggan, 2002; 2003).

As discussed in the findings chapters, there were clear, and often explicit, threads in most participants' narratives of either being or becoming 'normal' and 'ordinary' before and after CP, respectively. Most participants claimed that they were as 'normal' and 'ordinary' as

any other couple prior to CP, and many wanted to have 'normal' weddings or wanted to convey their ordinariness through their CP ceremonies and celebrations. A minority, on the other hand, were worried about 'copying' heteronormative weddings. For those participants who considered themselves and their same-sex relationships 'normal' and 'ordinary' prior to CP, the event was a confirmation of their perceived normality. For others, who had previously felt like an 'outsider' or a 'deviant aspect of society,' the CP was experienced as a welcomed normalizing process that had the effect of validating them as 'normal' and a part of 'normative society'.

Previous studies have noted that some LGB people who formalize their relationships are concerned with the potential that in doing so they might be 'mainstreaming' (Lannutti, 2011), while others are concerned with the prospect of 'being seen as "normal"' (Schecter et al., 2008: 415). These concerns were less evident in my study. This may be reflective of the fact that all participants in my study were gay men, who may be less likely than lesbian women to regard CP in critical or feminist terms, or the fact that my sample had a number of younger participants who, like Heaphy, Smart and Einarsdottir's (2013) sample were less likely to be exposed to alternative and 'critical communities' than older participants. Yet, even among older participants in my study, few were concerned with the potential normative and normalizing implications of CP because they regarded CP as distinct from marriage, and thus free of its normative connotations. Overall, my findings, although based on older and younger participants' narratives, were largely in keeping with Heaphy, Smart and Einarsdottir's (2013) who found that younger same-sex couples in CPs 'wanted "ordinary" things for their relationships' and CPs which they saw as ordinary relationships and ordinary marriages (165-6).

As was evident in the findings chapters (see section 7.4), several participants felt compelled to engage in what could be considered 'normative elements' of marriage (Nock, 2001), including cohabitation, financial interdependency, monogamy and family formation (Kitzinger & Wilkinson, 2004). With regard to monogamy, two thirds of participants in my study reported that they were currently monogamous whilst a third reported arrangements that allowed some degree of sexual contact with other men. These figures suggest that participants, as gay men in formalized relationships, are more likely to abide by the normative prescription of monogamy than gay male couples in the general population. Indeed, research generally finds that about two-thirds of gay male couples are non-monogamous (Shernoff, 2006; Spears & Lowen, 2010). Given that same-sex relationship recognition is a relatively recent phenomenon there has not been much research comparing the sexual arrangements of gay male couples who formalize their relationships to those who do not, but what there is shows that male couples who formalize their relationships (at least via civil unions) are more likely to endorse and agree to monogamy, and to report practicing monogamy (Solomon, Rothblum & Balsam, 2005). My

data also indicate that younger participants were more likely to subscribe to monogamy as a normative ideal than older participants. Indeed, all of the participants who reported non-monogamy were 'older', and all but one of the younger participants reported monogamy. Most of those who reported monogamy saw it as the 'normal' thing to do, a basic 'assumption of marriage' or the preferred option to protect themselves and their partners from psychological distress and sexual infection. Like my study, Heaphy, Smart and Einarsdottir (2013) found that most (90%) of their young participants reported monogamous relationships. Such a generational pattern may be, as Gotta et al. (2011) suggest, related to the normalization of 'longer-term monogamous, committed, legalized' relationships among younger generations of gay men and lesbians (371).

Children are another 'normative element' of marriage (Nock, 2001). While many LGB people creatively construct 'families of choice' (Weston, 1991; Weeks et al., 2001), others are, or want to become, parents in the context and form of 'ordinary' families that resemble the ideal of the nuclear family composed of two parents and their children in one household (see for example, Nordqvist, 2012). As discussed in section 7.4, several participants were invested in the idea of constructing nuclear families. A few were in the midst of the adoption process while several others, particularly younger participants, expected, aspired or hoped to become parents at some point in the future. Some saw this as a 'normal' and logical next step after they had formalized their relationships. Other studies have also found that formalizing a same-sex relationship via marriage encourages parenthood either by making couples feel more ready or open to having children, or making them reconsider previous decisions not to have children (Ramos et al., 2009; MacIntosh et al., 2010). Similarly, Heaphy, Smart and Einarsdottir (2013) found that after CP 'almost all' of the 50 same-sex couples they interviewed 'had turned their attention to the question of becoming parents' although this was less common among their male participants (162). Some male couples simply did not envision children as part of their future, and those who did usually articulated 'tentative plans' for children in five or ten years. Based on these findings, Heaphy, Smart and Einarsdottir (2013) concluded that the 'majority' of the male couples in their sample did not seem to be 'influenced by a strong cultural narrative which associated CP or 'settling down' with an inevitable desire to have children or become parents' (Heaphy, Smart & Einarsdottir, 2013: 163). This conclusion clearly differs from mine (as noted earlier in this paragraph), and Langdridge's (2013). Indeed, Langdridge (2013) found that of 20 young British gay men, who, incidentally were not even in formalized relationships if they were in relationships at all, a third expressed a clear desire to be parents and another third were less sure but open to the idea. He claims that his participants' desires for children 'demonstrate the very real presence of a new homonormative narrative that is being embraced by large numbers of the next generation of gay men' (Langdridge, 2013: 737).

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There was also a thread in participants' narratives about broadening what counts as normal in society, and for gay people. Most participants thought that CP would contribute to the normalization of gay people by way of changing the wider public's perceptions of gay identities and relationships in wider culture. A number of participants expressed the view that gay men participating in CPs challenged negative stereotypes about gay men and thus helped to 'normalize' the public perception of gay men. Several participants felt that CP provided a positive, if normalized and less sexualized, portrait of gay men to society and to younger and future generations of gay men and would, therefore, have implications for 'gay culture'. While one might see the potential for same-sex relationship recognition schemes to change gay culture, to erase its distinctiveness, I would suggest that it is, instead, broadening what it means to be gay. Even if new norms come to prominence, that does not mean they will completely displace the existing values and norms of gay culture. Indeed, while the majority of participants in my study thought of themselves and their relationships as 'normal' and 'ordinary' and structured their lives in accordance with various norms associated with marriage, some participants thought that they did not necessarily fit the normative image of marriage – as they either did not share money, live together, had no intentions of having children, or were non-monogamous. Thus, while some participants embraced or engaged in normative practices, others departed from these – sometimes consciously resisting them. Overall, the findings of my study reveal that rather than acquiescing uniformly to (hetero/homo)normativity, participants' blended an array of norms and values into their own lives in meaningful ways that both reproduce and challenge the norms associated with heterosexual marriage.

Well-being

As discussed in sections 1.1 and 2.2, several scholars have speculated about the positive implications of same-sex relationship recognition for social inclusion, health, and well-being (e.g., King & Bartlett, 2006; Meyer & Northridge, 2007; Buffie, 2011; Fingerhut, Riggle & Rostosky, 2011; Wight, LeBlanc & Badgett, 2013). These speculations are based on the assumption that the health and well-being benefits associated with marriage, derived from decades of research on heterosexual marriage (see section 2.2), will translate to same-sex couples who formalize their relationships. With regard to well-being, my analysis and interpretation of participants' narratives reveals that this seems to be the case. Indeed, my overwhelming sense of participants' narratives was that CP was a generally positive experience that contributed to their well-being in both general and LGB-specific ways. In this section I first discuss how the findings presented within this thesis tie in with prevailing explanations for how formalizing a relationship impacts health and well-being in general. I then discuss how the findings of this thesis complement these general theories as well as the general finding that formalized relationships have implications for health and well-being. I argue, based on my

analysis and interpretation of participants' experiences through the lens of minority stress theory, that same-sex relationship formalization is particularly consequential for the well-being of LGB people given their experiences, identities, and social status as sexual minorities. Thus, the findings of this thesis also tie in with the empirical literature (reviewed in section 3.10) which suggests that various forms of legal recognition for same-sex relationships have important implications for LGB people who formalize their relationships in terms of higher levels of mental health and well-being and reduced minority stress (Fingerhut & Maisel, 2010; Riggle, Rostosky & Horne, 2010; Wight et al., 2012; Wight, LeBlanc & Badgett, 2013).

As was discussed in section 2.2, there are several general explanations for the links between relationship formalization, health and well-being. Although these theories are drawn upon primarily to explain the links between (heterosexual) marriage, health, and well-being, I would argue that it is reasonable to assume that they are also applicable to other forms of relationship formalization, including same-sex relationship formalization. The marital resource model posits that relationship formalization confers social, psychological, and economic resources which contribute to well-being (Liu & Umberson, 2008). In line with this theory, some participants reported that they were 'happier' or felt more 'secure' 'protected' and 'stable' in their relationships with their partners as a result of gaining legal and financial rights and responsibilities as well as social recognition (all of which can be considered resources). The structural symbolic interactionism perspective assumes that marriage contributes to well-being by providing a 'strong identity and sense of self' (Kamp Dush & Amato, 2005: 625). Indeed, participants appreciated that they had a new marital identity after CP. Furthermore, some participants noted how gaining an arguably normative marital identity was important for their sense of self as a 'normal' person and citizen. Participants' experiences also resonated with the social support and integration perspective which suggests that relationship formalization contributes to well-being by providing 'emotional support, companionship, and a sense of belonging' (Kamp Dush & Amato, 2005: 625). Indeed, most participants noted that CP lead to a greater sense of commitment, stability and/or security in their relationships with their partners, or that CP had brought a sense of 'wholeness' or 'completion' to these relationships. Participants also noted how they gained social recognition and increased social support from family and friends, and a sense of belonging in wider society. Overall, participants' experiences clearly resonate with these general explanations for the links between relationship formalization and well-being.

My analysis and interpretation of participants' experiences also suggests that relationship formalization is particularly consequential, in distinctive ways, for the well-being of LGB people who formalize their same-sex relationships. This distinctiveness, I argue, arises

from their experiences of claiming and living with a stigmatized sexual minority identity, and is, therefore, best understood in the context of minority stress theory, the overarching theoretical framework I used to interpret participants' lived experiences as gay men and as same-sex couples, as well as their experiences of CP. Indeed, participants' minority status and stigmatized social identities as gay men were reflected in their lived experiences prior to CP, their experiences of CP, and the meanings and impacts that CP had for them (as discussed in chapters 5, 6 and 7, respectively). All participants reported lived experiences consistent with minority stress prior to their CPs. For example, all participants had internalized negative attitudes and ideas related to homosexuality, albeit to varying degrees depending on the socio-historical contexts in which they grew up. This included ideas that having a normative life involving marriage and family would be unlikely or more difficult to achieve because of their sexuality. All participants also reported expectations and/or experiences of stigma, prejudice, discrimination, violence and rejection, both in their individual lives and as same-sex couples. Thus, my study is consistent with previous qualitative studies which have found that minority stress experiences are a common and pervasive aspect of the lives and relationships of LGB individuals and same-sex couples, and that these experiences of stigma and social inequality negatively affect LGB people's well-being (Rostosky et al., 2004, Rostosky et al., 2007; Meyer et al., 2011). My study has also shown that LGB and same-sex couples demonstrate resilience and coping in the face of social inequality, stigma and minority stress. Indeed, participants employed a number of the 'ameliorative coping strategies' (Meyer, 2003) and 'resilience processes' (Oswald, 2002) outlined in sections 1.4a and 5.3 to deal with internalized homophobia and relatively low levels of family and social support, and to deal with or avoid stigma, prejudice and discrimination in daily interactions. Furthermore, prior to the availability of CP, some participants legalized and ritualized their relationships, thus strengthening, validating and legitimating them in the absence of social or legal recognition (Oswald, 2002). This paragraph has highlighted how participants experienced and dealt with minority stress prior to their CPs. This is not to say that their minority stress experiences were limited to this period of time[28]. Rather, highlighting participants' earlier experiences of minority stress serves

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[28] Participants also experienced minority stress while planning and participating in their CP ceremonies and celebrations, and afterwards. Some participants, for example, expected prejudice or discrimination from the various people they interacted with to plan their CPs and sought to avoid this enacted stigma, as well as heterosexism, by being vigilant in terms of choosing venues and service providers (see section 6.1). Some participants were wary of displaying same-sex love and affection during their ceremonies or celebrations either because of their own internalized issues and comfort levels with doing so or their perceptions of how others would react (see section 6.3). Although it was not the common pattern, even after their CPs a few participants reported a continued lack of support from some family members (see section 7.5).

as a backdrop to their subsequent experiences of CP which often had the effect of counteracting internalized homophobia or otherwise ameliorating aspects of minority stress.

The advent of CP offered participants new opportunities to ritualize and legalize their relationships. Against the backdrop of minority stress, the resultant rights and recognition participants gained via their CPs further strengthened, validated and legitimated their identities, lives and relationships. Thus, in addition to the feelings of happiness, life satisfaction, and relationship security that are commonly experienced by most people who marry, CP had further positive consequences for participants' well-being. The fulfilment of life expectations and aspirations is related to happiness and well-being (Diener, 2009a). Indeed, for several participants, entering a CP represented the fulfilment of a common life expectation or aspiration (i.e., marriage) which resulted in feelings of 'happiness' and 'life satisfaction'. As gay men, however, the fulfilment of this otherwise ordinary life goal also took on special meanings for participants because it had previously been legally impossible or had seemed inconceivable or unlikely. For some participants CP had an effect on well-being as it was an instrumental event in the process of reconciling aspects of their identities (e.g., sexuality and faith/cultural background) which had previously felt at odds. For others CP was a validating, normalizing and, to some extent, healing experience which led to feelings of inclusion and belonging in society and counteracted internalized homophobia. Indeed, some participants reported that their CPs were events that validated their sexual identities and same-sex relationships as 'normal' and 'legitimate', thereby diminishing or eliminating feelings that they had previously been 'outsiders' and 'deviants'. This resonates with the argument that the adoption of 'normative' identities and 'cultural prescriptions' related to marriage 'is associated with greater psychological well-being' (Orbuch, Veroff & Holmburg, 1993: 817). In terms of social support, many participants felt that their CP had been an important event which changed and often improved strained relationships with family members over time (although this was not always the case). Increased family and social support seemed to stem from the familiar framework (i.e., similar ceremonies, rituals, marital status and language) that CP offered family members (and others) for understanding same-sex relationships as normal. Even participants with supportive families reported that CP clarified the nature of their relationship or depth of their commitment, or authenticated them as family. Because social support mediates stress (Pearlin, 1999), and family support and acceptance mitigates minority stress (Meyer, 2003), it is reasonable to suggest that the increased social support and acceptance that participants received in conjunction with their CPs likely reduced the levels of general and minority stress they experienced, thereby contributing to well-being. The identity and status of being civilly partnered also seemed to serve as a psychosocial resource for coping with minority stressors. Participants spoke about the implications of their CP status in wider social networks (friends,

colleagues) and in everyday social interactions (doctors, barbers) where it was felt to be a useful status. Furthermore, many participants, including some of those who had been wary of displaying their same-sex relationships while planning or participating in their CP ceremonies and celebrations, felt more comfortable to be out and open about their sexuality and relationships after their CPs. Part of this newfound comfort was likely related to the perception, common among participants', that society was increasingly accepting and tolerant of homosexuality and same-sex relationships as a result of the CP legislation. Thus, while a few participants reported relatively recent experiences of discrimination and prejudice, most expected to experience the consequences of societal stigma less. Based on participants' narratives it seems reasonable to conclude that relationship formalization can ameliorate aspects of minority stress and provide additional resources to cope with minority stressors.

Overall, the findings of this study are consistent with previous quantitative (Fingerhut & Maisel, 2010; Riggle, Rostosky & Horne, 2010; Wight et al., 2012; Wight, LeBlanc & Badgett, 2013) and qualitative (Schecter et al., 2008; Badgett, 2009; 2011) research which suggests that formalizing same-sex relationships promotes social inclusion, ameliorates minority stress and contributes to well-being. Although the qualitative methodological strategy and narrative approach I took did not 'measure' well-being outcomes in the fashion common to quantitative research (i.e., I did not use well-being scales), my analysis and interpretation of participants' narratives, through the lens of minority stress theory, has shown that CP had implications for their subjective, psychological, and social well-being both in general and LGB-specific ways. Other qualitative studies have drawn similar conclusions. For example, based on interviews with same-sex couples who married in Massachusetts, Schecter et al. (2008) argued that it would be reasonable to assume that the increased social support and strengthened social ties that respondents reported subsequent to marriage would translate to increased well-being (Schecter et al., 2008: 419-420). The researchers also argued that the security and 'peace of mind' offered by the financial and legal protections of marriage would likely contribute to well-being. Additionally, it was noted that some participants reported that their 'feelings of marginalization and internalized homophobia' had been 'lifted or eased' subsequent to marrying (Schecter et al., 2008: 413). In another interview-based study with same-sex couples in the Netherlands, Badgett (2009) found that relationship formalization resulted in increased feelings of social inclusion and linked this to well-being and reduced minority stress. Overall, the findings of this study lend support to the idea that, and empirical findings suggesting that, relationship formalization contributes to well-being. Furthermore, the findings of this study shed further light on how relationship formalization is particularly consequential for the well-being of LGB people who formalize same-sex relationships as doing so ameliorates or reduces aspects of minority stress.

The costs of recognition: critical reflections on CP

As the last three sections have shown, participants predominantly experienced and understood CP as a positive thing in terms of citizenship, normativity and well-being. However, a number of scholars have drawn attention to the potential negative consequences of CP and same-sex marriage. Additionally, a few empirical studies have highlighted the critical views of some LGB people with regard to same-sex relationship schemes. Unsurprisingly, these critical views were less evident in the narratives of the participants in this study. In this section I critically reflect on the findings in relation to views raised in academic and public debates. Specifically, I will consider how the flipside to the citizenship, normativity, and well-being that participants, as men in CPs, felt might also be accompanied by new inequalities, hierarchies, and disparities.

With regard to citizenship, participants' experienced CP positively as it granted them previously denied rights and recognition which also led to feelings of inclusion and belonging as worthy citizens. Alongside this extension of rights and recognition, however, are the 'costs of recognition' (Richardson & Monro, 2012). Indeed, the rights and recognition of CP are bestowed only on those who enter CPs. Therefore, those who do not enter CPs do not benefit from these legal rights and recognition, or from social recognition. Furthermore, the introduction of the legislation carried with it the requirement for all same-sex couples who live together as if they were civil partners (even if they are not) to claim this when applying for state benefits (Browne, 2011). The implication is that, in addition to not benefitting from the rights and recognition afforded to couples in CPs, those who do not choose, for whatever reason, to enter CPs may be negatively affected in terms of seeing a reduction in their entitlement to social welfare benefits.

Another critical view is that relationship formalization schemes, whether marriage or otherwise, are forms of 'selective legitimacy' which privilege certain relationships over others (Warner, 1999: 82). It is argued that various forms of same-sex relationship recognition bestow rights, citizenship and legitimacy on the 'good gays' (Richardson, 2004) or 'respectable same-sex couples' (Valverde, 2006) who approximate the 'ideal' or 'normal' citizen who abides by the standards a society values (Richardson & Monro, 2012) but not on others. However, while these scholars argue, from queer or radical gay/lesbian/feminist positions, that same-sex relationship recognition schemes would 'create a two-tiered gay society in which married couples would be viewed within gay society as legitimate, while those who were unmarried would be considered social outcasts', Rotello (1998) thinks this is 'wildly exaggerated' and reminds us that 'unmarried heterosexuals are not exactly seen as "outcasts."' (256). Furthermore, as was evident from participants' narratives, not all same-sex couples who formalize their relationships match this image of the 'good gays' and 'respectable same-sex couples'. Indeed, some participants lived their lives in ways that are in line with an arguably queer sensibility (i.e. non-monogamy) or that otherwise departed from convention. Therefore,

while the intention of CP may have been to recognize same-sex relationships that approximate the ideal of the conjugal couple (Barker, 2006), it is possible for couples who deviate from such an image to be recognized and receive rights via CP. Indeed, Barker (2006) acknowledged that the wording of the legislation - the absence of clauses regarding adultery and consummation - allowed for these 'transgressive and transformative' possibilities.

While scholars have questioned the potential material inequalities and hierarchies of respectability and legitimacy that same-sex relationship recognition schemes might establish amongst LGB populations, there does not seem to be a critical argument about the potential (or reality) that an analogous hierarchy or gradient in well-being might come to be established (or exacerbated) as same-sex relationship recognition schemes become embedded. This is particularly surprising given that research on mental health and well-being among heterosexual and LGB people of varying relationship statuses consistently finds such a gradient. Indeed, among heterosexuals, married individuals report the highest levels of well-being followed in step-wise fashion by cohabiting individuals, those dating steadily, those dating casually, and finally, those not dating (e.g., Kamp Dush & Amato, 2005). Among LGB populations, those in formalized relationships (including domestic partnerships, civil unions and same-sex marriages) report higher levels of well-being and lower levels of minority stress and psychological distress than LGB people of any other relationship status (Wight et al., 2012; Wight, LeBlanc & Badgett, 2013). Although these studies find such gradients in well-being, little attention is paid to the possibility that new forms of relationship recognition for same-sex couples might bring about a new constellation of disparities in mental health and well-being.

If the social, psychological and economic resources provided by marriage are conducive to higher levels of well-being (Liu & Umberson, 2008), then presumably other forms of relationship formalization (possibly to varying degrees), will produce similar effects. If this is so, then it stands to reason that those who do not formalize their relationships may experience lower levels of well-being. Furthermore, in as much as well-being, at least subjective well-being, is relative, that is, based on social comparisons to what an individual has to what others have (see Diener, 2009a), then LGB people not in formalized relationships might perceive themselves to have less than those in formalized relationships, and thus may experience lower levels of well-being. It may also be reasonable to expect that as the proportion of LGB individuals in formalized same-sex relationships increases, this will become normative and will stigmatize those who are unable to, or choose not to formalize their relationships. Being a minority within a minority may increase the social stress they experience and thus create a new mental health and well-being disparity within the LGB population.

As much as there is the potential for this system of disparities to be established or exacerbated, there do seem to be positive implications for the mental health and well-being of the wider LGB population regardless of whether they marry or not. This view was held by participants in the study, particularly by those who were working in the fields of medicine and mental health. Furthermore, a few studies have documented such evidence. For instance, Badgett (2011) found that simply 'gaining the right to marry also reduces feelings of exclusion, including for individuals who choose not to marry' (Badgett, 2011: 331). That is, both the option to legally marry a same-sex partner and actually marrying a same-sex partner may increase feelings of inclusion and decrease feelings of exclusion. Lannutti (2011) seems to note a similar finding in that both married and unmarried same-sex couples expressed that they felt an increased sense of recognition (from family and society) as a result of the availability of same-sex marriage in Massachusetts. Thus, the very availability of same-sex relationship recognition schemes may have wider implications for population health as their availability may potentially create a social context conducive to better mental health and well-being outcomes among sexual minorities, a point further considered next in section 8.3.

8.3 New understandings of gay men, public policy and population health implications

In this section I consider the broader significance of the knowledge generated by this study. As such, I consider how participants' narratives may provide new, and arguably normative, understandings of gay men and their relationships. I also draw from participants' experiences some potential public policy implications, and then consider some potential implications of same-sex relationship recognition for population health.

New perspectives on and new representations of gay life

In section 2.1 I discussed the standard stereotypes and narratives associated with gay men. These have typically been negative, portraying gay men as hyper-sexualized and as lacking relational abilities or aspirations. Part of the aim of this study was to provide new perspectives on, and new representations of, gay men's lives, relationships, and the gay life course that contest these, largely inaccurate, stereotypes and narratives. One way to challenge such 'limiting' and 'destructive' representations is to provide new narratives in the form of a collective story which, according to Richardson (1990) may offer 'the patterns for new lives':

> 'If the available narrative is limiting, destructive, or at odds with the actual life, people's lives end up being limited and textually disenfranchised. Collective stories that deviate from standard cultural plots provide new narratives […] new narratives offer the patterns for new lives' (Richardson 1990: 26).

Individually, participants' stories were idiosyncratic, nuanced by class, ethnicity, and generational, geographical and cultural backgrounds; collectively, they told a story of social change and new possibilities for gay life. Their life stories indicate that what is imaginable, conceivable and realistically (socially and legally) possible in the gay life course has changed dramatically in the last few decades. This, I contend, is related to changing socio-cultural contexts, the emergence of a so-called 'homonormative narrative' (Langdridge, 2013) and a swath of legislative changes, including the introduction of CP (and, subsequently, same-sex civil marriage). As a result, gay men's consciousness of the possibilities for their lives, relationships, identities and social roles have expanded. What gay men can be and do is reflected in a set of social roles and identities that has expanded considerably even since Herdt & Boxer (1992) noted the beginnings of such change in the early 1990s. Among the social roles and identities (beyond a gay identity) adopted by participants in this study are civil partners/'husbands', and, in some cases, fathers-to-be. While these representations may be normative, they counter once prevailing stereotypes and provide new narratives of possible selves and possible futures for younger and future generations of gay men.

Public policy implications

While some participants were content with CP, it was seen by others as a second-class or separate-but-equal institution as compared to civil marriage. As such, all participants welcomed civil marriage for same-sex couples as a matter of formal equality. Some participants, however, wanted to retain CPs alongside civil marriage. Some of these participants appreciated that CP was distinct from marriage and did not want the state to redefine their CPs as marriages. These views resonate with public debates and indeed the government's consultation (in England and Wales, at least) on what should be done with CP since civil marriage for same-sex couples has become law. While some participants wanted to 'convert' their CPs into civil marriages, others did not. Based on participants' views on the matter, and my own, I would argue that retracting CP in light of the introduction of same-sex civil marriage would be a huge assault to the meanings that CP held for some participants. Therefore, I am of the opinion that both CP and civil marriage should be available for same-sex couples.

Even the move to open up civil marriage to same-sex couples, while a move towards formal equality, continues to privilege the conjugal couple. This means that others are left without rights and recognition. I agree with Barker (2006) who argues that the purpose and function of relationship recognition needs to be 'deconstruct[ed]' so as to separate it from 'ideology and romantic mythology about what families and relationships are and should be' (255). While Barker (2006) acknowledges the importance of some of rights and responsibilities, she questions why these should be vested in one romantic or sexual partner, why they should be

vested in only one person, and why they need be part of a pre-determined package; as she puts it:

> 'There is absolutely no reason why this should be only one person, nor why it should be a person(s) with whom one shares a bed, nor why all of these 'rights' or 'responsibilities' should be vested in the same person' (Barker, 2006: 255-6).

Similarly, I contend that in addition to bestowing rights and recognition on conjugal couples, the state should also provide rights and legal recognition for a diverse array of relationships which are important to people in different ways. These schemes should be available on dimensions such as choice (nominating beneficiaries and decision makers), care and interdependency, and open to consenting adults regardless of gender, sexuality or parental status. Perhaps a menu of options, including a range of options that are suited to couples, families and other meaningful relationships and interdependent living arrangements should be available to meet the needs of society's diversity of forms of living and loving. This is in line with a slew of others scholars (Auchmuty, 2004; Kitzinger & Wilkinson, 2004; Barker, 2006; Stychin, 2006; Wilkinson & Kitzinger, 2006; Badgett, 2011). In addition to retaining CP alongside civil marriage for same-sex couples, it seems appropriate to open CP to heterosexual couples, and to extend relationship rights to an array of relationships.

Population health implications

With regard to population health, it seems reasonable to expect that LGB people who formalize their relationships will experience similar if not the same health and well-being effects that married heterosexual people enjoy. For LGB people, there may even be an added dimension as their relationships move from a position of being marginalized to validated as socially normal and legally legitimate. Furthermore, from a socio-ecological perspective, it could be argued that the availability of CP fosters well-being on a broader scale and not just for those who enter formalized same-sex relationships. Indeed, if stigma is a fundamental cause of population health disparities (Hatzenbuehler, Phelan & Link, 2013), then it stands to reason that the reduced stigmatization of sexual minorities affected by the visibility and normalization of gay people via social policies such as CP may reduce these health disparities, thereby having positive impact on the health and well-being outcomes of sexual minorities in the wider population. For example, Hatzenbuehler et al. (2012) argue that: 'to the extent that pro-gay marriage laws reduce structural forms of discrimination against sexual minorities such policy-level changes likely would improve health' (285). Similarly, Riggle et al. (2010: 85) suggest that legal recognition is 'an important macro-environmental factor' that may result in better mental health and well-being of same-sex couples.

8.4 Limitations of the study and suggestions for future research

Given the research aim and question, a qualitative methodological approach employing life story interviews was employed to generate data. Analysis and interpretation of this narrative data resulted in a rich interpretive description of participants' lived experiences and experiences of CP. While this analysis provides important insights which complement and extend the existing literature, like any study, my study also has limitations and biases. In this section I acknowledge these limitations and biases and suggest some avenues for further research.

Like any qualitative researcher, I acknowledge that my analysis of participant interviews is subject to researcher bias, influenced by my own personal and academic goals, interests and background, which I have identified in sections 1.5 and 4.7. The research relied on personal narratives generated by life story interviews with 28 men. Such an approach may introduce issues of social desirability bias and the limits of memory (Kong, Mahoney & Plummer, 2003). However, in life story research 'a fundamental interpretive guideline is that the storyteller should be considered both the expert and the authority on his or her own life […] this demands a standard of reliability and validity that is appropriate to the life story interview as a subjective reflection of the experience in question' (Atkinson, 2001: 134). The sample size and non-probability recruitment methods I used mean that this study is not representative of the wider population. Indeed, despite efforts to achieve an ethnically diverse sample, the sample was fairly homogenous in terms of ethnicity. Otherwise the sample was fairly diverse in terms of age, relationship duration, socio-economic and educational backgrounds, employment status, duration of CP, and area of residence within the UK. Because I only interviewed men in CPs I cannot, and do not, claim that my study is representative of LGB people generally, or gay men, or even of gay men in CPs. I would argue, however, that the themes and patterns that I identified in the narratives of the men in my sample are likely to hold some resonance with the wider population.

Despite the limitations which I have just outlined, it was heartening to know that my analysis resonated with participants. Indeed, as the following quotations demonstrate, my analysis was validated by several participants who responded to the progress updates, preliminary analyses, and drafts of conference papers or publications I sent to them via email:

> 'I really liked your analysis and therefore the title of your work. Normativity is a fab term to describe why I like my Civil Partnership. And don't want to change it to Marriage, but am happy for others to do that if they wish' (Liam, 45).

> *'Many thanks Robert for the update on your research. I read the preliminary draft with* great interest. I was particularly interested in the dichotomy between the perceptions of

being gay; between old 'wrinkles' like myself and the younger generation of today. I still, even now, after 23 years of "marriage" to [Eric], mentally 'look over my shoulder' before I talk about aspects of my gay life to anyone; and I envy greatly the freedom that both gay and straight young people have today to accept it as a perfectly normal and *ordinary subject to talk about' (Oscar, 72).*

*'Thanks for following up [...] it's funny how the world has moved on since th*e early times of your work, with regards to marriage equality although there is still a disparity in other areas - *try and find a card for Valentine's Day for instance' (Kumar, 40).*

Regarding future research on CP, there are several topics that could be investigated with particular populations. Furthermore, as all the studies on CP to date have been qualitative, future research could complement these findings by employing a quantitative approach. Given the introduction of same-sex civil marriage, future qualitative studies could investigate the experiences of those who convert CPs into civil marriages as well as why some people might continue to choose CP. Based on my findings that there were important generational differences, future studies might wish to employ a more explicit comparative design to examine generational differences. Future studies could also investigate ethnic minority men's experiences of formalizing relationships. Lastly, assuming that CP will be retained alongside the introduction of civil marriage for same-sex couples in the UK, this could offer a chance to disentangle, clarify and extend the results of previous studies which find that marriage is uniquely beneficial above and beyond other forms of legal recognition for same-sex couples (e.g., Wight, LeBlanc & Badgett, 2013). This research could examine whether a gradient in health and well-being outcomes associated with relationship status might come to be established within the LGB population. In terms of methodology, this could include prospective, longitudinal quantitative study designs which document and compare socio-demographic variables, health and risk behaviours, validated measures of health status and subjective, psychological and social well-being scores, with the view to comparing these variables among comparison groups based on relationship status.

8.5 Conclusions

In the contemporary Western world gay men live in contexts characterized by increasing tolerance and acceptance of homosexuality, expanded legal rights for LGB people, and heated debate and speculation regarding same-sex relationship recognition. It is within this broader context that this thesis documented and explored the life stories of 28 individual men in CPs. As such, the thesis provides a rich interpretive description of their lived experiences, including their experiences of legally formalizing their same-sex relationships through CP, which represents a new life course option for gay men, a group previously denied a legal framework within which

to formalize their relationships. The findings provide insight into participants' motivations for entering CPs, their experiences of planning, constructing, and participating in CP ceremonies and celebrations, and the meanings and impacts of becoming and being civilly partnered. While many of these motivations, experiences, meanings and impacts were similar to what one would expect to hear from heterosexuals, some were seemingly distinct to gay men. Participants' accounts of CP revealed that becoming and being civilly partnered was largely, but not wholly, a positive experience which, I have argued, can be understood in terms of the overarching, and overlapping themes of citizenship, normativity and well-being.

The inclusion of older and younger participants in the study revealed generational differences not only in their biographies, but also in how they experienced CP. All participants reported experiences of minority stress but these seemed more severe and pervasive in older participants' life narratives given the relatively intolerant socio-historical contexts in which their lives unfolded. Indeed, underpinning older participants' life narratives were stories of struggle and resilience. In contrast, younger participants tended to tell new narratives of normality. For older participants CP not only represented a legal reparation for a previously denied right to citizenship, but also represented a new life course possibility and a new era in life as a gay man. Among younger participants, many of whom expected or hoped for arguably normative lives, CP was an enactment of their perceived normality. On the other hand, for some older participants the act of formalizing their same-sex relationships was experienced as an unexpected but welcomed normalizing and validating process which replaced feelings of being a 'deviant' or 'outsider' with new feelings of inclusion in 'normative society'. In addition to the validating impact of CP participants' narratives revealed other LGB-specific ways in which formalizing a relationship has implications for well-being. This suggests that, above and beyond the general ways in which marriage affects well-being, relationship formalization may be particularly consequential for the well-being of LGB people because it ameliorates aspects of minority stress and provides additional resources to cope with minority stressors.

Participants' narratives also revealed that while same-sex relationship recognition may reduce stigma by normalizing public perceptions of gay people, it is not a panacea that eliminates stigma. Indeed, their narratives highlighted the continued context of adversity that many face in their families, workplaces and communities. Part of this, was related to continued institutional discrimination inherent in the compromise of CP which was seen by some as a second-class or separate-but-equal institution in relation to marriage. Thus, all participants welcomed the legal reform of civil marriage for same-sex couples, even if some had no intention of converting their CPs to civil marriages. And while the implementation of same-sex civil marriage may diminish this feeling of second-class citizenship in legal terms, there will likely be some way to go in social terms.

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What becomes of CP remains to be seen. Assuming that CP continues to be an option, it may evolve into a parallel, yet distinct, legal and social institution alongside marriage meeting the different needs of different people. It may serve as a prelude to civil marriage for some couples, or be a genuine alternative for other couples, or even be a way for two adults who are not necessarily romantically or sexually involved to gain rights and protections. As those who would have chosen marriage anyway, choose marriage, it may become a distinct institution with its own norms, traditions, and lexicon.

Overall, the study generated greater understanding of the lives and relationships of a diverse sample of men in CPs. This knowledge is of value for several reasons. It complements and extends the emerging literature on the experiences of individuals in legally recognized same-sex partnerships, thereby contributing broadly to the social sciences literature, including: the sociology of marriage and family; the sociology of sexuality; the sociology of health and well-being; gay and lesbian studies; and the socio-legal and citizenship studies literatures. The study also contributes to contemporary debates on marriage and same-sex relationship recognition in the UK and abroad. It also provides new perspectives on, and representations of, gay men's identities, lives, and relationships. Overall, participants' life stories provide a complex and nuanced understanding of CP as a lived institution, and what it means to be gay and 'married'.

NOTE: In the following pen portraits, participants are referred to with pseudonyms. Furthermore, all other identifying information (area of residence, place of work, where they socialize), as well as the names and identifying information of all other individuals they mentioned during their interviews, has been changed or removed to ensure confidentiality and anonymity.

Rishi is a 24-year-old Indian man. He initially came to the UK in 2009 to pursue a graduate education. He met his partner Cole (31, White English) online about six months later. They entered a civil partnership in 2010, a year into their relationship. They live in London, and as yet, Rishi's family in India remain unaware of his CP. While Cole is keen to have children soon, Rishi would like to wait. The couple was monogamous at the time of interview and had not amended their surnames.

Kareem is a 28-year-old British-born Pakistani man. He and his partner Irfan (26, Pakistani) met online in 2006 and entered a civil partnership in 2009, three years after they first met. They live in London. They 'definitely' want to have children but not in the near future. The couple was monogamous at the time of interview and had not amended their surnames.

Bryce is a 29-year-old White Welsh man. He and his partner Jason (31, White American) met online in 2006, a month after the first civil partnerships took place in the UK. They entered a civil partnership in 2010, four years into their relationship. They had recently purchased a newly built flat in a small town outside London. Bryce says that children are a 'maybe' at this point. The couple was monogamous at the time of interview. They had double-barrelled their surnames.

Chen is a 30-year-old Chinese man. He initially came to the UK in 2009 to pursue a graduate education. He met his partner Miles (41, White English) a few months later online and they entered a civil partnership in 2011, about a year and a half into their relationship. He has not explicitly told his family about his CP. They live in a coastal city in South East England. Chen is keen to have children but his partner is not; he says they will re-discuss the issue in a few years. The couple was monogamous at the time of interview and had not amended their surnames.

Ethan is a 30-year-old White Scottish man. He and his partner Conor (34, White Irish) met online in 2004 and entered a civil partnership in 2009 just over five years into their relationship. They share a detached home in a suburban community a short drive from one of Scotland's large cities. Ethan says that children are 'not out of the question' but 'pretty unlikely'. The couple was monogamous at the time of interview, although they had previously had a period where they were not, and had not amended their surnames.

Sean is a 31-year-old White English man. He and his partner Phil (56, White English) met online in 2003 and entered a civil partnership in 2010, about six years into their relationship. They live in a village in the East Midlands just outside a larger town where Sean grew up. The couple reported occasional sexual encounters with other men in the context of threesomes. They chose not to amend their surnames after CP.

Hugh is a 32-year-old White English man. Although Hugh and his partner Alex (35, White English) first became acquainted as friends-of-friends in their late teens, they only got together when Alex consulted Hugh professionally about the breakdown of his relationship with his previous civil partner. After Alex's previous civil partnership had been dissolved they entered a

civil partnership in 2011, about three years into their relationship. They live in a large city in the East Midlands. After starting the adoption process they then decided not to have children. The couple was monogamous at the time of interview. They had double-barrelled their surnames.

Ryan is a 33-year-old White English man. He and his partner Kurt (30, White South African) met at a gay club in 2006 and entered a civil partnership just over a year later in 2007. They live in London. They have not yet had a 'serious conversation' about having children but they have not 'ruled it out' either. The couple was monogamous at the time of interview and had not amended their surnames.

Andrew is a 33-year-old White English man. He and his partner Ben (36, White English) met at a gay club in the late 1990s and entered a civil partnership in 2008, eleven years into their relationship. They live in a suburban Victorian village a short commute from a large city in the north of England. At the time of interview they were entering the final stages of the adoption process. The couple was monogamous at the time of interview and had plans to double-barrel their surnames when they had successfully adopted. In later email communication with me they informed me that they had, indeed, successfully adopted a young girl.

Emin is a 35-year-old mixed Turkish and Black Caribbean man. He and his partner Lee (42, White English) met at a gay club in 2005 and entered a civil partnership three years later in 2008. They live in a council flat in London. Although Emin would like children, this does not seem to him a likely possibility with Lee. The couple was monogamous at the time of interview. Emin had taken his partner's surname.

Thanos is a 40-year-old White European (Greek Cypriot) man. He and his partner Riccardo (40, White European (Italian)) met at a gay bar in 1996 and entered a civil partnership ten years later in 2006. They live in a flat in London. They do not want to have children. It was unclear if they were monogamous or not. They did not amend their surnames.

Kumar is a 40-year-old mixed-race man of White English and Black Sri Lankan heritage. He and his partner Ian (30, White English) met online in 2001 and entered a civil partnership ten years later in 2011. They live in a coastal city in Southern England. At the time of interview they were involved in the adoption process. While the couple had a history of non-monogamy in context of threesomes, they were not sure they would keep this up after they had adopted children. Ian took Kumar's surname.

Eric is a 42-year-old White English man. His partner Oscar (72, White English) was also interviewed. Their relationship developed from their mutual involvement with church. They entered a civil partnership in 2006, about fifteen years into their relationship. They live in a community of mobile homes in a pastoral setting just outside a large city in the West Midlands. His partner Oscar has adult children. The couple reported that they were monogamous and that they had double-barrelled their surnames.

Steven is a 45-year-old White English man. He and his partner Oli (48, White English) met at a house party in the late 1980s and entered a civil partnership in 2011, twenty two years into their relationship. They live in a semi-detached house in a large city in the West Midlands. Steven thought that children were an unlikely prospect. He reported that he and his partner were not monogamous. They chose not to amend their surnames.

Mark is a 45-year-old White English man. His partner Irving (60, White English) was also interviewed. They met twenty seven years ago – initially randomly on the street, and then randomly at a gay pub a few days later. They entered a civil partnership in 2006, twenty one years into their relationship. They live in a detached house in a large city in the East Midlands. They reported that they were monogamous and that they had double-barrelled their surnames.

Liam is a 45-year-old White English man. He and his partner Craig (46, White Scottish) were introduced by a mutual friend at a gay bar in 2003. They entered a civil partnership in 2007, four years into their relationship. They live in a small town a few miles from one of Scotland's large cities. Liam reported that he and his partner were monogamous. They had not amended their surnames.

Sunil is a 48-year-old Asian man born to Guyanese parents in the UK. He and his partner Charles (45, White British (not-specified)) met online in 2000 and entered a civil partnership seven years later. They share a home in London. Sunil reported that he and his partner were in a sexually open relationship and that they had kept their own surnames.

Mitchell is a 49-year-old White English man. He and his partner Leo (56, White British (not-specified)) met online in 1997 and entered a civil partnership in 2011. They maintain separate homes in different areas of London but speak on the phone every evening and spend at least three days a week, including weekends, together. The couple decided to keep their own surnames.

Nathan is a 50-year-old White English man. His partner Adam (54, White English) was also interviewed. They met in 2003 through their mutual involvement in a gay walking group and entered a civil partnership five years later in 2007. They live in a detached house in a village just outside a large East Midlands city. The couple reported that they were monogamous and that they had not amended their surnames.

Jens is a 51-year-old White German man. His partner Daniel (55, White Welsh) was also interviewed. They were introduced in a gay bar by a mutual friend in 1986 and they entered a civil partnership nearly twenty years later in 2006. They live in a B&B which they run in a seaside town in North Wales. The couple reported that they were not monogamous and that they had not amended their surnames.

Klaus is a 52-year-old White German man. He and his partner Peter (44, White English) met through a personal advert in 1997 and eight years later they were among the first couples to register civil partnerships in December 2005. They live in London. Klaus reported that he and his partner were monogamous and that they had not amended their surnames.

Adam is a 54-year-old White English man. His partner Nathan (50, White English) was also interviewed. They met in 2003 through their mutual involvement in a gay walking group and entered a civil partnership five years later in 2007. They live in a detached house in a village just outside a large East Midlands city. The couple reported that they were monogamous and that they had not amended their surnames.

Daniel is a 55-year-old White Welsh man. His partner Jens (51, White German) was also interviewed. They were introduced in a gay bar by a mutual friend in 1986 and they entered a civil partnership nearly twenty years later in 2006. After a varied career in public health and education, as well as being a published author, Daniel now runs a B&B with his partner in a

seaside town in North Wales. The couple reported that they were not monogamous and that they had not amended their surnames.

Irving is a 60-year-old White English man. His partner Mark (45, White English) was also interviewed. They met twenty seven years ago – initially randomly on the street, and then randomly at a gay pub a few days later. They entered a civil partnership in 2006, twenty one years into their relationship. They live in a detached house in a large city in the East Midlands. Irving is now retired and takes care of most of the household duties. He regrets that civil partnership did not happen sooner as he would have liked a child. They reported that they were monogamous and that they had double-barrelled their surnames.

Cameron is a 62-year-old White New Zealander. He and his partner Tai (32, Thai) met randomly while he was on holiday in Thailand in 2005. After two years of a long-distance relationship they entered a civil partnership in 2007 and Tai joined Cameron in the UK. Cameron continues to work as a medical doctor. They live in London. While Tai would like children Cameron feels he is too old. Cameron reported that he and his partner were monogamous. They had not amended their surnames.

George is a 65-year-old White English man. He and his partner Patrick (65, English) met at a gay pub in London in the early 1970s. They entered a civil partnership in 2006. George is now retired but remains actively involved in a range of voluntary roles. They live in a large town in South East England. George reported that he and his partner had never had a policy of monogamy. They did not amend their surnames.

Oscar is a 72-year-old White English man who continues to work part-time as a lecturer. His partner Eric (42, White English) was also interviewed. Their relationship developed from their mutual involvement with church. They entered a civil partnership in 2006, about fifteen years into their relationship. They live in a community of mobile homes in a pastoral setting just outside a large city in the West Midlands. He was previously married to a woman for fifteen years and has four children who are now adults. The couple reported that they were monogamous and that they had double-barrelled their surnames.

William is a 72-year-old White English man. He and his partner Damian (70, Black Caribbean) met at a gay pub in London in the late 1960s. They entered a civil partnership thirty eight years later in 2006. William is a retired academic but keeps occupied with scholarly and leisure pursuits. He and Damian maintain a large semi-detached home in London. William reported that he and his partner were not monogamous. They had not amended their surnames.

Appendix B: Extract from ethics application – ethical considerations

Most ethical issues are covered by adopting the general principles of: informed consent; right to privacy; and, protection from harm. These will be central to the entire research process. This study will comply with the British Sociological Association's Statement of Ethical Practice (2002, updated 2004), and the Data Protection Act of 1998.

I want to emphasize that this study will involve a voluntary sample of adult individuals who have consented to take part in the study after careful consideration of the purpose of the research and their role in it.

Prior to each interview participants will receive the information sheet which will explain the aims and purpose of the research, as well as the research procedure, including their involvement. It will also cover how their identity and the information they provide will be protected through standard procedures for confidentiality and anonymity. They will have information on the data protection and storage protocols, and the proposed strategies for dissemination and representation. They will have time to consider their participation and to ask questions or express concerns before completing the informed consent form and taking part in the research (if they choose to do so). They will be aware that they can withdraw from the study at any time without consequence. They will also be aware of the complaints procedure.

Individual interviews are a standard and much used method to collect information in qualitative research and I do not anticipate problems with this approach. In the unlikely event that something does arise, I have considered the following ethical issues and offer resolutions for each.

a) Negative Emotions and Distress:

People who volunteer to take part in interviews tend to find the experience a positive one, and sometimes therapeutic. Having agreed to take part in the study, they are likely to have a mutual interest in the study and are usually keen and prepared to talk about the specified topics. However, there is the potential for interview questions to evoke unanticipated negative emotional responses or distress. If there comes a point in which I sense that a participant is distressed I will remain calm and sympathetic. The participant will be offered some time and then made aware of the following options: we can skip specific topics, the recorder can be turned off for a period, or the interview can be stopped completely.

b) Need for Support or Information or Indication of harm:

During the course of the interview, a participant may highlight a potential need, or I may feel that they might benefit from additional support or information. In either case, I have compiled a referrals list for issues that may emerge over the course of an interview. These may include: emergency and suicide services, sexual health, mental health and emotional support, counselling, domestic violence, housing advice, homophobic/hate crime reporting etc. When necessary I will provide this list to participants, and offer to contact the referral agency if that is desired by the participant. If the participant discloses information that indicates that they may be at risk of harm they will be encouraged to report it themselves but I will also offer to support them in seeking help.

c) Power in the Research Relationship:

The interviews have been designed to be open-ended, flexible and conversational in nature to allow the participants to tell their story in their own voice and as they want. However, due to the in-depth and spontaneous nature of interviews there is the potential for participants to reveal personal, private, and sensitive information which they perhaps did not anticipate. Participants will be reminded that their participation is voluntary and that

they have the control in what they want to tell me, and they will be aware that they are free to withdraw from the study at any time. I am aware that power differentials may come into play when participants and the researcher are unmatched in terms of age, gender, ethnicity, educational level and so on. Throughout the interview I will treat participants with utmost respect and sensitivity. Every attempt will be made to create a comfortable atmosphere, and to be a non-judgemental, responsive and empathic listener. And I will use language that is suitable. Additionally, my own background as a gay man may put the participants at ease.

d) **Data Protection, Privacy and Confidentiality:**

Some participants may worry about other people (their partner, family, friends, work colleagues, others) finding out that they took part in the research or what they said in the interview. I will remind participants that their identities will be protected, that all information about them will be coded and kept confidential at City University London in accordance with the Data Protection Act of 1998, and that none of their personal information will be shared with third parties. They will also have the opportunity to choose a pseudonym. Because some of the questions in the topic guide relate to third parties (e.g., their partners) participants will be reminded that no information that could lead to the identification of any individual will be disclosed in reports on the project or to third parties.

e) **Representation:**

Some participants may be concerned with how they will be represented to wider audiences in the research write up and dissemination. Again, I will remind them that their identity will be protected in any publications or other methods of dissemination by referring to them with a pseudonym of their choosing, and changing or removing any other identifying information (where they live, work, socialize, names of family members or friends, etc.). Every effort will be made to represent participants accurately. All participants will be offered a copy of the overall research findings.

f) **Safety of Researcher:**

I have reviewed the Social Research Association's Code of Practice for the safety of social researchers conducting research in the field. The general principle is to be prepared and alert. Prior to an interview, I will scope out the local area where the interview will take place, to take note of possible escape routes, safe places, the nearest phone booth, and law enforcement. When going to an interview, I will make sure that I am dressed appropriately, have a charged mobile phone, a personal attack alarm, and some spare cash. Two people (supervisors, friends, or my partner) will serve as emergency contacts and they will be aware of the time and location of any particular interview. At the beginning of each interview I will log-on by sending a message to each emergency contact briefing them on the situation and that the interview is about to begin. At the end of the interview I will log-off with the emergency contacts – alerting them that the interview has finished and all is well. If the interview takes more than two hours, the projected maximum duration of an interview, I will text the emergency contacts again to confirm this. In general, I will try to arrange for a cab to pick me up from the interview at a certain time, and participants will be aware that I have made this arrangement.

Appendix C: Approval letter for ethics application

CITY UNIVERSITY LONDON

School of Community and Health Sciences
Research Office
20 Bartholomew Close
London EC1A 7QN

Tel: +44 (0) 20 7040 5704

www.city.ac.uk

Ref: PhD/11-12/01

20 October 2011

Dear Robert / Eamonn / Sally

Re: Men in Civil Partnerships: an exploration of their experiences and meanings of a new relational possibility

Thank you for forwarding amendments and clarifications regarding your project. These have now been reviewed **and approved** by the Chair of the School Research Ethics Committee.

Please find attached, details of the full indemnity cover for your study.

Under the School Research Governance guidelines you are requested to contact myself once the project has been completed, and may be asked to complete a brief progress report six months after registering the project with the School.

If you have any queries please do not hesitate to contact me as below.

Yours sincerely

Alison Welton
Research Governance Officer

a.welton@city.ac.uk
020 7040 5704

Appendix D: Recruitment flyer

Appendix E: Information sheet

Men in Civil Partnerships: an exploration of their experiences and meanings of a new relational possibility
Researcher: Robert Stocker, PhD candidate, City University London, School of Health Sciences
Faculty Supervisors: Dr Eamonn McKeown & Prof Sally Hardy

CITY UNIVERSITY
LONDON

INFORMATION SHEET FOR PARTICIPANTS

You are being invited to take part in a research study exploring the lives of men in Civil Partnerships (CPs). The research is looking for men who are willing to share their life stories and their experiences of being in a CP. Before you decide it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take your time to read this carefully and you will have the opportunity to ask any questions and express concerns.

What is the purpose of the research?
The purpose of this research is to generate a better understanding of the lives of men in CPs and thereby provide a new perspective on the lives of gay men (and other non-heterosexual men) - one that is emerging from the experiences of men in CPs. Since the Civil Partnership Act came into force in December 2005, nearly 26,000 male couples have taken advantage of this new relational possibility. However, not much is known about why men enter CPs, their experiences of CP, what it means to them, and how these relationships are lived in everyday life. We think this research is important and would appreciate your participation.

Who can take part in the research?
This study seeks a range of men in CPs. We hope we can hear from older and younger men, men who may have started their relationship more recently, and men who have been together for many years. We would like to hear from men of any ethnicity, sexuality, religion, socio-economic or cultural background, or location in the UK. To participate, you must be male, at least 18 years old, be in a CP that was registered in the UK, and currently reside in the UK. Your participation is completely voluntary and you are free to withdraw from the study at any time, without giving a reason, and this will not affect you in any way. Please let us know if there is anything we can do to make it easier for you to take part.

What does taking part in the research involve?
Participation includes a face-to-face interview with the researcher which is expected to last between 1-2 hours. It will be arranged to suit your convenience, at a mutually agreed time and place (e.g., researcher's office, your office, your home). Interviews will begin by asking you to tell your life story – everything that you think is relevant to your current position as a man in a CP. We are hoping for a rich and detailed account. To stimulate your memory and aid you in your storytelling you may bring photos and/or other relevant personal items that you may find useful during the interview. Later in the interview the researcher will ask follow-up questions based on a set of topics, but the interview is meant to be flexible and conversational in nature.

What will I be asked?
In the broadest sense you will be asked to talk about your life and relationships from your personal perspective as a man in a CP. You will be asked to reflect on the following topics:

- family heritage, birth, your childhood and adolescence;
- awareness of sexual orientation and early experiences;
- adulthood - education, work, leisure, past relationships;
- your current relationship – how it began and developed, about your decision to enter a civil partnership, planning for the civil partnership and the actual day of the ceremony, everyday life after the civil partnership, and its impacts;
- other areas of your life including health, intimacy, and sexual arrangements & practices in your relationship;
- and, your visions for the future.

What will happen with this information?
Interviews will be digitally recorded and transcribed by the researcher into text for analysis. The results of the research will take the form of a PhD thesis, but will also be shared with wider audiences through, for example, publications in academic journals and gay media, or presentations at conferences. In each case, your identity will be protected by using a pseudonym (a false name which you can choose), and changing or removing any other references that could reveal your identity or that of other individuals that you mention. You will also receive a copy of the overall research findings if you would like to.

What about my privacy and confidentiality?
All information about you will be kept confidential at City University London on a password-protected computer network and in locked filing-cabinets for the duration of the study. The primary researcher will have access to this data and it may be shared with supervisors and other colleagues or used in future, but only in anonymized form. No information that could identify any individual will be disclosed in reports on the project or shared with third parties. If you have any specific concerns, the researcher will work with you to come to an arrangement in which you feel respected and comfortable.

What are the risks and benefits?
I hope that you may see this as a mutually beneficial project. By working together we may generate a better understanding of the lives of men in CPs and thereby provide a new perspective on gay men's lives. On a personal level, the project offers you an opportunity to reflect upon and tell your life story. This process has been described by participants in previous research of this kind, as a moving and thought-provoking experience with the potential to impact upon other lives and future generations. On the other hand, your participation will require some of your time and some people may be uncomfortable in revealing certain aspects of themselves or their life history. If we come to a point in the interview where this is the case we can skip certain topics and move on, turn the recorder off, or stop the interview completely.

What do I do if I am interested?
If interested, you can contact **Robert Stocker** (the primary researcher) directly by phone **020 7040 5966** or by **Email:** robert.stocker.1@city.ac.uk. He will go over the study in more depth, and give you the opportunity to ask questions and/or express concerns. This can be done over the phone, or, if you prefer, by meeting in person. You will be asked to complete a brief demographic form, and you will receive a copy of this information sheet and a consent form to take away. You will then have additional time to consider your participation. If you decide to participate you will be asked to complete the consent form and we will arrange for the interview. You can also find information about the study on Facebook: Men-in-Civil-Partnerships-Research-Study.

About the Project and the Researcher:
This project has been reviewed and approved by the School of Health Sciences Research Ethics Committee at City University London and has been issued with indemnity insurance through the university. The project is funded by a City University London doctoral studentship that was

awarded to Robert Stocker, the primary researcher and PhD candidate within the school. He previously worked in HIV prevention and sexual health promotion with gay and bisexual men, and young people across London. He has completed an MSc in Public Health at London Metropolitan University, and a B.A. in Biology at San Francisco State University.

Complaints Procedure:
If you would like to complain about any aspect of the study, City University London has established a complaints procedure via the Secretary to Senate Research Ethics Committee. To complain about the study, you need to phone **020 7040 3040.** You can then ask to speak to the Secretary to Senate Research Ethics Committee and inform them that the name of the project is: Men in Civil Partnerships: an exploration of their experiences and meanings of a new relational possibility.

You could also write to the Secretary at:

Anna Ramberg
Secretary to Senate Research Ethics Committee
City University London
Northampton Square
London
EC1V 0HB
Email: Anna.Ramberg.1@city.ac.uk

Appendix F: Consent form

Men in Civil Partnerships: an exploration of their experiences and meanings of a new relational possibility
Researcher: Robert Stocker, PhD candidate, City University London, School of Health Sciences **Faculty Supervisors:** Dr Eamonn McKeown & Prof Sally Hardy

CITY UNIVERSITY LONDON

CONSENT FORM

Before completing this form please make sure that you have read the information sheet for participants, and that you have had the chance to ask questions or express concerns about the research. Then, read the statements below and tick the designated box for each if you agree. Please also sign and date the form.

	I agree
I have read through the information sheet, and I have had the chance to ask questions and/or express concerns. I have thus been informed of the purpose and aims of the research, and of my role in the research.	☐
I understand that all information that I provide will be kept confidential and securely at City University London, and in accordance with the Data Protection Act of 1998. No identifying information about any individual will be disclosed in reports on the project or supplied to third parties.	☐
I allow the interviews to be recorded, transcribed and held as data at City University London. I consent to the use of anonymized quotations from my interview in reports on the project.	☐
I understand that the primary researcher will have access to this data and that it may be shown to supervisors and other colleagues or used in future, but only in anonymized form. I give my consent for this.	☐
I understand that the results of this study will be used primarily for the completion of a PhD thesis, but may also be disseminated in a variety of ways (e.g., at research conferences, publications in academic journals, teaching).	☐
I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I may withdraw from the study at any time, without providing a reason, and without being penalized or disadvantaged.	☐
I agree to take part in this study.	☐

Name of Participant	**Date**	**Signature**
Name of Person Taking Consent	**Date**	**Signature**

Men in Civil Partnerships: an exploration of their experiences and meanings of a new relational possibility
Researcher: Robert Stocker, PhD candidate, City University London, School of Health Sciences
Faculty Supervisors: Dr Eamonn McKeown & Prof Sally Hardy

Appendix G: Pre-interview demographic questionnaire

CITY UNIVERSITY LONDON

PRE-INTERVIEW DEMOGRAPHIC QUESTIONNAIRE

1) **How did you hear about this study?**_____

2) **What is your age?**_____

3) **What is your partner's age?**_____

4) **For how long have you been in your current relationship?**

   Years_____ Months_____

5) **When did you register your current Civil Partnership?**

   Year_____ Month_____

6) **In the past have you ever been?** (please tick all that apply)

   ____Married to a woman
   ____In a civil partnership (or marriage) with a man
   ____Divorced from a woman
   ____Divorced from a man
   ____None of the above

7) **How would you describe your sexual orientation/identity?**_____

8) **Where do you live in the UK?**

   If London, please specify the borough_____
   If outside London, please specify which city or town _____

9) **Who do you live with?** (please list all people by relationship, not name. For example: 'my partner', 'my son and daughter', 'a roommate' etc.).
   _____

10) **What do you consider your ethnic group to be?**_____

11) **What is your partner's ethnic group?**_____

12) **What is the highest level of education you completed?** (Please tick one)

_____ Primary/Elementary

_____Secondary/ High School

_____University/College/undergraduate

_____Postgraduate education (Masters, PhD)

_____Other (please specify)_____--_____

13) Are you: (Please tick one)

_____Employed/self-employed, please list your occupation_____

_____Student

_____Unemployed

_____Retired

_____Other (please specify)_____

14) What is your estimated household income?_____

15) What do you consider your social class to be?_____

16) In general, what would be a convenient time for you to take part in an interview?
(Please fill in what times best suit you on each day)

Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday

17) Please provide your contact details:

Name:	Is it ok to contact you this way?		
Phone:	Yes	or	No
Mobile Phone:	Yes	or	No
Email:	Yes	or	No

*All information will be kept private and confidential.

Appendix H: Interview topic guide

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Men in Civil Partnerships: an exploration of their experiences and meanings of a new relational possibility
Researcher: Robert Stocker, PhD candidate, City University London, School of Health Sciences   **Faculty Supervisors:** Dr Eamonn McKeown & Prof Sally Hardy

- Thank; introductions, describe the study and its aim
- Discussion of confidentiality, data protection, anonymity, what will be done with information, recording of interview, comfortable situation, stop recording or stop interview, research progress update emails?

....

Research Question: What are the lived experiences of men in Civil Partnerships (CPs), what meanings do these hold, and how are these relationships practiced in everyday life?

Aim: The overall aim is to contribute to the knowledge base on gay men's lives by providing a new perspective on their experiences of intimacy - one that is emerging from the stories of men in CPs.

Objectives:

- To explore how the lives of men in CPs have unfolded over the life course.
- To explore their experiences of CP.
- To explore the meanings that they attach to CP.
- To explore the range of ways they conduct their relationships in light of wider social discourses, normative expectations, and culturally familiar relational models.
- To explore other domains in these men's lives, including: love, intimacy and commitment; sexual arrangements and practices; and, health and well-being.

....

Invitation to narrate:

As a man in a civil partnership I am interested in your life story, how you came to be in a civil partnership, what it's like and what it means for you. I am hoping that you can share with me a rich and detailed account of your life. Try to think and tell broadly. Start wherever you feel comfortable, take your time and give as much detail as you feel comfortable. Feel free to refer to any photos or personal items you brought if they are useful. My aim is to hear your story, in your words, so please do elaborate as much as you can. This will run like a conversation and we'll cover all the topics, in some way or another, but for now, perhaps you could start by telling me about you...

Topics to cover:

Family Heritage & Birth	•when & where born •parents' and family background

	•parents' stories about this time?
Childhood & Adolescence	•family, friends, important people •school & community •gay references/role models •adolescence & puberty
Adulthood, Sexual Orientation & Early Experiences of Sex & Relationships	•transitions to adulthood - education, work, social •awareness/disclosure of sexuality? What does it mean to be gay? •first/significant sexual experiences? •experimenting - sex and relationships - who, duration, quality.
Current Relationship	•meeting, formation/development of relationship •description of partner •description of relationship
Civil Partnership	•motivation for CP & planning •the actual day/ceremony - description, thoughts, feelings, guests •tradition vs. doing things differently •comparison to others – siblings, parents, friends, other gay men?
Life after Civil Partnership	•daily life since- housework, leisure, family and social relations •impact generally, impact on health/sense of well-being •at work, community, terminology
Sex Life, Sexual Arrangements and Practices	•changes over course of relationship •communication & negotiation around sex, why these arrangements? compared to others? •explore meanings of love, intimacy, trust, commitment
Closing & Thoughts for Future *(We'll start wrapping up now...)*	•did you imagine this is where you would be? change anything? •Children/Parenthood? •Your vision for future? and as a couple? •advice for others? •role of marriage in society/opening up to gays? •anything else to add?

Appendix I: Referrals list

CITY UNIVERSITY LONDON

Men in Civil Partnerships: an exploration of their experiences and meanings of a new relational possibility
Researcher: Robert Stocker, PhD candidate, City University London, School of Health Sciences **Faculty Supervisors:** Dr Eamonn McKeown & Prof Sally Hardy

REFERRALS LIST

Emergency Services:

Accidents and Emergencies: Dial: **999**

Samaritans: non-judgmental emotional support, 24 hours a day for people who are experiencing feelings of distress or despair. Dial: **(020) 7734 2800 or 08457 90 90 90**

Other Services: Sexual Health, Mental Health, Social Support, & Helplines:

GMI Partnership – one-to-one support with sexual health trainers, individual counseling & mentoring programmes, sexual health and HIV prevention information and referrals.
Tel: 020 8305 5002
Email: info@GMIPartnership.org.uk
Website: http://www.gmipartnership.org.uk/

West London Gay Men's Project - sexual health services, hate/homophobic crime reporting hotline, one-to-one support, free condom scheme for gay men across London.
Tel: 0800 587 8302
Email: info@westlondongmp.org.uk
Website: http://www.westlondongmp.org.uk/

Positive East - sexual health services, social support, one-to-one support, HIV support services, group work.
Tel: 020 7791 2855
Email: talktome@positiveeast.org.uk
Website: http://www.positiveeast.org.uk/

Metro Centre– sexual health services, social support, one-to-one support (counseling and mentoring)
Tel: 020 8305 5000
Email: info @metrocentreonline.org
Website: https://www.metrocentreonline.org/

Terrence Higgins Trust – a range of sexual health services, helpline, one-to-one support, group work, workshops, couples counseling, HIV health trainers (support workers).
Tel: 0808 802 1221 for an adviser or 020 7812 1600 for switchboard
Email: info@tht.org.uk

Website: http://www.tht.org.uk/

PACE – mental health and well-being support for LGBT people, group work, workshops, couples counseling.
Tel: 020 7700 1323
Email: info@pacehealth.org.uk
Website: http://www.pacehealth.org.uk/

The Pink Practice! - counseling services for LGBT individuals, couples and families at a frequency to suit your needs.
Tel: 020 7060 4000
Email: info1@pinkpractice.co.uk
Website: http://www.pinkpractice.co.uk

London Friend – a range of support services for LGBT people, helpline, group work, workshops, counseling, bereavement helpline.
Tel: 020 7833 1674
Email: office@londonfriend.org.uk
Website: http://www.londonfriend.org.uk/

Broken Rainbow – domestic violence support for LGBT people.
Tel: 08452 60 55 60
Email: mail@broken-rainbow.org.uk
Website: http://www.broken-rainbow.org.uk/

Antidote – alcohol and drug dependency support for LGBT people. Drop-in services, counseling, group work.
Tel: 020 7437 3523
Email: grainne.whalley@turning-point.co.uk
Website: http://www.thehungerford.org/antidote.asp

Stonewall Housing – Housing Advice for LGBT people of all ages.
Tel: 020 7359 5767
Email: info@stonewallhousing.org
Website: http://www.stonewallhousing.org/

Stonewall – Advocacy and Information on Civil Partnership rights & responsibilities.
Tel: 08000 50 20 20
Email: info@stonewall.org.uk
Website: http://www.stonewall.org.uk/

Freedoms Condoms – selection of low-cost condoms and lubricants: http://www.freedoms-shop.nhs.uk/

Lesbian and Gay Switchboard - general calls that are not HIV specific: **020 7837 7324**

Terrence Higgins Trust Direct Helpline - for HIV related calls: **0845 12 21 200**

Appendix J: Code list

ATLAS.ti Codes arranged chronologically and thematically (as of 25th January, 2013)

<u>**BEFORE CP**</u>

    B1-birth and childhood
    B2-awareness of sexuality
    B3 - Early sexual experience
    B4 - transitions
    B5-coming out
    B6 - Gay scene
    B8-relationship history

    IDENTITY_gay id development
    IDENTITY_intersections of sexuality/ethnicity
    IDENTITY_Relationship oriented

    Context1-community growing up
    Context2-social context
    Context3-educational context
    Context4-professional context
    Context5 - family context/model
    Context6 - Gay references

    LIFE EXPECTATIONS/ASPIRATIONS and Gay Life course

    Relationship development1 - meeting
    Relationship development2 - partner_appeal/description
    Relationship Development3 - development of relationship
    Relationship development4 - acceptance by others
    Relationship Development5- commitments
    Relationship Development6 - protections prior to CP
    Relationship Development7 - challenge to relationship
    Relationship Development8- dynamics of relationship
    Relationship Development9* - sex life through time

    CP1 - proposal/decision to have CP
    CP as optional right/not necessary
    AAA* - general uncertainty/ambivalence to commitment of CP
    MOTIVATIONS*
        motivations*_celebration
        motivations*_cp as gift/gesture/compensation
        motivations*_expression of love & commitment_legal/public/personal
        motivations*_instrumental/immigration_legal/financial
        rights/protections/benefits
            VISAS and FOREIGN Partners - not romantic
            CP as protection/rights/responsibilities/benefits
        motivations*_next/natural/logical step
            CP as next/natural/logical step

        motivations*_Peer inspiration/Social expectation
        motivations*_personal desire, life aspiration
        motivations*_political statement

motivations*_recognition/status-official and legal
motivations*_relationship permanence/definition/security
motivations*_taking advantage of NOVEL legal option
CP as novel/exciting/special
CP as Legal permission/legal consciousness

CP1 - announcement and reaction of family and others
CP1 -guests/family/friends invited
CP1 - planning
CP1 - planning - considerations and constraints (money, time)
CP1 - planning_use of wedding planning resources
CP1 - stresses of organising/planning
CP1 - Negotiation_balance/influence/accomodate others
CP1 - venue

DURING CP

CP2 – format
CP1 - venue

CP2 - attendance, response & supportive actions of guests
Social Support
CP2 - experience of registrar

CP as meaning making activity
CP as performance/entertainment/demonstration
CP as politics - the personal is political
CP2_celebrating/Performing TOGETHERNESS
CP2_SOCIAL OCCASSION_Connectivity and Collectivity

embracing convention
AAA* - Discursive Distancing - Resistance to wedding/marriage

CP2 - bricolage_freedom/entitlement to create
CP2 - bricolage_gender_taking account of
CP2 - bricolage_irony/comedy vs seriousness
CP2 - bricolage_making it gay or not
CP2 - bricolage_personalization/individualization
CP2 - bricolage_reflecting heritage
CP2 - bricolage_Religious component
CP2 - bricolage_theme
CP2 - bricolage_tradition vs nontradition
Ritual/Tradition - best men/women etc
Ritual/Tradition - cake
Ritual/Tradition - candles
Ritual/Tradition - clothing
Ritual/Tradition - communal meal
Ritual/Tradition - consummation
Ritual/Tradition - first dance
Ritual/Tradition - honeymoon
Ritual/Tradition - kiss
Ritual/Tradition - music/song
Ritual/Tradition - readings
Ritual/Tradition - rings
Ritual/tradition - signing the CP certificate

Ritual/Tradition - speeches
Ritual/Tradition - stag-do/fag-do
Ritual/Tradition - threshold
Ritual/Tradition - throwing bouquet
Ritual/Tradition - throwing confetti/rice/bubbles
Ritual/Tradition - vow
Rituals/Tradition - walking in/out

CP2 - emotions

AFTER CP – Impact, Meaning, Transformation

CP as rite of passage/common experience/milestone/accomplishment

CP2 - emotions
CP3 - IMPACT/MEANING_More meaningful than expected
CP3 - IMPACT/MEANING: 'Just what we wanted' - postive reflections constructed
CP3 - Authencity_compared to other weddings/CPs
CP3 - LEGACY-personal legacy of CP/something to live by

CP3 - IMPACT/MEANING: commitment, cementing - means commitment
CP3 - IMPACT/MEANING_confirmation/celebration of established couplehood

CP3 - TRANSFORMATION
CP3 - Transformation/Impact - denial of or temporary change
CP3 - Transformation/Impact - 'Feeling Different'
CP3 - Transformation/Impact - ID-personal/joint
CP3 - Transformation/Impact - practical/everyday change
CP3 - Transformation/Impact - relationship - security, comfort, commitment
CP3 - Transformation/Impact - status
CP3* - Transformation/Impact - socially/more comfortable with being gay
CP3* - TRANSFORMATION_NAMING PRACTICES

CP3 - IMPACT/MEANING_INCLUSION/SOCIAL SUPPORT_social wellbeing
CP3 - IMPACT/MEANING_Recognition/validation/legitimation
CP3 - IMPACT/MEANING_RECONCILIATION/Healing_wellbeing
     CP as anchor/framework for achieving marriage and family aspirations
CP3 - IMPACT-on family/social relationships
CP3 - IMPACT_negative impacts
WB - Happiness and Subjective wellbeing
Social Support

FUTURE_Dissolution? - Realistic/Contingent approach to marriage
FUTURE_Family - considering, doing, decided against
FUTURE_life plans
FUTURE_Upgrading to Marriage?

DISCOURSES DRAWN UPON
D - queer politics/debates/human rights
D - romantic love
D - societal/cultural expectations to marry/children
D - stories of gay relationships b4 CP
D* - being gay/gay culture - what it means
D* - development/growing up gay as different

D* - gay relationships fleeting
D* - marriage and family_ideals/conventions
D* - masculinity
D* - Monogamy
D* - Sex

MISCELLANEOUS
Advice
AUTHENTICITY
embracing convention
PINK POUND
CP as anchor/framework for achieving marriage and family aspirations
CP as Legal permission/legal consciousness
CP as meaning making activity
CP as next/natural/logical step
CP as novel/exciting/special
CP as optional right/not necessary
CP as performance/entertainment/demonstration
CP as politics - the personal is political
CP as protection/rights/responsibilities/benefits
CP as rite of passage/common experience/milestone/accomplishment
LOVE/INTIMACY/COMMITMENT
METHODOLOGY/REFLEXIVITY
QUOTES_key quotes
QUOTES_Vignettes
VISAS and FOREIGN Partners - not romantic

THEMES RUNNING THROUGH

1. Approaching CP as same-sex couple
AAA* - accounting for being a ss couple_Ambivalence, Anxiety, Awkwardness
AAA* - Discursive Distancing - Resistance to wedding/marriage
AAA* - general uncertainty/ambivalence to commitment of CP
AAA* - lack of a model for gay relationships
AAA* - lack of model for CP
AAA* - policing selves/discomfort during CP
AAA*_residual anxiety/vigilance or disbelief at acceptance
AAA*_THE HETEROSEXUAL Assumption

2. Social Intelligibility
SOCIAL INTELLIGIBILITY*_CP as marriage
TERMINOLOGY*

3. CP as compromise
DISSATISFACTION with CP*
DISSATISFACTION*_inequality
DISSATISFACTION*_limited level of social/global recognition
DISSATISFACTION*_Religion/Regulation/Restriction
DISSATISFACTION*_Terminology
EQUALITY v. (in)Equality* - CP as good enough

4. (homo)normativity/normalisation
HOMONORMATIVITY-normal like str8 couples
HOMONORMATIVITY - domestic arrangements
HOMONORMATIVITY - financial arrangements

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HOMONORMATIVITY*- nonmonogamy
HOMONORMATIVITY* - Monogamy
Normality_after CP
Normality_b4 CP
normality_performing normality

5. Social change and complicity in social change
SC* - SOCIO-CULTURAL CHANGE
SC* - acceptance, tolerance and positive public perceptions
SC* - impact on gay culture and future generations
SC* - marriage/CP_patterns, role, definition
SC* - worries/expectations for CP
STEREOTYPES_challenging stereotypes
ROLE MODELS/PROUD PIONEERS*

6. Increased visibility
VISIBILITY*_after CP
VISIBILITY*_at work and community
VISIBILITY*_before CP
VISIBILITY*_more coming out to do
VISIBILITY*_on the day

7. Authenticity
AUTHENTICITY
CP3 - Authencity_compared to other weddings/CPs

8. Transformation
CP3 - TRANSFORMATION
CP3 - Transformation/Impact - denial of or temporary change
CP3 - Transformation/Impact - 'Feeling Different'
CP3 - Transformation/Impact - ID-personal/joint
CP3 - Transformation/Impact - practical/everyday change
CP3 - Transformation/Impact - relationship - security, comfort, commitment
CP3 - Transformation/Impact - status
CP3* - Transformation/Impact - socially/more comfortable with being gay
CP3* - TRANSFORMATION_NAMING PRACTICES

9. Reconciliation/healing/Inclusion
CP3 - IMPACT/MEANING_INCLUSION/SOCIAL SUPPORT_social wellbeing
CP3 - IMPACT/MEANING_Recognition/validation/legitimation
CP3 - IMPACT/MEANING_RECONCILIATION/Healing_wellbeing
     CP as anchor/framework for achieving marriage and family aspirations
CP3 - IMPACT-on family/social relationships
CP3 - IMPACT_negative impacts
WB - Happiness and Subjective wellbeing
Social Support

10. Meaning Making
Constructing and Conveying Meaning
    CP as meaning making activity
    CP as performance/entertainment/demonstration
        CP as politics - the personal is political
        CP2_celebrating/Performing TOGETHERNESS
    CP2_SOCIAL OCCASSION_Connectivity and Collectivity

Bricolage
        embracing convention
        AAA* - Discursive Distancing - Resistance to wedding/marriage

        CP2 - bricolage_freedom/entitlement to create
        CP2 - bricolage_gender_taking account of
        CP2 - bricolage_irony/comedy vs seriousness
        CP2 - bricolage_making it gay or not
        CP2 - bricolage_personalization/individualization
        CP2 - bricolage_reflecting heritage
        CP2 - bricolage_Religious component
        CP2 - bricolage_theme
        CP2 - bricolage_tradition vs nontradition
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        Ritual/Tradition - cake
        Ritual/Tradition - candles
        Ritual/Tradition - clothing
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        Ritual/Tradition - consummation
        Ritual/Tradition - first dance
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        Ritual/Tradition - kiss
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        Ritual/Tradition - rings
        Ritual/tradition - signing the CP certificate
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        Ritual/Tradition - threshold
        Ritual/Tradition - throwing bouquet
        Ritual/Tradition - throwing confetti/rice/bubbles
        Ritual/Tradition - vow
        Rituals/Tradition - walking in/out

Appendix K: An example of a case biography/generational story

<u>Oscar: a familiar story of struggle and resilience</u>

Oscar (72, White English), like most of the older participants, told a familiar story of struggle and resilience. He summed up his life by saying that 'it's been a long road for me'. His was indeed a generational story, as he acknowledged at the very beginning of the interview:

> *'Men of my generation, you dare not mention the fact that you were attracted to other men, you daren't. And so the concept of marriage never entered your psyche'.*

Oscar was born in the late 1930s at the brink of World War II. He considers himself from a 'vastly different era'. His parents married young because of teenage pregnancy and remained together. Oscar, the youngest of three children, has an older sister and brother. He grew up in various parts of northern England including a small cotton mill village and a seaside holiday resort town where he attended school.

Sex and sexuality were never subjects of discussion at school, nor at home. As a boy he was 'totally innocent' and unaware that there was 'such a thing as gay person' or a 'homosexual life'. He feels his experience of growing up in 'provincial' towns was 'even more isolating' as there were no visible references to homosexuality. Although he says he didn't have the language to call himself 'gay' when he was younger he had come across the word 'homosexual'. Indeed he made a few trips to the library to understand what this meant. These proved uninformative:

> *'The word homosexual was not in any dictionary [...] I had to go to um the city into the* central reading room, get a big dictionary and then when I opened it, it simply gave the literal translation: same-*sex. Nothing else'.*

With little awareness of what homosexuality was he engaged in 'mutual masturbation and things like that' with other boys. He didn't, however think these 'little adventures', as he calls them, made him any 'different':

> *'Just mutual masturbation and things like that, um, which isn't really an indication at all, it's just as, as your hormones get going, you know, uh lots of boys do that, they're not gay at all. But that's all. And I didn't think I was any different'.*

While Oscar didn't necessarily recognize that he was 'different' to other boys, as a teenager he did come to understand that these behaviours were illegal and punishable:

> *'All I knew about being gay, and this was later on when I was, I suppose in my teens um was that if you were caught you got two years hard labour'.*

He finished school at 15 and then did a two year training course at a nautical college before going to sea. It was while he was at sea that he came to understand that he had no sexual interest in women and that his sexual preferences were different from most of the other men who would go in search of sex at the brothels when the ships landed at various ports.

During the nine years he spent at sea he again had 'little encounters' with other young men on the ships. But he says even then, knowing that he was different, he still didn't label himself:

> *'Even when I was at sea I didn't class myself as being gay, uh, again the only encounters were mutual masturbation and they weren't too often either [...] it wasn't*

directed anywhere it wasn't aimed at anything it had no sort of end it was aiming for and uh, I just ca*rried on like that all the time I was at sea'.*

In his mid-20s he came back ashore and began teaching. His mother was keen for him to marry and settle down. He went along with that because he wasn't aware there was an 'alternative life':

> *'My mother organized a first date with somebody I didn't really know (chuckles). And* uh of course the whole society forced you in that direction as well, everything. This was expected that you would do this, the parents wanted you to do this, the church wanted you to do this and all the rest of it. And uh, you know, and (sighs) I just went with the *flow really'.*

He and his wife were married for fifteen years and had four children together. While he enjoyed having a home and a family, and was for the most part content with life, he was also experiencing great 'turmoil':

> *'*The large part of my life was quite satisfactory but underneath this turmoil was going *on all the time...I used to daydream all the time [...] I was suppressing the feelings I* had and the thoughts I was having, *just kept them to myself [...] I mean I wasn't* unhappy, uh for as I say, about 80% of my life. In fact I, it was very nice having a family and you get the uh support of society and all the rest of it, and that was very nice, was a nice girl, very nice girl. But, I was seething inside. And that was difficult to cope *with'.*

Oscar was married from the early 1960s to the mid-1970s, a time when homosexuality and gay identities were becoming more visible given the gay liberation movement that followed the Stonewall Riots of 1969. Yet, he says 'I didn't realize there was a gay life…There were gay people, but I had no concept of you know setting up a home with anybody or anything like that'. In his late 30s he met a younger man and they 'migrated together'. The relationship he was having with this young man ultimately had a destructive impact on his marriage and role as a father.

> *'My world exploded, a world I never knew about so I didn't know how to handle it, just* happened and uh and then my wife found out and we go*t divorced'.*

After the divorce Oscar became estranged from his wife and four children who his ex-wife would not allow him to see. He lived alone for about nearly a decade and had no sexual or romantic involvements with anyone. He did occasionally go to a local gay pub where he would simply 'sit at the bar and not talk to anybody'. It was during this time that he came to think of himself as gay.

In the early 1990s, when he was in his early 50s, Oscar met his current partner Eric (42, White English). At the time they both worked, in different capacities, for the armed forces. However, it was through their mutual involvement with church that they formed a friendship which later developed into a relationship. Early in their relationship Eric was posted for a service engagement in a city a few hours away. Despite the distance, for nine years they maintained their relationship by spending weekends together and going on annual holidays which they funded through a joint bank account. A few years in to their relationship they committed to each other privately by exchanging vows and rings. These commitments had the effect of making them feel married:

> *'We had been married uh although we hadn't been legally married. We had that commitment'*

Despite these commitments they were not out as a couple at the time. To remain 'under the radar' the rings they wore had been carefully chosen on the basis that they did not resemble wedding bands. They lived in fear of being found out because the ban on homosexuals serving in the British armed forces was still in effect:

> *'We didn't actually do much at all because we couldn't afford to be found out. We, we'd maybe go to the cinema or, you know, innocuous things like that, but we didn't do any, we never, we never went on the scene or anything like that at all. Um cuz we couldn't afford to, I mean both of us would've been out on our rear. And they were very strict in the force and uh so we didn't do much [...] we kept our heads down really, basically just kept our heads down'.*

By the time the ban was lifted in 2000 Eric had finished his military engagement and left the forces to join Oscar on a full-time basis. They bought a new home together and created wills and enduring power of attorney agreements to legally protect one another and their relationship. They joined a church as a couple and began to live more openly, for the most part. Oscar's family had known of his homosexuality since his divorce, but Eric remained reticent about coming out to his parents. Although his parents had met Oscar and had visited their one-bedroom home, and despite spending Christmases together, it was only after eleven years together that the nature of their relationship was made explicit to Eric's parents.

Civil partnership became available fifteen years into their relationship. Although they already felt they were essentially married, given the private commitments and legal protections they had made, Oscar says 'as soon as we could legally get married we did do'. They had a ceremony for about 40 family members and friends. After the civil partnership Oscar and Eric double-barrelled their surnames informally to communicate to others the authenticity and reality of their marriage:

> *'We decided to be known as Simmons-Ellis to our families, friends and casual acquaintances [...] I look upon this as a statement that we are married and not just two guys who share a house'.*

Oscar considers himself legally 'married' but expressed dissatisfaction that civil partnership ceremonies are strictly civil and thus did not provide a religious affirmation of his marriage to Eric:

> *'We would have liked it to be a normal wedding service. Um...but they're still arguing about that in churches now [...] if the chance came up we would repeat it in a church [...] it would be an affirmation within our church as much as we've got an affirmation outside our church'.*

Oscar's story is one of struggle, resilience and eventual reconciliation. Although the journey has been long and arduous, being in a civil partnership with Eric has provided Oscar with a sense of peace.

> *'When I was in, in an ordinary marriage most of it I enjoyed, but I didn't have inner peace, I was in turmoil inside, all the time. Now I have peace'.*

Appendix L: Examples of dissemination: conference paper abstracts

Title: Minority Stress, Relationship Formalisation and Well-being: an exploratory analysis of the life narratives of men in civil partnerships in the UK

Authors: Robert Stocker, Eamonn McKeown, Sally Hardy

Paper presented by Robert Stocker at the 2nd Annual Doctoral Research Conference, 22 April 2014, City University London, London, UK.

Abstract: Epidemiological studies indicate that lesbian, gay and bisexual (LGB) populations are at increased risk of a range of mental health issues when compared to heterosexual populations. The predominant explanation for this disparity in mental health and well-being is minority stress theory which posits that LGB individuals experience an excess of social stress given their stigmatized social identities and minority status. This excess is produced by stressors including: internalized homophobia; lower levels of family and social support; and, expectations and experiences of stigma, prejudice and discrimination. Another contributing factor may be institutional discrimination in the form of exclusion from full and equal civil marriage rights. This exclusion is not only a symbol of discrimination but also disadvantages same-sex couples by barring them from the benefits of marriage. As the voluminous empirical literature on heterosexual marriage demonstrates, marriage confers a wide range of economic, social, psychological and health benefits. The emergent literature on same-sex marriage in the U.S. is consistent with these findings, indicating that married same-sex couples experience social, economic and legal benefits as well as increased well-being and reduced minority stress. To date, similar empirical evidence from the UK is lacking. This paper addresses this gap by drawing on personal narratives elicited through qualitative life story interviews with 28 individual men in civil partnerships from across the UK. Participants' narratives revealed that, in general, civil partnership was a positive experience which mediated aspects of minority stress and contributed to well-being. Most participants reported that civil partnership resulted in some or all of the following: feelings of happiness, life satisfaction, inclusion and belonging, security and stability, increased commitment, validation and legitimation of their gay identities and same-sex relationships, increased confidence and comfort is social settings and interactions, and increased social recognition and support. Overall, this study lends support to the idea that relationship formalisation may reduce minority stress and contribute to well-being.

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Title: 'We're strange. We're monogamous': sex and commitment in the narratives of men who have married men - betwixt and between discordant discourses and norms

Authors: Robert Stocker, Eamonn McKeown, Sally Hardy

Paper presented by Robert Stocker at the European Sociological Association 11th Conference, 28-31 August 2013, Torino, Italy

Abstract: The sexual behaviour and relationship arrangements of male couples have been well documented in the sociological and health sciences literature. However, few studies have explored sex and commitment among men who have 'married' men (MWMM) in a legally sanctioned form (e.g. civil partnership). MWMM confront two sets of discordant discourses and norms. On one hand they are socialized, to varying degrees, in a gay subculture said to promote

casual sex over monogamous relationships. Gay men are also part of mainstream culture where the meanings and practices of marriage, although fluid, operate at discursive and normative levels to endorse stable, permanent and monogamous relationships. Drawing on personal narratives elicited through qualitative interviews with 28 men in civil partnerships in the UK this paper explores how MWMM reflexively engage with and reconcile these discordant discourses and norms into meaningful arrangements in their own lives. The majority reported monogamous relationships. Monogamy was more common among younger men, men in relationships of shorter duration, and men with minimal experience or engagement with gay sexual culture. Nine men reported arrangements that allowed for a degree of sexual non-exclusivity while also protecting their relationship, and partner, from emotional harm and sexual infection. Consistent with previous research this study finds that monogamy is not taken for granted but reflexively negotiated among male couples. Furthermore, the narratives of MWMM provide a more nuanced picture of assimilation and resistance than is presented in abstract academic and public debates which tend to suggest that same-sex couples who 'marry' uniformly acquiesce to emerging (homo)normativities.

<div align="center">*****</div>

Title: Figments of family and fatherhood in the life narratives of men in civil partnerships – new homonormativities?

Authors: Robert Stocker, Eamonn McKeown, Sally Hardy

Abstract: Historically marriage and parenthood were complementary and the exclusive realm of heterosexuals. However as societies become more tolerant of homosexuality and as new legal provisions (e.g. adoption and partnership rights) become available same-sex couples are obliged to decide whether to, and how to, formalize their unions and/or construct families. Yet same-sex parenting remains controversial and is often criticized by social/moral conservatives and seen as undesirably 'heteronormative' by queer scholars and factions of the gay community. For gay men, in particular, bringing children into their lives presents unique challenges, requires creative planning, effort and tenacity. As a result they are far less likely to be raising children than their lesbian or heterosexual counterparts. Drawing on personal narratives elicited through qualitative interviews with 28 men in civil partnerships in the UK this paper explores how these men and their partners reflexively consider, jointly negotiate, and choose, postpone, or reject fatherhood. It is concluded that the institutionalized context/framework of civil partnership has implications for male couples who imagine parenthood and serves as a potential platform to bring children into their lives through various means. This paper joins the growing body of empirical research engaging with theories of modernity and individualisation to argue that while the meanings and practices of marriage and family are indeed fluid they are still pervasive ideals that shape expectations and guide action in personal lives, including those of same-sex couples who are increasingly re-configuring their life scripts to include marriage and parenthood, thereby establishing new 'homonormativities'.

<div align="center">*****</div>

Title: A novel gay 'right' of passage: bricolage in men's civil partnership ceremonies

Authors: Robert Stocker, Eamonn McKeown, Sally Hardy

<div align="center">**269**</div>

Paper presented by Robert Stocker at the 2nd Global Conference: Gender and Love, 25-27 September 2012, Oxford, UK

Abstract: This paper offers an exploratory analysis of the personal narratives elicited through in-depth interviews with 28 men in Civil Partnerships (CPs). Their narratives expose how CP is experienced and given meaning in relation to wider socio-cultural discourses, norms and practices, including the stereotypical white 'wedding'. An examination of their CP ceremonies reveals that these men engaged in a dynamic process of bricolage at the nexus of the traditional and the modern, the normal and the queer. Bricolage, in the context of their accounts, involved the piecing and patching together of wedding traditions and rituals to creatively construct desired and personally meaningful CP ceremonies. Their ceremonies were forums for them to express their identities and politics, challenge stereotypes, make claims about normality, and play with stereotyped gender roles. Their ceremonies were usually regarded as defining moments in their lives and many spoke of 'feeling different' after going through the process which often invoked overwhelming emotions. Most embraced the normalising power of CP, which represents a new, and optional, 'right'/rite of passage in the gay life course.

Appendix M: Example of dissemination: book chapter

NOTE: This appendix was redacted from the thesis by the Publications Team at City University London although permission for the author of this thesis to include the book chapter, cited below, had been sought and granted by the publisher.

The book chapter which follows (pages 267-285) was in press at the time of writing this thesis. The citation details are as follows:

Authors: Robert Stocker, Sally Hardy and Eamonn McKeown
Chapter title: A Novel Gay 'Right' of Passage: Constructing Ceremonies, Conveying Meaning and Displaying Identities through Men's Civil Partnerships
Book title: Doing Gender, Doing Love: Interdisciplinary Voices
Edited by: Serena Petrella
ISBN: 978-1-84888-273-7
Oxford: Inter-Disciplinary Press, 2014, in press.
Pages 219-247.

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