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# “I Do”: A Qualitative Study of Gay Men in Same-Sex Marriages

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UNIVERSITY OF CALGARY

“I Do”: A Qualitative Study of Gay Men in Same-Sex Marriages

by

Edwin Estuardo Morales

A THESIS

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### **Abstract**

In Canada, the right to marry someone of the same sex has been available to sexual minorities since 2005. However, while the right is available on paper, little is known about how entry into this institution is socially negotiated by those who choose to marry. This qualitative study explored the process of entering and being in a same-sex marriage through 11 one-on-one interviews with gay men who had been legally same-sex married for at least six months and were currently living in Calgary, Alberta, Canada. The final product is an exploration of same-sex marriage entry that focuses on social support, recognition, and service access perceived by these men. Practice implications are discussed to prepare professionals to support the unique psychosocial context faced by these men. In addition, this social justice inspired work aims to increase awareness that legal rights do not guarantee universal social acceptance.

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## Epigraph

*“We committed to sticking it through, to seeing what’s on the other side of bad so if things get really bad, our commitment is to stick through that.”*

## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Rites of passage are important life transitions because they can affirm a person's changes and place in the world. In Western society, they can occur from birth to death and involve becoming independent from parents, buying property, entering the realm of parenting, getting married or becoming the oldest generation in a family, just to name a few. Such rites are affirming of individuals' increasing personal capacity to be self-sufficient; mark the progression of life; require building new relationships; provide opportunities for individuals to grow, learn about new roles and responsibilities as well as for people in their lives to be supportive.

However, the sexual orientation of the individuals making these transitions can affect how these rites are experienced. For example, people's attitudes on non-heterosexual relationships may impact the level of support that they provide their family and friends who belong to sexual minorities. As a result, sexual minorities have no guarantees that everyone around them will be accepting of them or their relationships. Thus, members of sexual minorities may experience rejection from friends, family and co-workers, as a result of disclosing their sexual orientation (*coming out*); or identifying dating partners or conjugal relationships.

In Canada, prior to 2003 equal access to marrying someone of the same-sex was not available to sexual minorities across the country. This meant that they enjoyed many, but not all, of the same rights as other individuals. But, with changes to Canadian laws, marriage in 2012 is available to all adults regardless of their sexual orientation. Yet, in spite of a changed societal context, the representation of gay men's lives within the research literature remains somewhat negative.

As a case in point, sexual minorities' mental health has received a great deal of attention in the literature and findings show that gay men are at risk of depression, suicide, anxiety, and feelings of isolation and distress, just to name a few (Diaz, Ayala, Bein, Henne, & Marin, 2001; Frost, Parsons, & Nanin, 2007; Mills et al., 2004). Even though the above difficulties are not inherent characteristics of gay men, these challenges may be based on the stigma associated with being a sexual minority (Lewis, Derlega, Griffin, & Krowinski, 2003). Nonetheless, the way stigma affects some gay men may decrease their potential to build or enjoy happy relationships or perhaps even same-sex marriages.

In light of this, it is concerning that professionals may not be suitably prepared to work with this population. For example, Alderson (2004b) examined the creation of counsellor lesbian, gay, bisexual (LGB) cultural competency in the counselling training programs of 10 Canadian universities at the Masters and Doctoral level. Through providing a questionnaire consisting of four questions that asked about the number of training hours devoted to LGB issues, the findings showed that training was minimal and insufficient to create counsellor competency. As a result, such a gap in training may have implications for the ineffective practice of referring sexual minorities to other professionals when the current counsellor is unfamiliar or untrained to serve their needs (Alderson, 2004b). As a corrective measure, additional research is crucial to provide insight on how to better prepare professionals to work with sexual minorities.

This current qualitative study informed by grounded theory will focus on the experience of entering and being in a same-sex marriage for 11 same-sex married gay men living in Calgary, Alberta, Canada. This project aims to explore this experience with a focus on social support,

recognition and access to services, as it was socially negotiated by the gay men who agreed to participate. The goal of this work is to provide new insights and recommendations for human service providers who may work with this population.

### **Researcher's Perspective**

*Locating* yourself as a researcher is important in qualitative research, and certainly in qualitative work informed by grounded theory (Charmaz, 2006). As such, it is important for me to acknowledge my own perspectives and biases as a married gay man in the hopes that it will provide some context for the goals and impetus for this project. As a very out same-sex married gay man I am well acquainted with the topic of inquiry for this project; thus, it was important for me to avoid becoming an unofficial twelfth participant. Also, among my biases, I am a strong advocate for promoting happy, healthy relationships and marriages for all adults regardless of their sexual orientation. I am also happily married to another man in the best relationship I have ever had. Thus, based on my personal connection to this topic, my positive perspective and experience I needed to avoid casting participants in an overly positive light for fear of stigmatizing their experiences.

In addition, based on the above points, I was also acutely aware that there was risk of committing what Glaser (1992) has termed as *forcing* or imposing characteristics onto the data, based on my own experience. Due to this awareness I relied on memo writing, a type of journaling, about my own experience at the beginning and throughout, data collection and analysis. Memos were written as *stream of consciousness* or without concern for content or grammatical accuracy to promote honest, spontaneous impressions and then edited for grammar afterwards. Some of the experiences highlighted above were examined during such writing.

Memos were also used to analyze the themes emerging from the data and will be discussed again in Chapter Three as part of the methodology used in this study.

Furthermore, in preparation for this qualitative work, the biggest question encountered by this researcher from both some members of the LGBTQ and heterosexual community ranged from “So what?” to “What’s the point now that gay marriage is legal?” Thus, these questions are highlighted here because they underscore that with the legalization of same-sex marriage, a new tendency for indifference within the general population is likely to have been created. This indifference may assume that the needs of married sexual minorities are now less worthy of attention because through the legalization of same-sex marriage their rights are “protected” and a negative social environment has been neutralized if not eliminated.

### **Definitions of Key Concepts**

In research defining key terms is very important to ensure clarity and avoid misinterpretation of ideas (Grinnell & Unrau, 2008). Below definitions are given for key concepts that will be used throughout this effort. There are varying definitions of some terms, for example sexual orientation, thus the following section will define them to be clear about the way terms are used in this manuscript.

#### *Sexual Orientation*

Sexual orientation is one aspect of sexual minorities’ lives that has been explored extensively in the literature. Early on some researchers focused on personal histories of reported behaviour that placed individuals along a sexual-orientation continuum that could change over the person’s life-time (for example Kinsey, Pomeroy, & Martin, 1948). More recently a similar approach has been used as a type of equation to infer sexual orientation based on the number of

same-sex or opposite sex partners (Carpenter, 2007). Even though the reason these approaches may be used is that they can infer objectivity (in the former) or represent sought after personal history information (in the latter), such assumptions may be only best guesses. This statement is made because sometimes there can be a mismatch between sexual behaviour and a person's self-definition (Pathela et al., 2006). Also, behaviour would make for a poor definition of sexual orientation for this study because all behavior may not always be constant; therefore, even same-sex married couples may not be sexually active at all times in their relationship and yet continue to be gay.

On a different level, other researchers have articulated sexual orientation in psychological terms. One such example is Alderson (2003b), who posited that this concept is “the interaction between affect and cognition such that it produces attraction, erotic desire, and ultimately philia for members of the opposite gender, the same gender, or both” (p. 79). This conceptualization frames sexual orientation as a type of equation that when solved can produce unique outcomes for each individual and place them perhaps along a continuum. Without a doubt, such a psychologically based conceptualization is a great addition to understanding sexual orientation because it captures the conscious and sub-conscious levels of sexuality. However, this framework will not be used because even if sexual orientation occur inside a person's head, the concept has interpersonal and other referential elements that cannot be ignored (American Psychological Association, 2008).

The definition of sexual orientation that will be used for this study is the one articulated by the American Psychological Association, APA, (2010) which has defined this concept as follows: “*sexual orientation* refers to an enduring pattern of attraction, behaviour, emotion,

identity, and social contacts” (p. 74). Thus, this definition will conceptualize this study because includes global elements of a person and emphasizes an identity component important to this study because participants were chosen based on self-identifying as gay. Also, this conceptualization allows potential participants to remain in control of their own identities without having labels applied to them and supports a Social Work perspective that emphasizes empowerment of those under study (Canadian Association of Social Workers, 2005). Additionally, a self-identification perspective provides a straight forward way to differentiate between men who may identify as bisexual, transgendered, straight or any other classification and may also have a same-sex partner.

### *Sexual Minorities*

The term *sexual minorities* will be used to refer to individuals who identify as Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transsexual, and Transgender (LGBT) and identify within the spectrum of non-heterosexual individuals. Whenever the identity terms: lesbian, gay, straight, bisexual, and transgendered are used, the concepts are assumed to be based entirely on the person’s self-definition. This definition is also based on the person’s global sense of self and not on any one aspect of sexuality such as, for example, attraction or sexual contact only. For this project, participants will determine whatever elements they deem relevant to identify as gay without being asked to define these.

The terms gay, lesbian and bisexual will be conceptualized under the American Psychological Association (2010) definition which states: “*lesbian, gay, and bisexual* refer to identities and to the culture and communities that have developed among people who share those identities” (p. 74). The terms transsexual, will be conceptualized as “a person who does not



identify with their birth sex and assigned gender and self-identifies as transsexual” (Erich, Tittsworth, Meier, & Lerman, 2010, p. 295). The term transgender refers to individuals, whose gender expression is different than what is expected for their biological sex (Hughes & Eliason, 2002).

Moreover, the term two-spirited is used to refer to indigenous “people who are a) lesbian or gay, b) transgender, [sic] or c) who follow some or all of the parameters of alternate gender roles (may include specific social roles, spiritual roles, and same-sex relationships) specific to their tribe or panethnicity.” (Adams & Phillips, 2009, p. 960). The word queer will purposely not be used because no consensus exists as to whether the word is uniformly interpreted in positive terms (Alderson, 2004b). Similarly, this project will avoid using the word homosexual because of its potential negative historical connotations that resonate to a period when gay men were persecuted for their sexual expression, “homosexual activity,” which was criminalized and pathologized.

The terms *gay man* or *gay men* will be used even when the issue being acknowledged might also apply to other sexual minorities. This choice is made for the sake of space and specificity of the topic and I do not intend to be exclusionary by this choice. Inclusivity is important because excluding a group can undermine the importance of their issues and send unintended negative messages.

Moreover, the term Men who have Sex with Men (MSM) will be used to refer to men who have sex with other men regardless of their sexual orientation. This behavioural based term will be used only when research studies or legislation being reviewed use that label. The use of that term will be assumed to include other men who have sex with men such as bisexuals and

heterosexuals even if only the issues relating to gay men are mentioned in this thesis for the sake of brevity.

### *Same-sex Marriage*

A point of clarification is needed around the use of the term same-sex marriage for this project. From a legal perspective there's only one form of marriage in Canada (Civil Marriage Act, 2005). However, from a social perspective, sexual minorities who choose to marry someone of the same-sex may not be simply borrowing the institution of marriage from heterosexuals. Instead, they may be creating a new social institution that will redefine marriage in their own terms. This idea is consistent with propositions of transculturation that emphasize the redefinition that occurs when a different culture embraces the institutions of others and a new version of those institutions emerges with new characteristics (for example Cook & Offit, 2008). With that in mind, for this project a same-sex marriage is composed of two people of the same-sex and a heterosexual marriage is composed of two people of the opposite sex.

The terms *partner*, *husband*, and *spouse* are used interchangeably throughout this thesis. Within the literature review, the choice of term will be based on the study's choice of term and within the results chapters on the participants' choice. In other instances, the word *husband* was selected as the preferred term because of the word's ability to identify the nature of the relationship.

### **Chapters at a Glance**

The following sections will describe the chapters included as part of this thesis. Chapter Two focuses on a literature review that acknowledges the history and current challenges facing sexual minorities. It also provides a history of the progress achieved by same-sex marriage

around the globe with a special emphasis on how this was achieved in Canada through the use of key court cases. Then, the chapter provides a background and rationale for the project by focusing on issues facing sexual minorities narrowing down to a focus on what is known about the social support available to gay men and lesbians. Theory implications are discussed as well as the research questions used for this project.

The next chapter, Chapter Three, focuses on grounded theory as the methodology that informed this qualitative study and describes its history, philosophical foundations as well as its connection to Social Work. After that, the chapter provides the methods used for this project, its justification, data collection, procedure used, data analysis, and ethical considerations of the project. The chapter strives to acquaint the reader with what transpired and the rationale for those choices to generate a grounded description of participants' experiences.

Chapter Four is the first results chapter and it focuses on participants' experiences of entering into a same-sex marriage for the same-sex married gay men, who agreed to participate. This chapter describes the process participants followed from meeting their future spouse to the wedding day as well as the reactions they received afterwards. The rationale for including those steps is to provide an overview of the social negotiation of that entry.

The following results chapter, Chapter Five, focuses on being same-sex married with special emphasis on the participants' experiences with family, friends and work contexts in relation to social support, recognition and service access. The purpose of these sections is to highlight the experiences of these men seven years after the legalization of same-sex marriage in Canada. That chapter concludes with a summary of Chapter Four and Five that proposes the idea of *the process of managing risk* for same-sex married gay men.

The final chapter, Chapter Six discusses the findings in relation to the existing literature as well as focuses on its implications for practice, study limitations and suggestions for future research. That chapter concludes this qualitative manuscript with a creative synthesis (a wedding toast) that captures major and minor themes that emerged from participants' one-on-one interviews. Some of these minor themes were excluded from Chapters Four and Five for the sake of brevity and cohesion.

## CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

Little Canadian research is available with same-sex marriage as the topic of inquiry and not just a characteristic of research participants. To date, two studies are worth reviewing. The first from Alderson (2004a) found several reasons for choosing marriage including strengthening the commitment in the same-sex relationships, feeling empowered because of gaining social recognition, and being treated equally through receiving spousal death benefits. It must be acknowledged that this work, in part, inspired this project.

The second study, conducted by MacIntosh, Reissing and Andruff, (2010), used mixed methods through a combination of qualitative and quantitative approaches. Its goal was to explore relationship satisfaction and attachment as well as the impact of same-sex marriage on same-sex married gay and lesbian couples living in British Columbia and Ontario, Canada. This study found that obtaining legally recognized marriage had had a positive impact on a number of areas including social spheres of their participants' lives. Also, they found that their participants were significantly more satisfied and secure in their relationships than their heterosexually married counterparts based on the quantitative measures used.

In the following sections, research literature and other relevant points will provide a background and rationale for this proposed research. The sections will highlight what is known about the benefits of marriage and what is known about developing a gay identity, coming out, counting sexual minorities, examining their physical and mental health and facing detrimental issues with a focus on sexual minority stigma. The remaining foci will develop as follows: a focus on current attitudes toward sexual minorities, the emphasis their relationships receive, the social support they may experience, biases inherent in the current literature, its limitations and

the implications for practice and services provision. This discussion will show how this project intends to attend to this area of study, while filling the gaps in our current understanding of this social rite of passage for gay men.

### **History of Issues and Current Challenges**

In 2012, sexual minorities enjoy legally protected rights; but, historically they faced prejudice that was justified on religious and moral grounds that were widespread throughout the world. In more contemporary times, sexual minorities were vulnerable to being jailed or harassed for being publicly affectionate with their partners, crossing gender boundaries and having private sexual relations with other same-sex adults (Lahey & Alderson, 2004). They also needed to keep their sexual orientation a secret, lived in fear of being placed in mental institutions or were motivated to pass as heterosexual through what Dr. Kevin Alderson has dubbed a “heterofacsimile” (Alderson & Jevne, 2003).

Legal changes, political activism and the de-pathologizing of sexual orientation have led to some improvements. In Canada, legal changes involved Pierre Trudeau’s 1967 Omnibus Bill, with its related iconic statement “There’s no place for the state in the bedrooms of the nation,” which led to decriminalizing same-sex sexual behaviour across the country (Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, 2003). Comparatively, in the United States the 1969 New York Stonewall Riots were crucial to moving change forward when sexual minorities began to protest police mistreatments (Lahey & Alderson, 2004). Shortly thereafter, in 1973, amidst a great deal of pro and against debates (Silverstein, 2008), the American Psychological Association (APA) removed same-sex sexual behaviour as a mental illness (Meyer, 2003).

An example of how sexual minorities were once labelled as “mentally ill” is the diagnosis of *ego-dystonic homosexuality*, which was a pathology assigned to gay men dissatisfied with being attracted to others of their same-sex (Silverstein, 2008). Used as a justification for professional interventions, this label blamed gay men for their unhappiness instead of the societal stigma imposed on them. Most importantly, this label persisted until 1987 when it was removed from the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Health Disorders (DSM), fourth edition, almost fourteen years after the removal of homosexuality from the DSM, second edition, in 1973 (Jeyasingham, 2008). In essence, correcting sexual minority stigma has been a very slow process.

Beyond their mental health, Lahey and Alderson (2004) highlighted that sexual minorities could: be fired from their jobs; evicted from their homes; and lose their children in custody battles. They could not: adopt children, inherit property from their partners if not legally under both their names; and be role models such as teachers if their sexual orientation was known to others. Yet, many of these issues began to change with the reading of sexual orientation into the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms in a Supreme Court of Canada decision that recognized same-sex couples as spouses to receive Old Age Pension benefits in 1995 (*Egan v. Canada*, 1995). As this chapter will highlight later, reading these words into the Charter allowed sexual minorities to begin seeking more equality through court battles.

Yet, in 2012, even though the Charter continues to protect sexual minorities nationally, Men who have Sex with Men (MSM) are still not fully treated as equals. When donating blood, gay men are considered a high risk group and are banned from contributing (Canadian Blood Services, 2011) even if they are celibate, monogamous, or consistently practice protected sex

(Egale Canada, 2008). However, during October 2011 Canadian Blood Services posted a web statement acknowledging changing its permanent exclusion to allow them to donate blood so long as they have been same-sex celibate for 5-10 years (Canadian Blood Services, 2011). In July of 2012 a spokesperson for the organization acknowledged plans to submit the change to Health Canada in the fall of 2012 (Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, 2012). An announcement on the results of that submission is still pending at the time of this writing.

Additionally, differential treatment exist around other types of physical donations because MSM are able to donate tissues/organs but the person receiving the donation and their doctor must weigh the risks of accepting them (Health Canada, 2009). Similarly, gay men can donate sperm but not without having the sperm quarantined for six months when in-vitro fertilization is required for conception (Health Canada, 2000), a point a lesbian couple contested before the Supreme Court of Canada when they wanted to have a gay male friend as their child's biological father (*Doe v. Canada*, 2007). The women argued such a delay was a barrier to becoming parents for sexual minorities while heterosexuals were not required to experience such delays. But, on the grounds of maintaining the child's and the mother's health, the court denied their case. This barrier is relevant to this project because entering marriage has been shown to motivate at least some Canadian same-sex married gay men and lesbians to become parents (MacIntosh et al., 2010).

On a different level, mentioning the current state of affairs in Alberta is relevant because it has become positive. Since October 1, 2009, sexual orientation has been explicitly stated and protected within the Alberta Human Rights Act (Alberta Human Rights Commission, 2009) so that sexual minorities are now unambiguously protected like all other Albertans (Alberta Human



Rights Act, 2000). Yet, the Supreme Court of Canada mandated the province to have sexual orientation read into the provincial act (Alberta Human Rights Commission, 2009; Vriend v. Alberta, 1994) but it refused to formally write the words for almost 11 years. The main issue around this change is that a message of intolerance may have been sent through such resistance.

Additionally the province continues to have a negative track record toward sexual minorities. For example, in 2009 it stopped financial support for sex reassignment surgeries for transsexual individuals (Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, 2009; C. Wong, personal communication, December 9, 2011) and in 2004 Calgary, one of the two major cities in Alberta, had the highest incidence of reported hate crimes in Canada, although not every reported incident was sexuality motivated (Dauvergne, Scrim, & Brennan, 2008). The above negative history makes Alberta a great location to study the process of entering and being in a same-sex marriage for gay men who live in this province because it has been politically unfriendly.

### **Same-sex Marriage Legalization**

Today, same-sex marriage has expanded into different parts of the world. The first countries to approve same sex unions were the Netherlands in 2001, as well as Belgium in 2003 (Alderson, 2004a; Lahey & Alderson, 2004), followed by Spain on June 30<sup>th</sup>, 2005 (Green, 2005, July 1) and Canada on July 20<sup>th</sup> of the same year (Civil Marriage Act, 2005). Also, the Statistics Canada 2011 Census acknowledged some of the countries that provide legal recognition to same sex couples that include: South Africa, Norway, Sweden, Portugal, Iceland, Argentina, Denmark, parts of the United States and Mexico (Statistics Canada, 2012).

However, even though the above countries show progress for same-sex marriage worldwide, issues can still be raised in some jurisdictions. For example, Spain a country that

legalized same-sex marriage less than a month before Canada in 2005 had the legality of those marriages questioned by the new ruling political party. But, on November 6, 2012 the Spanish Supreme Court ruled that those marriages would remain legal (The Associated Press, 2012, November 6).

Additionally, some success for same-sex marriage or legal unions has occurred in parts of the United States such as the District of Columbia, Connecticut, Iowa, Massachusetts, New Hampshire Vermont and New York (Confessore & Barbaro, 2011). As well, two Native American tribes have approved same-sex marriages such as the Suquamish and Coquille Tribes (Yardley, 2011, August 11). On November 6, 2012 three additional states, Maryland, Maine and Washington voted to allow same sex marriage within their borders (Baynes, 2012, November 8). Without a doubt the world is in a state of flux where sexual minorities may go from being second class citizens to enjoying the same legal rights as heterosexuals from one day to another.

#### *Continuing Inequalities and Opposition to Change*

What is noteworthy about the above changes is that some do not give actual marriage but instead have created separate systems, such as the Civil Unions or Registered Domestic Partnerships, that substituted for marriage and do not have all the same rights and requirements (as acknowledged by Alderson, 2004a). However, in some locations, for example Norway, these separate systems have been upgraded to full marriage (The Associated Press, 2008, June 17) and more recently in Denmark in 2012 (British Broadcasting Corporation, 2012). This highlights that same-sex marriage when achieved is often not granted without having to settle for what the courts are willing to give at that time.

But, even if granted, same-sex marriage may not be permanently available within some locations. One example is the State of California, where a ban on same-sex marriage was reinstated through Proposition 8 which asked regular citizens to vote on whether same-sex marriage should be banned in their home state and even though this tactic was successful it was later found to be unconstitutional (Perry et al. v. Schwarzenegger et al., 2010). During 2011, opponents of same-sex marriage asked to reverse the above unconstitutional finding because the person who rendered the verdict was a gay judge in a relationship with another man and he stood to benefit from allowing same-sex marriage (Perry et al. v. Schwarzenegger et al., 2011). The court decided to deny their request to prevent attempts to reverse minority judge's decisions based on claims of "conflict of interest." Taking into account the above legal battles and because same-sex marriage in Canada is no longer a hot button issue, same-sex married sexual minorities' challenges may be at risk of becoming ignored because this topic is not currently in the courts or the local media on a regular basis.

In light of this, demonstrating the complexity of battles for equal access to marriage and examining its historical Canadian achievement can contextualize the process of same-sex marriage entry. Even though an examination of this topic on a country-wide scale was beyond this project's resources, a narrower focus in a well-known conservative province such as Alberta was justifiable because community characteristics have been shown to influence attitudes toward sexual minorities and their rights in negative ways (Fleischmann & Moyer, 2009; McVeigh & Diaz, 2009). Also, this province may be a good fit to study same-sex marriage because of its efforts to stall legalization. For example, in March of 2000, the province passed a bill defining the provincial Marriage Act, in heterosexual terms and including a notwithstanding clause to

prevent the legal recognition of same-sex marriages within its borders (as highlighted by Johansen & Rosen, 2008). Taking this negative history into account, same-sex married couples may hold reservations about being recognized by others in this province.

### *Same-sex Marriage in Canada*

Same-sex marriage in Canada was achieved after a long and arduous struggle for equality (Lahey & Alderson, 2004). This struggle legally began with a number of court cases, such as that of *North v. Matheson* (North et al. v. Matheson, 1974), where two gay men sought to have a correctly performed and already completed marriage ceremony registered in Manitoba. English cases supported the denial of this case on religious grounds. Similarly, in another case religious rules were again used to justify denying access to marriage as well as the gay couple's inability to procreate (Layland v. Ontario, 1993). Also, within the above case, another argument used was that the gay couple had the same access as everyone else to marry someone of the opposite sex and that since they were willingly choosing not to make that choice; it rendered unnecessary a change to the marriage regulations. These cases demonstrate how procreation, religion, and sometimes questionable logic have been used as roadblocks to equality.

In addition, while marriage had been blocked into the early 1990's, other decisions came about during this period that set the ground work for the possibility of same-sex marriage. Among them is the Ontario lower court case of *Haig v. Canada* (Haig v. Canada, 1992) where a gay male serving in the Canadian Army had been informed that he could no longer advance his career within the armed forces based on having disclosed he was a gay man. Later, found incapable to work under these new rules, the army dismissed him for health reasons shortly afterwards. Afterwards, he took the case to court, and after carefully examining the case, a judge

decided that sexual orientation should be approached as though written into the Charter of Rights and Freedoms to avoid future discrimination on these grounds.

The next pertinent case for setting the ground work for equal access to marriage was that of *M v. H* (*M. v. H.*, 1999), where the Supreme Court decided to allow financial support be paid to one lesbian partner in a same-sex couple after separating from a common-law relationship. It becomes evident through considering these above cases that sexual minorities have had to address areas unrelated to marriage first in order to set the stage for gaining access to this institution.

With this ground work in place, other cases were able to move forward and this occurred concurrently in three provinces: British Columbia, Quebec and Ontario. Lahey and Alderson (2004) highlighted that the case was originally lost in the first province but not in the other two; however, after multiple appeals, these court cases provided dates for allowing same-sex marriage in their respective provinces (*Barbeau v. British Columbia*, 2003; *Halpern et al. v. Toronto*, 2003; *Hendricks v. Attorney General of Quebec*, 2004). These decisions were further supported in the Yukon Territory in 2004 when same-sex marriage became legal there also (*Dunbar & Edge v. Yukon*, 2004). Without a doubt, these cases provided much to celebrate about same-sex marriage and encouraged many individuals from different parts of the country as well as the world to seek those locations (Lahey & Alderson, 2004). After these victories, same-sex marriage was only allowed within limited jurisdictions within Canada and this led to the next stage of sexual minorities' fight for marriage equality.

The Supreme Court of Canada became the final legal battle ground for same-sex marriage in this country and after carefully deliberating, it endorsed that same-sex marriage was

consistent with the rights that the Charter tried to promote for all Canadians (Supreme Court of Canada, 2004). Legally clarifying procedures was a step toward the ascension of the Civil Marriage Act ratified on July 20, 2005 (Civil Marriage Act, 2005). After that day, same-sex marriage became legal in Canada across the entire country.

Arguments arose while legalizing same-sex marriage because religious groups felt they had a vested interest in marriage and they ensured their voices were heard. But, while their desire was to stop same-sex marriages altogether they had to settle for the government accommodating their religious beliefs. This took place through the procedural clarification of the same-sex marriage bill which explained that religious individuals not be forced to perform such marriages (Supreme Court of Canada, 2004). Thus, while successfully accommodating and respecting religious beliefs, the government prevented those beliefs from being imposed on sexual minorities.

Moreover, after federally legalizing same-sex marriage, Alberta was the only province to threaten opposing it using the notwithstanding clause allowed in Section 33 of the Canadian Constitution that can take precedence over section 15 of the Charter that protects against being discriminated (The Constitution Act, 1982). However, such a tactic had become a moot point once the Supreme Court stated in its reference that allowing marriage was under federal jurisdiction and thus it prevented the provinces from deciding over something they did not control (Supreme Court of Canada, 2004). This led then Premier of Alberta Ralph Klein to announce in a press conference “We will proceed to issue marriage licenses to same-sex couples, much to our chagrin, following proclamation of the federal Civil Marriage Act,” (Canadian Television Network, 2005). Without a doubt, such a comment underlines that Alberta was

willing to fight until the last available second and further emphasizes that this province may be a prime location for examining what the process of entering and being in a same-sex marriage is like when the environment has not been supportive.

### **Heterosexual Marriage**

Because sexual minorities persistently fought to gain the right to marry, exploring the benefits that come attached to this institution is worthwhile. One such benefit is that marriage has recognition across borders (Alderson, 2004a) and is compatible with personal and group aims that most people understand about their own social groups (Wells & Zinn, 2004). It may also, open the door to benefits that may not be available without being legally recognized (Lahey & Alderson, 2004) and perhaps to other taken-for granted benefits.

Because this project is focused on the experiences of gay men, a choice is made here to focus on marriage benefits for their heterosexual counterparts. The research literature has painted a positive picture for these heterosexual men since entering marriage has been shown to improve depression during the first few years of entering marriage (Frech & Williams, 2007). Also, staying married longer can be associated with experiencing less depression and using less alcohol than leaving the marriage, although relationship quality mediates such outcomes (Waite, Luo, & Lewin, 2009). Furthermore, some research has shown that heterosexual married men are half as likely as unmarried heterosexual men to die of a heart condition during a 10 year follow-up (as found by Eaker, Sullivan, Kelly-Hayes, D'Agostino, & Benjamin, 2007) although, other longitudinal research has shown that these health differences may be decreasing (Liu & Umberson, 2008). Moreover, heterosexually married men have been found to enjoy better physical health (Schoenborn, 2004), suffer less substance abuse issues, (Substance Abuse and

Mental Health Services Administration Office of Applied Studies, 2007), enjoy more happiness (Waite et al., 2009) as well as earn more money (Hersch & Stratton, 2000; Maasoumi, Millimet, & Sarkar, 2009) when compared to individuals in other marriage classifications that included never married, divorced, or re-married men.

The few negative outcomes that have emerged for married heterosexual men include: being more likely to be overweight than their single counterparts (Schoenborn, 2004) and feeling socially isolated because of an overreliance on socializing with their partner and the family context while decreasing contact with friends (Shapiro & Keyes, 2008). While some studies have promoted the many advantages of being married over not married for heterosexuals, some researchers have argued that marriage benefits are not so numerous and that marriage should not be promoted as a cure-all for people's problems (Shapiro & Keyes, 2008). In spite of these difficulties though, research projects have shown that married heterosexual men have benefited greatly from the institution of marriage.

### **Sexual Minority Challenges and Issues**

At this juncture, and after setting the stage for why marriage can be beneficial to heterosexual men, the differences inherent to gay men must be acknowledged because such differences can explain that choosing a same-sex marriage, though less common, may require some preliminary steps.

#### *Challenges in Being Counted*

Because developing a gay identity and coming out to others is complex, it justifies asking how many people undergo these processes, especially since sexual minorities are not always visually obvious and might thus be rendered invisible (Alderson, 2004b). In addition, Carpenter



(2008), through analysis of data from the Canadian Community Health Survey (CCHS), found that out of 140,000 participants, only 1.5% were gay men and 0.9% were lesbians. However, his analysis was based on data that verbally asked a direct question about sexual orientation through telephone and in person interviews, and could not guarantee all respondents had been willing to disclose such information to a stranger. Yet, the researcher went on to claim that "... because gay men and lesbians make up a small fraction of the population," (Carpenter, 2008, p. 1243) thus, he rendered sexual minorities as rare and perhaps inadvertently minimized their issues. It must be added that earlier behaviourally focused estimates for predominantly same-sex behaviour in males placed this number at 10% (for example Kinsey et al., 1948).

Along these lines, Statistics Canada in 2006 reported 7,460 same-sex couples had married that year, but being based only on 1/5 of all census participants, this number may have underestimated the actual total (Statistics Canada, 2007). Additionally, the human rights organization Egale Canada (2006) had concerns that asking same-sex married couples to fill out the "other" section of the form, implied a secondary married status to other married couples. Thus, based on targeted samples and the way questions are asked, the actual number of same-sex married couples may be much larger than any previous or current statistic can reveal.

In addition, as of this writing, the 2011 Census results have been released and they indicate that the number of same-sex married couples increased approximately threefold from 2006 to 21,015 (Statistics Canada, 2012). However, once again a fuller estimation of same-sex married couples was not possible. This time census data from rural communities was excluded because Statistics Canada could not be sure if two married individuals, living in transitory communities with someone of the same-sex, were married to one another or just sharing

accommodation (Rennie, 2012). Without a doubt these numbers underscore that same-sex marriages are increasing and the continued challenges in counting same-sex married sexual minorities

### *Gay Identity*

At some point in their lives, gay men will need to decide if a gay identity is relevant to their own experience. Yet, based on the literature, the process can seem somewhat daunting because there's no agreement on how to define this process. In essence, a menu of options for conceptualizing a gay identity is available and ranges from: stage models (for example Cass, 1979) that have found support or disagreement (Degges-White, Myers, & Rice, 2000; Sophie, 1986; Van de Meerendonk & Probst, 2004), to psychosocial models (such as Alderson, 2003b's ecological perspective) to phases that have focused on developing an individual or group identity (Fassinger & Miller, 1997; McCarn & Fassinger, 1996). Also, some models have explored minority sexual identity and higher mental functioning (Marszalek, Cashwell, Dunn, & Jones, 2004). The main point behind all of these approaches is that they all involve knowing that something is different about the self, dwelling lightly or deeply into this possibility, facing some turmoil and ending with accepting the identity if the process is fully achieved. Also, the process can take years to achieve (Alderson & Jevne, 2003) assuming that individuals want to become consistent in their sexual conduct, emotions and cognitions (Alderson, 2003b; Cass, 1979).

There are several well-noted criticisms of these approaches. For example, stage models may be incorrect because even when a sexual minority identity is achieved it may not always be permanent as people can choose future partners of a different sex for a variety of reasons (Sophie, 1986). Moreover, whether intentional or not some of these approaches can come across

as judgmental since they can inadvertently imply that those who start but do not pursue a sexual minority identity may be deemed as “developmentally arrested” (Paul & Frieden, 2008, p. 30) or like they gave up along the way. Based on these points, it may be arguable that such exclusions may send unintended negative messages about gay men who do not fit these approaches.

Perhaps, the key points to be remembered about understanding the development of a gay identity is that, no agreement between the different propositions exists. Also, it is likely that some conceptualizations have a better fit with some individuals more than others. But, more importantly, no matter what conceptualization is chosen, the most likely key element is that it is the individual undergoing the process that is in control of their own self-definition.

### *Coming Out*

Another area that may be unique to sexual minorities and has been explored a great deal in the literature is coming out a process that involves telling others that one is not heterosexual. The current literature has shown that some individuals may choose to come out as bisexual at first, need a while to fully undertake the process or selectively come out only to some but not to others (Alderson & Jevne, 2003). In addition, considering that new friends or acquaintances may provide continuous coming out experiences, the process may never end.

Moreover, additional coming out may occur while entering into a same-sex marriage because individuals may choose to disclose their marital status gradually, to a select few or to everyone. However, unlike the individual journey, coming out as same-sex married may not allow for complete choice since, for example, providing inaccurate information during a census is illegal (Statistics Act., 2005).

Furthermore, coming out is defined here because marriage may create a plethora of different procedural experiences unrequired before marriage, and because marital status for sexual minorities may also disclose membership in a minority group. Thus, this project will examine these procedural changes that may alter the experience for those who choose to marry.

### Benefits of Being Out

The literature has thoroughly highlighted the benefits of being out for sexual minorities. For example, Riggle, Whitman, Olson, Rostosky and Strong's (2008) work has summed up the benefits as providing opportunities to: be truthful, connect with others, become romantically involved, learn to self-define one's own family, become a positive example, learn about one's self and become inspired to advocate for others, who are oppressed and discriminated. Other research has shown that being out can yield better mental health and emotional wellbeing (for example LaSala, 2000; Lynch & Murray, 2000; Rosser, Bockting, Ross, Miner, & Coleman, 2008). Without a doubt, considering these points makes a powerful case for rendering coming out as desirable for sexual minorities.

### Criticisms of an Over Emphasis on Coming Out

While highlighting a strength-focus and using empowering language can celebrate sexual minorities, it may also unintentionally judge or render as dishonest those who make different choices. Additionally, being openly out is sometimes seen as an idealized, *most evolved* [sic] achievement of embracing a gay identity but ignores factors including: employment or interpersonal costs and that other identities might be more relevant than identifying as a sexual minority (Paul & Frieden, 2008). While keeping a strength-focus may contribute to the positive

benefits literature, no attempt is made here to imply that sexual minorities that come out are superior to those who do not.

Another problematic issue is that if coming out as a sexual minority can define strength, then coming out under multiple statuses such as being a same-sex married spouse or parent can, in theory imply even greater strength for some but not others. While each new role might provide more areas for being discriminated this project will not attempt to confer greater attributes to one group over the other.

### *Physical Health*

Discussing what is known about gay men would be impossible without mentioning HIV/AIDS because so much research has either focused or acknowledged this topic with this population (among them Bartholomew, Regan, Oram, & White, 2008; Cochran & Mays, 2007; Craft & Serovich, 2005; Fergus, Lewis, Darbes, & Butterfield, 2005; Frost et al., 2007; Harris & Alderson, 2006, 2007; Todosijevic, Rothblum, & Solomon, 2005). Yet, a constant linkage between gay men and HIV/AIDS may have created an unwritten equation where HIV/AIDS = gay men in the minds of some people. This is evident in the literature because even though some has looked at strengths, the majority has tended to focus on the challenges faced by these men.

In Canada, statistics have shown that MSM have consistently had the highest rates of HIV/AIDS infection since the Public Health Agency of Canada (2010) began reporting in 1985. In addition, in 2009, this agency reported that MSM accounted for 41.8% of new positive reports that year and that they also accounted for almost double that of the next highest group Intravenous Drug Users (IDU). However, what tends to be less emphasized is the new HIV/AIDS reported infections that can occur in other groups such as heterosexuals (18.9% in

2009) and those who become infected through receiving infected blood donations (nine cases in 2009) (Public Health Agency of Canada, 2010). In short, while MSM represent a high percentage of reported cases, they do not have a monopoly on this disease.

Moreover, as already highlighted, so much focus on HIV/AIDS and gay men, as part of the MSM group, may have inadvertently created the equation whereby HIV/AIDS = gay men. Without minimizing the importance of this difficult infection, this overemphasis may overstate the importance of this topic to all gay men when compared to other individuals. In addition, an HIV/AIDS and same-sex marriage focus might distract from the emotions gay men feel for their future spouses (the latter point highlighted in Alderson, 2004a) or render a same-sex marriage as a potential escape from infection.

In addition, simply knowing about the prevalence of HIV/AIDS in MSM does little to help understand how these conditions are created. One example is Kashubeck-West and Szymanski (2008)'s work with MSM which found that the larger the men's level of internalized heterosexism the more likely they were to believe that drugs or alcohol would improve their enjoyment of sex with other men often leading to unsafe sexual activities. In explaining, the above researchers proposed that perhaps their participants were using substances to numb their discomfort with their same-sex sexual behaviour. In other words, internalizing negative attitudes can diminish the potential for making healthy choices for some men and help explain the high prevalence of infection. It must be added that there will be no focus on HIV/AIDS in reporting the results and implications of this effort.

Research has shown that homophobia, a fear of gay men, may underscore the possibility of violent behaviour against gay men, (Parrott, Adams, & Zeichner, 2002) thus, gay men's

physical health may be dependent on guaranteeing their own safety through assessing others. However, sexual minorities cannot always anticipate if others' will react aggressively or positively; and if, for example, wearing wedding rings invites questions that disclose sexual orientation and a spouse's gender lead to circumstances involving being rejected. In essence, same-sex couples' experience of marriage can involve variables that may be foreign to some of their heterosexual counterparts.

### **Stigma and Heterosexism**

A number of detrimental issues are associated with sexual minorities and their experience may occur, perhaps the most relevant to same-sex marriage is heterosexism. Herek (1990) originally defined this concept as “an ideological system that denies, denigrates, and stigmatizes any nonheterosexual form of behavior, identity, relationship or community” (p. 316). This discrimination is central because opposing same-sex marriage has been based on a presupposed heterosexual entitlement to that institution. Also, that discrimination can take seemingly innocuous forms such as jests (Silverschanz, Cortina, Konik, & Magley, 2008) or occur through excluding or never mentioning same-sex romantic relationships (Alderson & Jevne, 2003). In addition, the lack of familial role models, which unlike racial or ethnic minorities gay men sometimes lack, may magnify its impact (Alderson, 2003a). Without a doubt, heterosexism can play a key role in understanding the process of entering and being in a same-sex marriage, for gay men who choose that option.

Another detrimental issue for sexual minorities is when societal heterosexism becomes internalized because “most people internalize the societal values, customs, mores, and ideals that are privileged by the majority in their culture” (Alderson & Jevne, 2003, p. 133). Thus, the

argument becomes that as individuals begin to embrace a gay identity, they may also apply society's negative connotations of that label to themselves (Meyer, 2003). This point relates directly to same-sex married individuals who may enter the institution of marriage with attitudes that may sabotage their own potential success within a new context to their relationships.

Perhaps the best conceptualization of sexual minorities' challenges and same-sex married gay men would be the use of stigma theory. This theory has proposed that stigma created stress is associated with being a sexual minority (Meyer, 1995, 2003), goes beyond what most individuals' encounter every day (Rostosky, Riggle, Gray, & Hatton, 2007, p. 393), can have detrimental impacts on well-being (for example Otis, Rostosky, Riggle, & Hamrin, 2006), and is compounded by being a member of a visible minority (Diaz et al., 2001). Thus, this theory provides a context for why sexual minorities might sometimes seek professional support to address the challenges they face.

As mentioned already, attitudes towards sexual minorities used to be negative and their lives were often filled with stigmatized experiences (Lahey & Alderson, 2004). However, in an analysis of Gallup polls from 1977 – 2001, and Lexis-Nexis and USA Today polls in 2003, Hicks and Lee (2006) found that public opinion towards gay men and lesbians has become, in general, more positive and that those who believe sexual orientation is inherent to the person tend to have more positive attitudes. But, when focusing on opening up marriage to sexual minorities respondents were less positive, which becomes pertinent to same sex marriage because topic-based support may require sexual minorities to track who supports and what is supported.



In writing about attitudes, the local context is vital because as already mentioned, Alberta fervently fought to prevent both sexual minority rights as well as their access to marriage. Yet, an Ellis' (2011) October opinion poll found that out of 1,237 Albertans interviewed over the phone 72% believe same-sex marriage should continue to be legal in Canada and that this number has increased from the previous two years. While excellent news it leads to the following question: same-sex marriage is legal but is it just being tolerated or is it accepted? Perhaps interviewing same-sex married gay men may provide an inferred answer to that question.

### **Perceptions of the Relationship and Interactions with Partners**

As already highlighted, it is usually acknowledged that all gay individuals may not be or achieve the same level of identity development and self-acceptance (Alderson, 2003b; Cass, 1979). Based on the existing literature, this is a problem because if both members of a couple have internalized society's negative attitudes, it can: affect their assessment of the positives in the relationship, decrease their confidence that it can last (Otis et al., 2006) and diminish their enjoyment of harmonious and rewarding relationships (Mohr & Fassinger, 2006). Based on the above points and unlike heterosexuals, for whom society and peers may not teach self-hatred based on sexual identity, sexual minorities face a unique set of relationship challenges.

On a more positive note, the literature has shown that same-sex couple in legalized relationships may feel confident in their relationships. Solomon et al. (2004) highlighted that, same-sex couples in civil unions, when compared to one of their married heterosexual siblings as well as to lesbian and gay couples not in such unions, were less likely to have had end of relationship conversations and had more friends in common. Furthermore, even when same-sex

couples are compared to their heterosexual counterparts, they are found to lack characteristics that cut short their relationships and are equally happy with their relationship (Roisman, Clausell, Holland, Fortuna, & Elieff, 2008).

Additionally, some researchers have found that same-sex couples in civil unions used more egalitarian and less gender based ways to make decisions than their heterosexually married siblings and friends (Solomon, Rothblum, & Balsam, 2005). Similar positive results have been acknowledged when comparing gay couples to other committed couple types (lesbians, heterosexually married and engaged individuals) in that they interact positively with their partners (only inferior to lesbians) during laboratory observation perhaps due to the benefits of interacting with someone of the same gender (Roisman et al., 2008). Moreover, later in life, gay individuals in a romantic relationship compared to those without, have been found to have less thoughts of ending their lives, a more positive self-image, and feel connected to others (D'Augelli, Grossman, Hershberger, & O'Connell, 2001). Based on the above findings, it cannot be understated that same-sex relationships come with a great deal of strength and provide numerous benefits.

### **Monogamy and Gay Men**

References in the literature to the monogamy/non-monogamy of gay men are common. An example is Solomon, Rothblum and Balsam (2005) who reported that about half of their gay participants both in and out of civil same-sex unions were non-monogamous. Along the same lines, instances of sex outside marriage have also been mentioned in work conducted with married same-sex couples in Canada (Lahey & Alderson, 2004). While acknowledging sexual activity outside gay relationships (legal or otherwise) can help to fully understand those

relationships, such acknowledgements may inadvertently support promiscuity stereotypes for all gay men and minimize that discussing non-monogamy may simply be less taboo for these men.

### **Experiences with Social Support**

Social support has been found to be significant for all individuals' wellbeing and I recognize that there's a broader body of literature on the topic of social support; however, for this project such literature will not be included because I wish to focus on social support as it relates to gay men specifically. For this population no previous source of support is guaranteed when they undergo their journey toward self-acceptance as gay (Paul & Frieden, 2008), and this lack of guarantees may extend into same-sex marriage, which may involve embracing rights and options previously considered inconceivable (Lahey & Alderson, 2004). Thus, the process of entering and being in a same-sex marriage may require re-examining many personal and others' assumptions about marriage and inter-personal relationships.

#### *Relationship with Relatives*

The literature is clear that becoming an out sexual minority can lead to difficulties with parents, other relatives and sometimes to the loss of those relationships (Dudley et al., 2005; Lynch & Murray, 2000; Patterson, 2000). However, researchers such as Solomon, Rothblum and Balsam (2004) conducted research in Vermont with couples in civil unions, their gay friends and heterosexual siblings and found that both types of gay men perceive more support from their friends than relatives. They also found that gay men in civil unions are equally likely to interact with partner's mother but less likely to interact with the father. Perhaps, underlying these issues are uncertainties about the possibility of support from relatives.

### *Families of Choice*

Based on the above, it should not be surprising that sometimes same-sex oriented individuals choose relatives to keep in touch, who become part of their *chosen families* and have been identified as strength for same-sex couples. Such families may consist of “current partners, former partners, friends (both from the GLBT community and supportive straight allies), and select family members” (Riggle et al., 2008, p. 212). Other American research, has highlighted that same-sex couples may need to create these families when they experience no support from both partners’ original families or one partner’s family is more supportive of the relationship than the other’s (Dudley et al., 2005). Thus, these families of choice may be required for sexual minorities as a coping strategy adopted upon being rejected by relatives.

### *Connection to the Gay Community*

In general, research has shown that sexual minorities desire community connections (for example Ayala, Morales, Saunders, & Palagina, 2009) but, sometimes the link is described in ways that may not be used for heterosexuals. For example, while examining gay couple’s influence on each other’s sexual risk behaviour, Fergus, Lewis, Darbes and Kral (2009) found that being more involved in the gay community, defined as having more gay friends, was associated with a greater likelihood of unsafe sex with other gay men and that gay couples influence each other’s sexual risk behaviour. However, such findings may be problematic because friends and partners are self-selected and individuals may choose to associate with others who share similar attitudes. Thus, the connection may be more a reflection on the types of social contacts chosen as opposed to a characteristic of a promiscuous gay community.

## **Recognition**

As mentioned above, sexual minorities' may face issues with relatives around social support and by extension it could be argued that those issues may result in a lack of recognition of their same-sex relationships or marriages. What is meant by recognition here is that the relationship is of equal value and legitimacy as that of heterosexual individuals. From that perspective, recognition of the same-sex relationship is important because it has been found to be among the motivations to choose marriage for same-sex couples (for example Alderson, 2004a). However, it may be useful to extend this recognition discourse beyond the desires of same-sex couples and instead explore the concept within the context of interpersonal relationships. Thus, this project strived to explore the recognition received from relatives, friends and co-workers to generate new insights as to interpersonal nature of recognition for same-sex marriages.

## **Service Access**

As highlighted in Chapter One, sexual minorities are at risk of facing depression, suicide, anxiety, isolation and distress, among other negative outcomes. Not surprisingly, gay, lesbian and bisexuals individuals are found to be more likely than heterosexuals to have accessed mental health services (Cochran, Sullivan, & Mays, 2003). They are also more likely to have accessed those services when compared with their own heterosexual siblings (Balsam, Beauchaine, Mickey, & Rothblum, 2005). In light of this, it is justifiable for this project to explore the service access of same-sex married gay in order to determine if they are able to find the support they need for their same-sex marriages.

### **Limitations within the Current Literature**

One criticism of the literature on same-sex relationships is that it has a bias towards challenges. The challenges include: focusing on relationships that lack social acceptance, have a strained societal status, or have HIV as either a relationship or community component just to name a few (Cochran & Mays, 2007; Mohr & Fassinger, 2006; Otis et al., 2006; Rostosky et al., 2007). While so much focus on challenges can go a long way in promoting empathy, it can also inadvertently negate the positives within the lives of gay men. As a corrective, and considering that marriage in our culture seems to be celebrated, it stands as a great foundation to base a project that will highlight what strength gay men find from entering and being in this institution.

In addition, another issue found in the literature on same-sex relationships is that much tends to be comparative (to heterosexual primarily) and can imply a legitimizing theme. Roisman et al. (2008) support this by highlighting that work which compares same-sex couples to heterosexuals risks being judged as relying on a “hetero-normative assumption” (p. 99). While acknowledging this risk, this project will avoid unnecessarily comparing same-sex couples to heterosexually married individuals unless participants make such references.

Another criticism of the literature is that the benefits of marriage have primarily been examined for heterosexual unions. However, seven years after same-sex marriage became legal across Canada little is known about the benefits of marriage for Canadian gay men because few studies have been conducted with a focus on this topic (Alderson, 2004a; MacIntosh et al., 2010 being among the only ones located). Yet, while romantic relationships can yield the benefits of having a partner and illuminate their societal contexts, they fail to acknowledge the impact of

having a legally recognized status with entitlements and responsibilities. These points drive the rationale for focusing this project within a Canadian context in Calgary, Alberta, Canada.

The predominance of Caucasian participants in same-sex couples' research tends to limit what we know about visible minorities, especially since many studies have acknowledged this as one of their limitations (for example Fergus et al., 2009; Riggle et al., 2008; Solomon et al., 2004). Yet, visible minorities may require more focus because research has shown that racism and socioeconomic status (Diaz et al., 2001) as well as belonging to multiple minority groups (Harper & Schneider, 2003) can compound difficulties for visible minority gay men. As a workaround and in case most participants for this project were also Caucasian, a demographic questionnaire that inquired about a husband's characteristics was included to provide further discussion points during interviews and data analysis.

Moreover, much of what is known on same-sex marriage or romantic relationships is based on American data. Yet, today such knowledge may be inappropriate to a Canadian context because the state-by-state legal diversity in the United States can serve as a better example of the impact of a tenuous and highly localized environment. Needless to say, this realization energized this researcher to seek a Canadian understanding of entering and being same-sex married for Canadian gay men.

### **Practice and Theory Implications**

From a practice perspective, the attitudes of professionals toward sexual minorities have, over time, become more positive (Kilgore, Sideman, Amin, Baca, & Bohanske, 2005). This has been aided by different professional and ethical codes which have promoted treating all clients equally (Canadian Association of Social Workers, 2005) as well as position statements that have

discouraged correcting sexual minorities' sexual orientation (such as American Psychiatric Association, 2000; and the National Association of Social Workers, 2000 just to name a few). However, in spite of the above requirements, some professionals may find it difficult to adhere to these recommendations because professional training in this area can be lacking (Alderson, 2004b) or counsellors may find it difficult to work with sexual minorities whose gender expression is different from what is expected for their gender (Anderson & Holliday, 2008). With the above points in mind, specific questions were planned around human service access for same-sex married gay men in order to assess its occurrence.

#### *Attitudes in the Research Literature*

Finding positive attitudes towards sexual minorities in the current research literature is relative easy. In most cases the literature has promoted developing empathy for sexual minorities' challenges and increasing same-sex affirmative attitudes (for example Alderson, 2003a; Alderson, 2003b; Alderson & Jevne, 2003; Alderson, 2004b; Alderson, Orzeck, & McEwen, 2009; Alessi, 2008; Anderson & Holliday, 2008; Riggle et al., 2008; Rostosky et al., 2007). However, negative attitudes among researchers and practitioners still surface. For example, in 2009, four years after same-sex marriage was legalized in Canada, Osterlund (2009), demeaned the merit of marriage equality for sexual minorities by referring to them as "... the unacceptably and unspeakably queer." (p. 105); she also fervently questioned a legalized love requirement that may force the legitimization of other "unspeakable" loves. Her biggest argument against same-sex marriage was that it undermines feminists' arguments that marriage is a woman oppressive institution and a government ploy to force individuals to financially care for one another while freeing the government of such responsibility. Her sentiments demonstrate



that current academic circles are not immune to negative attitudes being promoted from well-established Canadian institutions. This certainly re-emphasizes the need for more affirming research to be conducted.

While it may be unlikely that same-sex married gay individuals may encounter the above intolerance openly within helping settings, some men may be forced to navigate a helping environment where they cannot assume every professional they encounter is sympathetic to the issues they face. Moreover, a further rationale for this project is to contribute to the literature so that more practitioners know that same-sex marriage is legal and that they can base their approaches to working with sexual minorities from a positive standpoint instead of research literature that overemphasizes challenges and inadvertently stigmatizes. This project will strive to emphasize the positive without editing out the negative.

On the whole, social workers may serve gay individuals for different reasons after they have entered into a same sex marriage, which makes the draw of attention to their issues justified. Social workers are well placed to support sexual minorities because their professional capacity can extend beyond formal settings, such as an office. They also have “an ethical and professional responsibility to promote social justice and equality for oppressed groups, including sexual minorities” (Woodford, Newman, Brotman, & Ryan, 2010, p. 191).

Overall, this project’s goal is to increase understanding of the process of entering and being in a same-sex marriage through assessing the current levels of social support received from their families, friends and work colleagues before and after entering marriage. Among other areas, enriching this understanding, under a uniquely Canadian context, may contribute to the work of Canadian professionals. It is hoped that exploring this topic may prevent taking benefits

for granted and may contribute to the arguments for marriage equality in locations where same sex marriage is threatened, still a dream or a goal for true equality. This researcher is confident that such success is achievable.

### **Research Questions**

This qualitative study was guided by the following research questions:

1. What is the level of social support same-sex married gay men receive from family, friends, and work colleagues before and after entering into a same-sex marriage?
2. Do same-sex married gay men feel recognized in their status as same-sex married gay men?
3. Are same-sex married gay men able to find the human services they need to support their relationships? (e.g., counselling services, basic needs services, financial support services, etc.)

### **CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY**

For this project grounded theory informed data collection and analysis but I did not arrive at a theory. Instead the final product is framed as more of a grounded description rather than a presentation of grounded theory. With that in mind this chapter aims to describe why and how grounded theory was chosen to inform this research. It will begin with a description of its origins and different forms; then an explanation will be provided as to why a specific style of grounded theory was chosen to inform this qualitative work. The qualitative research methods used for this study will also be described with attention paid to the process used for participant recruitment, data collection and analysis. Ethical considerations and study limitations will also be noted.

#### **What is Grounded Theory?**

Grounded theory is a way to conduct research to generate theories through a constant comparison of data so that the final theory is based on the collected data and not on preconceived notions of the researcher. Generally, it has been described as “a specific philosophical stance, a particular logic of inquiry, [and] a set of procedures [that can incorporate] flexible guidelines” (Charmaz, 2006, p. 53). Grounded theory can lead to theory that describes a phenomenon or provides steps to incorporate into other research approaches based on the needs of the researcher (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Originally, grounded theory emerged within the field of sociology, but over time, a number of other fields have embraced it, among them anthropology, business, education, nursing and social work.

The main aim of grounded theory is to create a theory that helps make sense of processes encountered in human experiences within the world around us. In essence, grounded theory’s

ultimate goal is *not* to pursue theory building for its own sake, but to generate theory, based on data, that adds to the understanding of processes people experience (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). It also involves applying recommendations to “direct the research process as well as provide a heuristic for data analysis and interpretation” (Miller & Fredericks, 1999, p. 538).

Most theories based on data are not likely to be universal; at best, they only represent the data that generated them. As a result, most research findings can only be generalized or applied to the same process (for example grief) within the greatest number of contexts (at work, school, church etc.) for the same type of participants. If achieved, the final product becomes a formal theory, assumed to possess the highest level of scope and abstraction possible for a grounded theory (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Conversely, if something more population and context specific is pursued then the final product is a substantive theory (Creswell, 2007; Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

In grounded theory, avoiding imposing characteristics on the data is important because the researcher joins similar pieces of data into groups and in that process may be at risk of artificially imposing inaccurate categories. Glaser (1992) has referred to this risk as “forcing” and to avoid it, he recommends basing all grouping decisions only on characteristics/labels the data justifies. Yet, considering that different researchers conducting analysis on the same data may conceptualize it differently, the same data may potentially generate different products. Moreover, this risk is inevitable since joining the data into more abstract and meaningful categories moves the analysis away from description, implicitly seen as a lower level of analysis within grounded theory (Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

## History of Grounded Theory

Grounded theory was originated from the collaboration of two sociologists, Barney Glaser and Anselm Strauss through the publication of their book *The Discovery of Grounded Theory* (1967). At the time, academic ideas that deviated from quantification were not popular; yet, these researchers saw this as unsatisfactory to achieving well rounded academic knowledge. They believed that numbers provided some, but not all, of the story of people's lives because human beings and social environments were complex and thus, needed to be captured more broadly. The resulting version from their effort became known as *Classical* Grounded Theory.

Furthermore, Glaser and Strauss (1967) were unhappy with how theories were created since theories were the result of using preconceived assumptions to elaborate an explanation and then corroborating it with experiments. However, from their perspective this was self-serving to the researcher's own ideas or "theories" because it shaped what research would confirm. They also saw potential to discover unprecedented theories instead of just confirming them.

Furthermore, Glaser and Strauss were concerned that participants and the theories applied to them lacked "fit" (Creswell, 2007). Their rationale was that after deducing a theory from data, the data itself became subservient to the theory that required its collection. Nevertheless, by realizing the reversibility of this process, they solved this conundrum through gathering the data first and then letting the theory be shaped within the parameters of what was available. This switch created a fundamental shift in their academic work and allowed other researchers to consider alternatives to beginning the theory development process.

Along these lines, grounded theory is a testament to how a creative repackaging of ideas can lead to innovation and notions not yet considered. For instance, stepwise approaches were

already being used in quantitative research to generate and confirm theories. Thus, other theorists and researchers' work helped Glaser and Strauss (1967) articulate how to build grounded theories. What was ground breaking was their proposal that qualitative researchers, using data itself as their tool, could achieve both. Ultimately, re-conceptualizing (using induction from data) allowed them to create an emergent, useful and innovative research process.

It did not hurt that Glaser and Strauss had impressive resumes backing their claims. Strauss was trained at The University of Chicago, where he studied qualitative research with an emphasis on interactionism and pragmatism (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Comparatively, Glaser was trained at Columbia University and studied empiricism and theory generation (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). As a result, perhaps, of merging their respective backgrounds, grounded theory focused on people's interaction, the practical consequences of behavioural choices, rigor and the elaboration of theory. All elements that may have persuaded novices and established researchers to embrace Classical Grounded Theory and its other iterations that followed.

After the inception of grounded theory in 1967, its collaborators wrote about the process separately for some time. Yet, their official separation occurred when Strauss published *Basics of Qualitative Research* with Juliet Corbin in 1990. In response to this work, Glaser (1992) publicly divorced his efforts from Strauss' efforts because he viewed the latter's new conceptualization as too focused on procedures and unfaithfulness to the proponents of the original version. Goulding (1998) similarly acknowledged this point and emphasized that Glaser disliked the systemic approach's emphasis on excessive coding, which implied the continued need for quantification even if the authors never claimed this as their goal.

In spite of Glaser's criticisms, the Strauss and Corbin collaboration, Systemic Grounded Theory, became the most embraced version of the approach (Creswell, 2007), perhaps based on user friendliness and provision of explicit steps to accurately develop grounded theory (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, 1998). Yet, some of their proposed steps were contentious. Among them is axial coding, which involves connecting titles assigned to sections of data, *codes*, (i.e. seeking services) with predetermined characteristics such as time frames, locations, actors, steps taken and results of such efforts (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). While this step has been praised for introducing macro considerations into the theory generation process (Annells, 1996), it has also been criticized for imposing categories onto the data (Glaser, 1992) even though context may not be equally important to each participant involved in a study.

Over time, the ideological separation between Glaser and Strauss opened up room for developing more versions of grounded theory. For example, Leonard Schatzman's version focused on dimensional analysis (highlighted in Kendall, 1999). In addition, Clarke (2005) has advocated for a situation-based grounded theory that graphically displays social positions and power and control issues inherent to the researcher (cited in Creswell, 2007). Not surprisingly, Glaser added his own objectivist grounded theory brand (Glaser, 2002), *Glaserian* Grounded Theory, which a number of researchers have embraced (for example Cutcliffe, 2005).

More recently, Kathy Charmaz, a former student of both of the originators of this approach, articulated a *Constructivist* version of grounded theory that promotes social justice within the approach's methods (Charmaz, 2004, 2006). So far her version is praised for addressing many of the criticisms of earlier versions, such as being less positivist and step focused. In addition, her work has articulated concerns about the influence of researchers'

background experiences, perspectives, and analytic choices that received less focus in earlier versions of this approach (Charmaz, 2006; Creswell, 2007). Based on the diverse options available, her work has faced opposition (for example Glaser, 2002). However, a changed academic and social environment that embraces relativism/perspective taking and strives for less absolutist and deterministic answers from analyses of human experiences may have supported its success.

### **Philosophical Foundations**

According to Creswell (2007) grounded theory is one of the main five approaches within the qualitative mode of inquiry. This mode is not homogenous or prescriptive and allows flexibility in capturing the level of detail desired by the researcher. On the other side of the equation is quantification, which is based on positivist ideals or the unquestioning conviction that enough numbers have a cleansing effect on bias and that reality can be captured through objectivity and scientific procedures. Not surprisingly, both positivist and post-positivist research promote the belief that any assertion can be confirmed through numbers or lack thereof. Thus, a faith in the benefits of quantification relies on a desire to objectively and, perhaps, naively capture the truth about the world in numeric form (Guba & Lincoln, 2005). Based on the above points, there may be some subtle similarities between grounded theory and other post-positivist approaches since they both place an emphasis on rigor and making sure data sufficiently supports claims. Even though this characteristic may incite positivist accusations against grounded theory, for this project its “rigor” made it an attractive choice.

Furthermore, irrespective of the research being conducted, be it qualitative or quantitative, all research is based on paradigms or worldviews that underline attitudes toward



acceptable ways to learn about the world. For example, Annells (1996), articulated that paradigms exist at two levels within all inquiries; one is within the researcher and the other within the inquiry method itself. As such, a researcher's paradigms can help determine the inquiry approach chosen for a project and support Cutcliffe's (2005) observation that "no researcher is an 'empty vessel', [or] a person who can approach an area of study with an entirely a-theoretical stance" (p. 424). With this in mind, this researcher is no exception, and as will be underscored later, both the characteristics of the researcher and methods proposed influenced the ultimate choice of a version of grounded theory to inform this qualitative project.

Defining the philosophical foundations of grounded theory is straight forward, even though its foundations have not remained static over time. The original version started out from a post-positivist perspective since the originators themselves probably still embraced many of the values of that perspective. Moreover, considering how positivism was unquestionably dominant in academia in the 1960s, incorporating positivist elements may have become the most strategic way to sell their academic vision to other researchers. After that, the second major version of grounded theory, the systemic version, took the approach slightly into a constructivist territory while still maintaining much of its post-positivist roots (Annells, 1996). Perhaps the version to take the largest leap was Charmaz' constructivist version, which took grounded theory away from post-positivism into a focus that became more relativist and most removed from objectivist aims.

Considering changing philosophical foundations, different versions of grounded theory differ in their ontological foundations about the nature of reality based on the paradigms they embrace (Annells, 1996). As a result, claiming a uniform nature of reality for grounded theory

as a process is not feasible when each version has a different focus. For instance, the classical version promotes a probabilistically apprehended reality consistent with the Guba and Lincoln (2005) definition of the post-positivist paradigm: the systemic version promotes a reality purposely apprehended with the help of procedures. Conversely, the constructivist version is elaborated through the interaction of the researcher and participants among other constructivist elements. As the above descriptions indicate the paradigm behind each version has the potential to impact what is seen because the focus in each one is different.

Consistent with the above observations, the reality of participants themselves is not mentioned here. A choice made primarily because, at some level, grounded theory carries the assumption that individual reality becomes diluted through comparison to other data. Thus, the resulting reality is more valuable because it has a wider lens, and isolates the process from the individual's experience.

The motivation for mentioning the levels of paradigms, reality and the journey grounded theory has taken during its evolution is to emphasize that, within this approach, researchers can choose a version that best fits their own preferences, beliefs about great scientific inquiry and the goals of their projects (Annells, 1996; Fassinger, 2005). Thus, to inform this qualitative project, this researcher will choose a constructivist approach that acknowledges a researcher is not a blank slate when approaching research. In other words, as a same-sex married gay male working in social work, this researcher already had some personal and professional understanding that same-sex married gay men may face stigma based on their chosen identities before and after entering into a same sex-marriage. While unavoidable, failing to acknowledge this characteristic would not neutralize its influence.

Also, this researcher will choose the constructivist approach to inform this qualitative effort. This choice is based on a belief that “reality” may be dependent on: the version of grounded theory chosen; the methods and analytical choices made; and the researcher’s and participants’ background and experiences (in complete agreement with Charmaz, 2006). Additionally, this researcher chose the constructivist version because he is committed to social work’s social justice goals and considers a version that makes them explicit a great fit for this profession. Based on the above rationale and in faithfulness to social work’s commitment to address issues of power and control, throughout this project effort was made to use what Charmaz (2006) has termed as “locating.” As a procedure this required the researcher to acknowledge, write down reflections or journal any of his own biases that may interfere with his interpretation of data generated through this work. Some of those elements were already included in Chapter One. This researcher is confident that this technique empowered the voices of participants to take precedence and limit any unnecessary influence from this researcher.

### **Social Work and Grounded Theory**

Since the original version of grounded theory was developed with sociologists in mind (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) they were the first field to embrace this approach. The next field was nursing, in part because Glaser and Strauss accepted teaching positions at a doctoral nursing program at the University of California, San Francisco after they began to develop their approach (Charmaz, 2006). Needless to say, these researchers became instrumental in supporting many of their students in studying phenomena pertinent to nursing work. From there, other fields such as education, business, psychology and social work have followed suit.

Social work's full support of grounded theory is evident in the variety of settings and populations that have currently incorporated this approach (for example Ferguson & Islam, 2008). However, irrespective of profession, some researchers like Wells (1995) questioned if what some projects are creating is grounded theory. As its originators promoted, this approach is so flexible and adaptable that sometimes projects do not even remotely resemble one other; a point that may suggest a lack of clarity as to what a grounded theory should look like (Wells, 1995). Nevertheless, this discrepancy might be inevitable since grounded theorists prioritize making sure that the data determines the final product over whether or not steps are followed the same way every time. As a result, researchers are given leeway to choose only steps that might benefit their own goals and projects while discarding those they might deem unnecessary (Charmaz, 2006; Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss & Corbin, 1990).

Moreover, acceptable grounded theories may develop through such different pathways because the routes taken are far less important than making sure the destination is correct (Charmaz, 2006). Thus, the important point, regardless of whether a researcher chooses to interview, collect journals; use art work, their own analytic notes (also called memos), or photographs etc., is that all claims must be justified from more than one source. In grounded theory, comparing different kinds of data is called triangulation, a process that does not have rigid guidelines, but instead, requires the researcher to demonstrate that they have performed due diligence in ensuring the interpretations are reliable. Similarly, consumers of research are left to determine the faith the data has earned, so long as the final product (formal or substantive) avoids making undeserved claims, the grounded theory product may end up at different levels of

development while still justifying its existence. Taking this into account, for this qualitative project the flexibility of this approach made it an attractive option.

On a different level, and in spite of all this opportunity and flexibility in grounded theory, social work's use of this process is still underused, especially since social workers have not provided widely known data-generated theories. An explanation of this may be that social work is comfortable borrowing from other disciplines to avoid "reinventing the wheel" (or simply recreating other people's work). Nevertheless, such a stance, limits infusing academic knowledge with a perspective rich in advocacy, correction of power imbalances, social justice, empowerment and self-determination (Canadian Association of Social Workers, 2005). While other fields may hold their own versions of some of these characteristics the above list of professional requirements, not options, is distinct to social work and has much to offer to the theory generation process.

### **Use of Grounded Theory in Current Project**

The goal for this qualitative project was to develop some further questions or hypotheses to explore in future research given that this is a new area of research and this effort was more exploratory in nature. This study focused on a specific group (gay men living in Calgary, Alberta, Canada) within a specific process (same-sex marriage) and within a specific context (a semi-structured interview conducted at the above location). This specificity was pursued based on limited resources and time requirements to complete a Social Work Master's program. Participants were recruited until no new material emerged from their one-on-one interviews. The hope was that the experiences of these participants would be sufficient to explore aspects of same-sex marriage and benefit practitioners working with this population. No effort was made

to observe or interact with participants outside of the interview context other than during an over the phone or email screening questionnaire and during member checking via email, both to be described later. Also, participants chose the contexts of the experiences and this researcher explored them accordingly.

This project's focus involved capturing the process and ramifications of entering and being in a same-sex marriage, for gay men who lacked this option until the past seven years. For this study, same-sex married gay men are conceptualized as members of a marginalized population based on their sexual orientation. Conversely, they are theorized as members of, perhaps, a privileged group with access to certain job and cohabitation rights that may not be as readily available to their unmarried sexual minority or heterosexual counterparts.

As already highlighted in Chapter One, a focus on same-sex marriage was based on my reflections of entering into a same-sex marriage in 2008. During that time, this researcher became aware that becoming same-sex married was not one decision, but the beginning of a process of making sense of the institution of marriage, as opposite sex couples had previously defined it. Also, negotiating entry (booking a marriage commissioner, a venue etc.), and being married afterwards required navigating a social milieu where universal acceptance of sexual minorities was not guaranteed, regardless of marital status. Based on these observations and as Creswell's (2007) proposed "on the practical side, a theory may be needed to explain how people are experiencing a phenomenon, and the grounded theory developed by the researcher will provide such a general framework" (p. 66). Thus, grounded theory became an attractive choice for informing this qualitative study even if theory building was not the ultimate goal of this

project. Especially taking into account that little knowledge is available around entering and being in same-sex marriage for a novel population but within an old institution.

Additionally, being a same-sex married gay male, demographically, this characteristic provided some advantages such as greater personal and professional contacts within the LGBTQ community as well as a shared status to build rapport with participants. Nonetheless, I was aware that such a characteristic could introduce significant bias; therefore, a number of checks were chosen to minimize such researcher influence. The section on building trustworthiness for this study will cover those checks.

Furthermore, this project had a few temporal alternatives available when determining at what point to examine the process of entering and being in a same sex marriage. Participants could be interviewed prior to their actual weddings, or they could be interviewed close to the wedding date and/or perhaps even be observed during the actual marriage ceremony and reception. However, all of these choices were deemed potentially intrusive and carried a high potential for bias as participants can sometimes run the risk of idealizing their own same-sex marriages (Alderson, 2004a). They may likewise be overly negative about the process, not because of any attributes of the same-sex marriage itself, but based on the high emotional, financial and even physical demands of entering into a marriage. As a result, this researcher chose to interview retrospectively, more than six months after the wedding, to allow participants some emotional distance to reduce the impact of demands related to planning a wedding and allow grounding on a panoramic view of their experience as a whole. Not surprisingly, and based on the retrospective nature of this study, interviewing became the best alternative for acquiring the data required to capture this process.

## Sample

In terms of sampling, qualitative research strives for purposeful data or data congruent with the phenomenon under study. This is a different goal than that of quantitative research, where the objective is to achieve a sample that accurately depicts or represents the general population. As a result, qualitative research may pursue smaller sample sizes compared to quantitative approaches exclusively based on the research goals. This distinction is pertinent when discussing grounded theory informed qualitative research because the latter often calls for larger sample sizes than would normally be required in qualitative research. In essence, some versions recommend that saturation of themes, or interviewing until no new themes emerge, be what determines sample sizes (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss & Corbin, 1990, 1998). Conversely, Charmaz' (2006) version de-emphasizes the importance of categorical saturation, and instead promotes sampling that focuses on strengthening the theories being developed.

Another key sampling consideration in grounded theory is theoretical sampling where participants are chosen based on their fit with hypothesis derived from earlier participants and is consistent for all three main versions of grounded theory (Charmaz, 2006; Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss & Corbin, 1990). For this qualitative project, theoretical sampling was not used given the limited resources and time available to carry out data collection. Instead, convenience and snowball sampling were used to recruit participants, meaning that volunteers that wanted to be part of the study and fit the criteria for the study were selected to participate.

Participants for this project were recruited over a period of two months between the end of December 2011 and middle of February 2012. They were part of a convenience and snowball sample, located through an email invitation, sent out to the researcher's local professional



contacts and inviting same-sex married gay men to participate (See Appendix A). Contacted individuals were asked to pass the email invitation along to their contacts until same-sex married gay men, willing to participate, were found. The choice to recruit via email was made partly because the project was unfunded and this researcher did not have the financial resources required to pay for advertising in local gay magazines or newspapers. Though grants or scholarships could help financially to pay for this, based on the time constraints, such options were not feasible, and as a result an email invitation was chosen based on its cost effectiveness.

A second convenience and snowball sampling strategy used involved contacting local agencies serving the gay community and inviting them to forward the email invitation or to post a short description of the project in either their corresponding social media or email notifications. Such agencies were instrumental in helping locate a broader selection of participants that may have otherwise been available. Once a few original participants were identified and recruited, snowball sampling in combination with further convenience sampling were used to facilitate further recruiting efforts. A total of 11 men participated in the study and sampling continued until the point of saturation was reached or no new themes were emerging from participants' interviews.

### **Data Collection Method**

According to Charmaz (2006) "... intensive interviewing permits an in-depth exploration of a particular topic or experience and thus, is a useful method for interpretive inquiry" (p. 25). Not surprisingly, such an approach allows the researcher to choose to interview one or multiple participants depending on the project's goals. For this qualitative project, with one exception, only one person per couple was interviewed to explore the individual process of entering and

being in a same-sex marriage. At the risk of contributing to the literature a “pseudounilateral bias” (Fergus et al., 2005), created whenever only one partner is interviewed in research, this researcher’s skill level motivated this choice. Similarly, interviewing a single participant was chosen since the skills required would be simpler than those needed to interview a couple together, for a student researcher with this researcher’s level of experience.

Furthermore, for this project, the choice was made to interview each participant only once. This choice created a restriction that if new and interesting questions arose later in the enquiry process, as is common in grounded theory informed research, those new questions would be asked from latter interviewees as potential concluding questions for their respective interviews (Charmaz, 2006). Such a decision was made based on time constraints to complete this project and care was taken to ensure any new questions were asked as observations from previous interviews and that they kept within the parameters of the ethics approval received for this project.

In seeking ethics approval for this qualitative project, choosing interview questions was important. Charmaz (2006) suggested using an interview guide consisting of starting, middle and final questions that for this researcher appeared too structured. Instead, questions were formulated more in line with the work of Alderson (2004a) who interviewed same-sex couples prior to entering their own same-sex marriages in different parts of the world. This alternative was chosen in agreement with Glaser’s (2002) criticism that Charmaz’ stance toward questions was too prescriptive and an opinion that Alderson’s approach allowed greater flexibility before and during each interview. In short, a semi-structured approach to interviewing was used whereby the researcher had pre-determined questions to cover during the interview, but was still

open enough to allow flexibility in the order in which these were addressed and to allow participants to discuss other relevant topics that emerged from the interviews. The interview schedule used for the study is included in Appendix B.

According to Creswell (2007), interviewing is a common method within grounded theory informed research because a researcher may adjust questions from one participant to the next as important themes emerge, while still remaining within parameters of obtained ethics approvals. This method was used in the current qualitative study, and such flexibility allowed for new or clarifying questions to evolve throughout the interview process.

On a different level, grounded theory allows incorporating varied data into a project depending on the goals of the researcher. For this project, at the beginning of the interviews participants were asked to fill out a demographic questionnaire to gain more descriptive details to enrich the final thesis manuscript (see Appendix C). Also, paying special attention to confidentiality, this project will report this demographic information only in an aggregate manner. Participants were informed that completing this questionnaire was voluntary and they were not obligated to do so as part of their participation.

## **Procedure**

This qualitative study was promoted in two ways: The first was through an email invitation sent out locally through the researcher's professional contacts and the second through an email invitation or a social media (Facebook) post sent out through local agencies serving the gay community (See Appendix D). Everyone who received the email invitation or saw the social media post was asked to circulate the invitation through their friendship circles to same-sex married gay men who met the eligibility requirements and who they believed would be interested

in participating in this study. Potential participants were asked to email or phone the researcher to inquire about the study or to express interest in participating. Only one person per same-sex married couple was interviewed for this study with the exception of one participant's husband included in this study because of his dual perspective living in Canada and the United States.

Consistent with the method chosen to contact the researcher, participants were asked a brief pre-screening questionnaire either by email or phone to ensure their suitability for the study. The inclusion criteria for this study involved finding: currently same-sex married gay men, married for at least six months, living in Calgary, Alberta, Canada and interested in participating in this study. Interested gay men who did not qualify for the study were thanked for their interest and informed that they did not meet the inclusion criteria for the present study. They were also asked to notify any friends who might be interested in participating and met the inclusion criteria thus, enhancing this project's snowball sampling.

For qualified participants, the interviews were scheduled within one week or as soon as convenient for the potential participant. After that, arrangements were made to conduct the one-on-one interviews on the University campus in an office available for Master's students or in the participants' homes. The researcher digitally recorded the interviews, later transcribed them, and removed any identifying information (such as names, wedding venue locations, etc.) to keep participants anonymous.

At the beginning of each one-on-one interview participants were invited to complete the demographic questionnaire that included questions about the participants, their husbands and dependent children. The rationale for asking these questions was to increase potential areas of analysis for this study. Moreover, these questions were not asked verbally to avoid

overwhelming participants with questions easily acquired through a questionnaire. Also, having participants' written responses would facilitate making summations about them as a group instead of needing to write such information down after each interview. Participants were made aware that disclosing demographic information about themselves, their husband and/or children was voluntary and not a requirement of participation.

#### *Disclosure of Researcher's Sexual Orientation*

In preparation for this qualitative project, this researcher had to determine if disclosing his sexual orientation and marital status to participants was appropriate because participants may not always automatically know a researcher is a member of the same community. In other cases, coming out for the researcher may be a moot point because participants already know the researcher is not heterosexual (Alderson & Jevne, 2003; Arm, Home, & Levitt, 2009; LaSala, 2000). For this study, recruiting participants too closely connected to the researcher was avoided to prevent conflicts of interests. Additionally, disclosing the researcher's status as a same-sex married gay man was avoided to prevent biasing participants, in either a positive or negative way, but when such information was requested, disclosure took place.

#### *Sexual Orientation Exclusions Based on Biology and Behaviour*

Furthermore, this researcher endorses a belief that sexual orientation is independent of biological sex as is seen in transgendered and transsexual individuals who can identify as either heterosexual, gay, or bisexual among other possible sexual orientation categories (Hyde, DeLamater, & Byers, 2009). Not surprisingly then, for this study, gay men were assumed as individuals born biologically male and who self-identified as gay. All the gay men who agreed to participate in this study fit this assumption.

## **Data Analysis**

As has been emphasized already, more than one approach to grounded theory from data exists and only the researchers' creativity and their own preferences set the limits. In grounded theory informed research, the researchers are perhaps the "most used" analysis tool throughout all projects, regardless of version or types of data collected. They are identified as a tool because they can manifest throughout the analysis when, for example, written memos are used. Such memos can reflect on incoming data and personal experience as well as conversations with others outside of projects and participants (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). In essence, encouraging broad sources of data invites the researcher to become deeply involved and acquainted with the data to make meaning of it after each interview (Charmaz, 2006).

As alluded to above, since grounded theory supports flexible analysis, the researcher may, at the outset, determine the desired level of abstraction that will define a finished product. In other words, what makes for a great final analysis is that it makes sense to others even if they would have made different choices had they been conducting their own research (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). As mentioned at the beginning of this chapter this qualitative project's data collection and analysis were informed by grounded theory methods and the final product is more of a grounded description and not a theory.

The foundation of data analysis in grounded theory is coding and, depending on the version chosen, the suggested steps can vary. According to Charmaz (2006), when using interviewing to collect data, the most effective approach is to initially code broadly and then recode with more focus. Within her vision, coding quickly on the first round allows hunches to emerge, be direct and specific while altering the data as little as possible without preconceived

ideas. The coder is encouraged to seek in-vivo codes that summarize participants' experiences, highlight significance and underscore participants' chosen behaviours to address their circumstances.

In terms of how to generate the codes, Charmaz (2006) recommended using line-by-line coding when dealing with interview data and when possible to consider coding incident-to-incident to develop codes from different angles. Thereafter, to move into interpretation, the researcher is encouraged to summarize the codes through organizing them into categories and sub-categories. A category is expected to capture the significance of all sub-codes placed under it while constantly comparing pieces of data and codes (Charmaz, 2006). The underlying rationale behind this step may be to prevent introducing the researcher's pre-conceived ideas into the data, through labeling it one line of transcript at a time, while simultaneously determining what incidents have in common.

For this qualitative project, interviews happened quickly, sometimes two in one day, so transcribing and coding each interview before the following one was not possible. Instead, this researcher had to settle for journaling about each interview to determine patterns emerging from the data in preparation for the next participant. In addition, considering that I transcribed most of the interviews myself, transcription did not keep pace with interviewing and resulted in delays in analysis and coding. Nonetheless, once transcription was completed, coding was performed. I relied on ATLAS.ti software and followed Charmaz' (2006) initial line-by-line coding guidelines. The focus was an openness to discovering in-vivo codes that used participants' own words as much as possible but still tried to incorporate some level of interpretation. Similarly, faithful to her recommendations, in-vivo codes were evaluated based on their ability to

summarizing participants' meanings and the participants' application of these terms (codes) were conceptualized as "problematic" to deconstruct their significance as well as the behaviours they implied.

After the initial coding step, the micro versions of the data, the codes, were compared to other codes in other parts of the first interview with a focus on similarities and differences between codes. The objective of this comparison step was to move into focused coding that generated more "macro" level codes chosen based on high or low frequency and carrying significance for understanding each participant's experience (Charmaz, 2006). The use of this comparison was the beginning of using the constant comparative method within one interview that would later be applied across interviews.

Once analysis of the first interview was completed, subsequent interviews were coded using the same initial coding procedures used in the first interview. After that, focused coding was carried out within the second interview and then these less numerous codes were compared to the macro codes developed from the first interview. New codes were developed based on this comparison. From the third interview onward the same initial coding was carried out. After that, focused coding helped collapse micro codes into appropriate macro codes within each interview so that macro codes were compared retrospectively across all interviews. If new codes emerged from latter interviews, previous transcripts were re-read to verify, re-code and re-conceptualize those interviews if necessary. Throughout the entire process, codes were developed, collapsed or changed accordingly, but while the codes were the primary point of comparison, other data was likewise considered acceptable for comparison.



One such data involved journaling or writing down the researcher's hunches and observations into memos. According to Charmaz (2006), "Memos chart, record, and detail a major analytic phase of our journey" (p. 72). She has recommended that they be written in whatever way works best for the researcher, that they be elaborated in tandem with each level of the coding and data collection and that this process begin as soon as the researcher has classifications or inklings to explore. Charmaz likewise has encouraged memo writing so that it can provide a paper trail of how the thinking about each element of the coding and analysis was solidified and advises that they all be considered tentative and subject to change. For this qualitative project, memo writing consisted of free writing about post interview reflections, listening or re-listening to interview recordings when necessary, codes, data, incidents, categories, sub-categories and comparisons between them (Charmaz, 2006).

Also, this researcher used memo writing to conduct personal discussions about similarities and differences between his own and participants' experiences entering and being in a same-sex marriage, in line with the idea that from a grounded theory perspective, "all is data" (Glaser, 2002). Moreover, these personal discussions through memos enriched the constant comparison method and promoted further "locating" for this researcher.

On a different level, Charmaz (2006) weighed in on the benefits of incorporating axial coding from Strauss and Corbin based on conditions, actions/interactions, and consequences and theoretical coding from Glaser's work based on flexibly prescribed coding families into the analysis of data. However, while admitting that there may be benefits to conducting such structured analysis and incorporating a looser version of these, Charmaz has warned that following those researcher's suggestions too closely may impose artificial structure onto the

data. As a corrective, she has recommended that if a researcher is comfortable with some uncertainty, then a less prescriptive application of these strategies is acceptable so long as the data is analyzed and compared from as many angles as possible. In support of this rationale, this researcher chose to analyze the data as flexibly as this researcher's creativity and reference points would allow.

Data analysis extended over a period of six months where I revisited the data, after short periods of distance from it, in order to see new patterns emerging from it. Closer to the end of data analysis, feedback for the final conceptualization and organization of the major themes was sought from my supervisor Dr. Jessica Ayala. This was helpful as it allowed me to see aspects of the data in even newer ways.

### **Trustworthiness**

Trustworthiness in qualitative research is necessary because researchers should not expect others will accept their work at face value. As such, Guba & Lincoln (2005) asserted that users of qualitative research want to have confidence in findings especially if said findings will shape practical decisions and changes. In accordance with Creswell's (2009) recommendations member checking, triangulation, and rich, thick description were used to enhance the trustworthiness of this qualitative study.

The first way trustworthiness was pursued was through member checking. This usually involves asking participants if they feel that the final product or segments of it correctly capture their experience (Creswell, 2009). For this project, near the completion of this study, the major themes resulting from the research were e-mailed to participants for verification/feedback (member checking). Participants were asked to provide feedback (via e-mail) within a two week

period on a voluntary basis (see Appendix E). Such feedback was used to revise the researcher's conclusions while keeping a balance between the individual and group experience. The informed consent form highlighted that, providing feedback on the interview summary was voluntary and not a requirement of their participation. Six out of 11 participants provided feedback, which was very positive and while some provided corrections or additions to the explanations of their circumstances, they did not request any changes to the themes that were supposed to represent their experience. It is noteworthy that one participant mentioned that compared to others' responses he felt fortunate that he had been spared many negative experiences by living far away from his relatives.

The second way trustworthiness was addressed was through triangulation. Through comparing different types of data to enhance the analysis, which included comparisons between interview transcripts, or comparing data from earlier participants with subsequent ones. Also, memoing or reflecting on the themes throughout the process and the researcher's locating of his own experience served as ways "to shed some light on a theme or perspective" (Creswell, 2009, p. 208). The use of triangulation allowed interview questions to adapt/change throughout interviewing and was the basis for comparing themes to ensure the researcher's analytic choices were grounded on the data.

Finally, rich, thick description of the participants' characteristics and their experiences was used to enhance the project's trustworthiness. This was in agreement with Creswell's (2009) perspective that it can allow research consumers to determine how applicable findings may be to other settings, enrich the trustworthiness of qualitative endeavors, both desirable for this work.

## **Ethics**

Ethical considerations in research are important to ensure that participants are protected from harm while contributing to research efforts. Thus, ethical issues in research must include letting participants know that their participation is voluntary, withdrawal is possible at any time and safety has been assured through an ethics review board that screened the project for risks. In fulfilling these requirements, ethical clearance was sought and obtained through the University of Calgary Conjoint Faculties Research Ethics Board.

Written consent was obtained from participants at the beginning of each one-on-one interview (see Appendix F for informed consent form). One-on-one interview participants were informed in the written consent form of their right to withdraw their participation from this study without penalty. They were similarly informed of their right to withdraw their participation up to two weeks after their own individual interview and their data would be destroyed. However, they were informed that if they withdrew after that two week period, their data would be retained as it would be already integrated into the analysis. In addition, at the beginning of the interviews participants were verbally informed of the voluntary nature of the study, their ability to withdraw without penalty and of the time restrictions for withdrawal. Also, they were informed that if at any time during the interview they wished to withdraw participation from the study the recording would be stopped. Any data collected up to that point (consent form, interview recording, demographic questionnaire) would be destroyed and none of the data would be incorporated into the study.

Maintaining anonymity of data is a key component of research efforts since providing such anonymity can encourage individuals to participate in research projects and protect them

from negative consequences based on their participation. For this project, participants were informed through the informed consent process that to protect their privacy interview results would only be reported in the aggregate and if individual quotes were included in this thesis manuscript all participants would remain anonymous. Additionally, they were informed that only the principal investigator and his supervisor were to have access to the raw data and that audio tapes/digital recordings would be destroyed upon successful completion of the thesis defence that motivated the project. Similarly, participants were informed that hard copies would be kept in a locked cabinet in the researcher's home for five years. Electronic data files would be kept in password protected computers and would be retained for five years, at which time files would be deleted and all discs destroyed.

No reasonably foreseeable risks to the participants associated with this qualitative study were found because all planned questions would be similar to what they may encounter in their everyday lives. Furthermore, if after participating in this study participants wished to discuss their emotions or experiences further, information was provided in the informed consent form about services they may wish to contact for support.

## CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS – ENTERING SAME-SEX MARRIAGE

The findings from one-on-one interviews with 11 same-sex married gay men living in Calgary, Alberta, Canada are presented here as part of more a grounded description and not a theory. The quotes provided belong to the men who agreed to be interviewed as part of this study. The participants were all white collar professionals having a bachelor's degree or higher education. Great effort was made to recruit participants in blue collar professions or possessing a different educational attainment but all such recruiting efforts were unsuccessful. Participants' age ranges were as follows: two were between 26 – 35 years old, five were between 36 – 45 years old, three were between 46 – 55 years old and one was a senior over 66 years old. Total relationship length was between four and 17 years with a mean relationship length of 11.2 years. One participant had grown children from a previous heterosexual marriage and one had adopted an infant that by the time of the interview was still preschool age. Also, out of 11 participants, two identified as biracial (Indigenous/Asian and Indigenous/Caucasian), another was Asian and the remaining eight participants were Caucasian. The participants' ethnic backgrounds are discussed in more depth in the next chapter.

A number of major themes emerged from the analysis of participants' interviews and they revolved around the process of entering and being in a same-sex marriage. The themes are organized in chronological order whenever said order made sense, for instance having *the courtship* before *the proposal* or *accessing services* such as booking a venue to celebrate the wedding before *tying the knot*. All themes were not covered in the same order with all participants but instead were discussed as they emerged during the conversations. The themes presented are only based on those who agreed to participate in this study and may not apply to all

gay men who choose to marry someone of the same-sex. All participants were unique in countless ways.

### **The Courtship**

The ways participants met their eventual husbands varied and included: at a coffee shop, at a gay bar, through running, at a fundraiser, online, through a mutual friend, and through volunteering. As these examples illustrate, gay men who choose to marry may meet romantic partners in a variety of settings that reflected their own interests. For participants, meeting their eventual husbands was memorable, and as one explained it:

*We met in a coffee shop through a friend and I spoke to him for 30 seconds. Then, [I] said to the friend that I was with at the time, "Did you see that guy that I just spoke to?" He said, "Yes," I said, "That's the guy that I'm spending the rest of my life with."*

### *Dating*

Not all participants followed the same dating patterns. Some began with friendship and then transitioned into dating; in at least two cases, participants dated their future husbands for a short while, broke up and eventually got back together. In the majority of cases, participants met and started dating right away. As one participant put it, *"We laid eyes on each other and set up the [first] date and the rest is history."*

### *Becoming Common-law*

After starting dating, at some point, participants needed to decide if they wanted to start living together. Such a decision had implications of becoming common-law, a process that in Canada begins after one year of living together in a conjugal relationship. For a couple of participants, living together did not last long enough to become common-law. For another

participant, who had been living separately from his partner, the only options were to weigh the decision heavily and delay living together until the engagement a few months before the wedding. Moreover, for a couple of participants, the decision to become common-law went to the level of having co-habitation agreements. However, for one of these participants the agreement left many unanswered questions due to owning a business with his relatives.

*[H]e had to get independent legal advice, I had to get legal advice ... we had a pre-cohabitation agreement. Actually, that was something else that governed our relationship that ... nobody could explain to us. The lawyers all said, "This is what we think it means but we don't know what it means for a gay couple because there's all these laws out there. They can affect you maybe differently [because you are not married]."*

For the remaining participants, becoming common-law occurred by default of moving in and staying together for longer than the stipulated time. Yet, such a process was not marked by any event in particular and some were unclear of how long was required to become common-law after starting to live together.

*Well there's no real discussion of common-law, right? In the gay community you are just living together. But whether the government considers you common-law or not, I don't even know what the time line is. It's not considered until you divorce, right? Until you split up and want to start separating the property and one is being a bitch, right? So that's when common-law comes into play (laughs).*

As the above descriptions and quote illustrate, for the majority of participants becoming common-law occurred more as by-product of living together as opposed to as a purposeful



choice made ahead of time. Yet, regardless of awareness or approach to a common-law status, at some point participants realized that marriage had something to offer their relationships.

### **Reasons for Marriage**

Some participants acknowledged that entering marriage on a whim was possible for both gay and straight individuals, but this did not appear to be the case for participants. Their reasons for marriage were as unique as participants themselves and they varied widely. Participants' reasons for marriage involved the following: being ready, committed to one another and in love; wanting recognition, validation, and legitimacy; making a statement or a political act; showing commitment to partner and to others; gaining social and financial clarity for the relationship; and deciding around immigration issues. This last point was only applicable to two participants married to one-another. Moreover, for the participant for whom the family business was on the line, marriage provided reassurance that had not been available before.

*So with [the] marriage contract we had a pre-cohab agreement and there the lawyers all said, ... "It's going to be the same [as for heterosexual marriages]. There's no reason it will be any different." So ... that process put a lot of clarity into our relationship financially but also socially."*

For participants, expressing their reasons for marriage also made evident the importance of their decision.

*I've always wanted to be married and so does he, right? And the decision to become married was pretty difficult. You don't want to make a wrong decision, of course, but being in a gay marriage you don't want to have, I almost felt like we had to. We loved each other and we wanted to get married but we also kind of wanted to show our friends*

*and our family how committed we are [sic] as a couple and society and you would just, it made it, I bet you if we were heterosexual we may have, dated a bit longer. It just seemed like we had something to prove. It's kind of strange. We almost felt we wanted to get married for maybe political reasons but also because we loved each other and we wanted to have it on paper, right?*

*I didn't feel as though we needed it but it was important to him. That was enough for me. ... I didn't care one way or another, but I understood a bit of his rationale. ... I am quite a bit younger than my husband and I think he was concerned I might move on to someone else ... So, I think ... it settled his nerves a lot knowing that I wasn't going anywhere.*

### **The Proposal**

The way participants proposed to each other varied: out of 11 participants, five decided together, four proposed to their husbands and two received proposals. Participants who decided together to become married, did so through open communication on a variety of issues ranging from children, to legalities of the relationship. In one case, the decision to marry was partly based on a brother's encouragement. Also, at least two participants had to attempt marriage proposals more than once because the first one was not romantically satisfactory or because the proposal was perceived as a joke. Another participant expressed this process as follows:

*We had a long, long discussion about it and marriage and ...what we thought about marriage and what we thought about kids and all of that and then, ... at the end of this long conversation, I kind of just said, "So you want to?" and he said, "Sure!"*

Another participant found deciding to be easier than expected.

*It was kind of amazing how, I don't want to say benign, but just how normal the decision to get married was. I mean there were sort of no bells and whistles. It was just something that came up as a very logical sort of thing. There was no getting down on the knees (chuckles) and there being a grand pronouncement, it just seemed like a logical sort of thing.*

As the above description and quotes illustrate participants entered marriage deciding on their own proposal protocol without societal scripts to guide them. In other words, who proposed was unique to each couple. This was further supported by another theme around lacking role models that was expressed by one participant as follows:

*The nuance would be the fact that two men have to figure out how to [work out] a life together in a world that didn't ever think of that as a possibility before. So, without role models, you know the next generation is going to look at us and say, "That's how that can work." We have to go and say, "We've got to figure [this] out for ourselves completely."*

### **Choosing the Guests**

*Benchmarking relationships* or measuring the closeness of the relationship was how participants decided who should come to their wedding. Two factors impacted these choices: appropriateness of guests and ensuring their acceptance. The last factor in particular was important to participants as they were purposefully selective in inviting supportive and affirming guests to their wedding. As one participant explained it, *"We didn't invite anyone who we [thought] would not be accepting of us."* Similarly, another participant prioritized these factors.

*So, [the guests were] people that we wanted to come and celebrate with us and that we knew would be happy for us. [They] would be participating in the celebrations as opposed to be judging, criticizing, [or] having negative feelings about it.*

However, not all participants' experiences were so straight forward. For one participant selectively inviting guests backfired. *"We cut out a lot of family which we paid for later.... There were a lot of people that were not very happy, because [for] a lot of them, we just didn't tell them."* A second participant chose not to invite his own father because, after a decade of being out to others, his father did not know the participant was gay. Similarly, for this same participant, his sister had not come to the wedding because her conservative husband did not know her brother was gay or that he had entered into a same-sex marriage. Another participant lost some control over the invitation process because some friends and family members were so supportive that they began inviting themselves. As a result, this participant had five separate wedding events on five separate days and locations. A fourth participant purposely invited unsupportive people as a way to challenge their perspectives on gay relationships.

### **Breaking the News**

Participants were asked if there had been any noteworthy reactions to the news of their weddings. Even though they had broken the news to friends and relevant co-workers no participants mentioned having had any noteworthy reactions from these groups with the exception of one participant's Godmother, who ended communication with the participant immediately:

*I told her about our marriage [and then] she basically stopped communicating with me and that's fine. I am not going to open that kettle of worms, if she doesn't want it open then she is not part of my life until that point.*

However, when it came to their family of origin the noteworthy reactions ranged from positive to outright negative with the answers trending toward the negative. Parents and in-laws, if they were alive, had a variety of reactions to the wedding news, which varied from supportive to hurtful. Among the positive, one mother-in-law, a former nun, was excited about the possibility of getting a new son-in-law. Another participant's father-in-law was excited by the news and simply stated, *"Let's go for sushi!"* A third participant's mother who had struggled with being accepting when her son first came out of the closet became his witness at the wedding! Participants did not share other positive experiences that were noteworthy because their relatives reacted positively and as they had expected.

However, some parents or in-laws may have been caught by surprise by the news and in some cases their reactions were unsupportive. One participant's mother-in-law appeared stunned and did not say anything after hearing the news. As the participant said, *"It was awkward, very awkward."* Another participant described his mother-in-law's reaction, *"I wasn't there when he told them but I guess his mother kind of broke into tears and had a big fuss."* Moreover, a third participant was unsure about his future father-in-law's reaction based on that person's previous behavior:

*We weren't sure how the father would react because when he came out to him as is often common in... [Asian] cultures it's, "You shouldn't do this! Go get married ... to a woman and then [do] what you want to do outside your marriage afterwards. It's up to*

*you.” Right? “So, have gay affairs outside your marriage but just make sure you are married!” which is more common than the cultures would like to admit, that practice, that habit.*

When this participant’s husband’s father received the invitation, he sent it back saying he did not want any part in the wedding. A fourth participant’s mother-in-law responded to the wedding news by lamenting, *“Well, it’s par for the course! ... Leave it to [my gay son] to push the boundaries of acceptable society!”* In another case, one participant delayed telling until right before the wedding because he did not know what to expect from his father.

*[My parents are] still married and my mother had, I think through the years ... [given] me pause to tell father. I was very anxious to tell [him] and so he was probably one of the last ones I actually told [I was gay] via the wedding route.... [That was] the official way.*

In addition to the expected (or at least not unexpected) negative reactions, breaking the news also involved *being blindsided* by relatives’ reactions that participants had not anticipated. Some participants found themselves facing these surprising negative reactions while inviting their wedding guests.

*Now my husband’s mom, on the other hand, she had always been fine. Once she found out [about the marriage] she’s like, “Uh, okay” until when we invited her to the wedding, she wouldn’t come because of her religious beliefs, it’s like, “I understand you are together, but do you need to get married?”*

*Well, from my siblings, the two siblings that boycotted [the wedding] they are right-wing Christians. ... And [one of them] thought that it would be silly for her to go because of her ... background. ... She talked to her priest. ... I guess he said or suggested she not go. ... She did a lot of consultation before she made this decision ... Then the other sister who is also Catholic ... wouldn't come because, as her quote was, "It would be hypocritical for her to come." I said, "But you are already a hypocrite? You are divorced!" (Laughs) ... That was the [second] one. I haven't spoken too much [to her.]... We'll see each other at family gatherings ... The first one is the one that ... continues contact and I just keep to a bare minimum. [I] hold grudges... which you are not supposed to do... but I hold grudges.*

As may be apparent from the above examples participants were faced with making decisions about how to respond to the reactions of others. For the most part when the reactions had been negative participants tended to keep their distance from those individuals or interact with them politely if they encountered one another at social events. In some cases participants chose to continue the relationship even if, for example, the person had not come to the wedding. Such exceptions were primarily made when the people who missed the wedding were their own or their husband's parents.

### **Planning the Wedding**

Participants' planning of their weddings involved a number of strategies that ranged from doing it themselves, having a wedding planner, or intentionally seeking input from relatives. For the most part, participants and their husbands both gave input into the planning of the wedding however; there were a couple of exceptions. One participant had his daughter plan most of the

event because it took place in another province. Another participant planned the entire wedding without his partner and then proposed only six days before the big day! This participant explained his process, *“And then about two years after [rejecting his proposal], marriage became legal and I started to, I created a [big] surprise wedding. He had six days’ notice. ... He had no idea it was happening.”*

In addition, some participants spoke of other family weddings where there had been some family involvement or relatives with strong opinions who took over the planning of those weddings. However, for this project, participants and their husbands primarily made decisions on their own. One participant alerted me to this discrepancy by stating, *“We were lucky that we could do it ourselves, and we didn’t have as much outside meddling. God you see the meddling, especially families can get involved.”* For the most part participants saw this lack of involvement as positive because it allowed them freedom to make their own decisions.

In addition, this absence of involvement was further supported by one contrast in financial support for one participant’s wedding. In that case, the participant’s in-laws were willing to pay for his husband’s brother’s entire wedding; conversely, the husband’s parents only provided a comparatively modest financial gift for the participant’s same-sex marriage. It must be added that the participant’s husband’s difficulties with his parents had begun from the moment he came out of the closet. With this in mind and taking into account the mostly negative noteworthy reactions received while breaking the news, this absence of involvement may have been related to a general lack of acceptance of the participants’ sexual orientation.



## Accessing Services

What is meant by accessing services from a wedding planning perspective is finding a Minister, a Justice of the Peace or any other such person authorized to solemnize marriages. It also meant accessing sellers of: flowers, cakes, wedding rings, invitations, wedding announcements etc. Participants varied in whether they chose to have any of the above options because, for example, some of them chose to forgo having wedding bands, a wedding cake or flowers at their weddings.

All participants were selective about the wedding services they accessed. This was particularly true of choosing the person who conducted the ceremony since all participants wanted to make sure that person would be accepting, supportive and whenever possible cared or was excited for them. As one participant explained his choice, *“I think we knew through the Unitarian church we’d get someone who actually did care a little bit more about us as people.”*

Some participants accessed wedding related services by working through their own connections or contacts. This meant that they sought referrals from people they knew rather than approaching unknown providers. At least one participant was relieved he had made this choice.

*So everybody we talked to we didn’t worry about it, and also like I said because we didn’t just [go] into the phone book, and [find] wedding photographers. We didn’t do that, so it was no stress, because if you did that then you’d have to say oh and by the way this is for a gay wedding, are you okay with that or not?*

However, when participants had not worked through their own connections they approached services with a consumer’s perspective. This approach was based on feeling certain about the

reactions they would receive because if unsatisfied the vendor would lose the participants' business.

Also, the excitement from the service provider towards hosting or catering a same-sex marriage was important. One participant expressed his understanding of the industry in plain terms,

*I am going to have to say frankly anybody who's in the business of running, catering weddings who would be negative to another opportunity to make a buck (laughs) this sounds terrible but it's true I mean God! [A wedding is] such a money machine!*

Another participant felt certain that he would encounter no issues.

*It didn't cross my mind, to be honest, I just assumed that if we were going to a place that they would show us it and we would, if we had the money, we would pay it and just be. It didn't cross our minds when we told [this venue] that we wanted to have a wedding. They knew right away that it was him and I, and it was just great. They were just accepting and excited so that wasn't a concern of mine going into look for any of these services.*

As all of the above examples related to service access illustrate, participants were successful in finding the services they needed to celebrate their weddings due in no small part to: 1) being selective 2) working through their own connections and 3) approaching services as a consumer. The message around service access was one of wanting to receive the same treatment as anyone else.

### **Tying the Knot**

The length of time from the start of dating to marriage ranged as follows:

- between 1 – 3 years: four participants, which included two participants married to one another
- between 6.5 – 9 years: four participants
- between 10 – 14.5 years: three participants.

However, seven participants had been together between 10 – 17 years with the remaining four participants ranging between 4 – 6.5 years. Two participants who had among the longest relationships had been married in the early days of legalization when same-sex marriage was only legal in Ontario, Quebec and British Columbia. At least one of these two participants received mixed reactions from others.

*I mean it was interesting because within the gay community it was considered a political act that was both looked upon with scorn and with favour. I mean some people thought it was selling out to a heterosexual institution, and some people thought it was a radical political act against the established norm.*

The absence of such negative reactions from the remaining participants may be an indication that the social climate around these marriages may be changing.

Moreover, participants chose to approach their wedding day through making unique choices. The number of attendees ranged from six to more than 150 people. Among all participants, more than half chose to have a Unitarian Minister and the rest chose a Justice of the Peace or Commissioner of Oaths. Only one of those who chose to have a minister included a religious scripture reading and the remaining participants stated intentionally requesting to have no mention of God in their ceremonies. Participants' main reason for this exclusion was that

they were not religious and as one participant put it, the goal became to, *“Accentuate things that affirmed more of humanist point of view.”*

Out of the men who took part in this study, some chose to mark their ceremonies with cultural elements that either intrigued them or were important. These elements ranged from hand binding, to commemorative decorations, to traditional clothing. In addition, for one participant, his wedding included a traditional event called a *polterabend*, which is a German celebration on the eve of a wedding. In his case, the celebration also involved a broom, guests breaking pottery and the couple sweeping up the debris afterward. Moreover, for another participant having a two-spirited individual contribute a reading to the wedding ceremony was important.

### **Post Wedding Reactions**

Out of the 11 participants, those who had the largest weddings, based on either the number of guests or the number of receptions, specifically mentioned that they had received positive feedback. These participants were told that their weddings or the ceremonies were the best their guests had ever attended because the event had eloquently celebrated their love with a wow-factor. These participants were proud and grateful for such feedback and at least a couple of them were awed by the societal progress. *“They still talk about the wedding and ... we’ve had probably ten, fifteen people say it was the best wedding they’ve ever been to. That makes you feel good right?”* Another participant compared the relative changes that had occurred:

*One of them said, “A group of us were talking at Christmas when we got together saying your wedding was the most fun we’ve ever had at a wedding!” And it’s a pretty odd notion to think that a gay wedding would be the best wedding people ever remember having been to... it’s a very pleasing notion but if you think about the world ... when I*

*was a child, nobody even conceived, nobody said the word gay practically let alone ... beyond saying they were happy. Nobody talked about gay people and the idea of a wedding, I mean if you'd had said that to people when I was child they would have said you were crazy.*

However, not all reactions to the wedding were positive and some elements of participants' experiences were not identifiable immediately after the wedding. For example, almost all participants had at least one wedding invitation rejected and the one participant who had not been rejected avoided it by inviting few people. In addition, one participant's sister viewed the wedding as, "*Satan's work*" and kept her distance. Moreover, for another participant, his wedding announcement had created a fire storm of controversy because his mother-in-law had not told people she had attended the participant's same-sex wedding. A third participant had an interesting reaction from two relatives sometime after the wedding.

*I sent them a wedding announcement and their response was, I think she wrote a Christmas card saying, "I have difficulty saying congratulations but we love you both and please don't feel that the communication is closed," and they continued to send us a Christmas card every year addressed to the both of us ... when we do see them they're very friendly and that's kind of where I leave it right there. If they want to engage in a dialogue or an argument about it, I am willing to engage but I'm not going to seek out the argument.*

Another issue that emerged after the wedding was the idea of guests "*attending in silent protest*" highlighted by a couple of participants. While this point may appear to be of lesser importance because most participants did not mention it, the idea of this behaviour was

intriguing but difficult for participants to prove unless they found out additional information.

For one of these two participants what this *attending* meant was having his mother, who came to the weddings but, at the same time was being unsupportive.

*I essentially made an ultimatum that she has no control of me or my life and this is what I choose to be. And I choose this as who I am, this is how I'm living my life, and she can either be a part of this or not [so] decide. And so she got on the wagon and came to the wedding but she was encouraging my siblings not to go.*

The second participant referred to his mother-in-law, who had attended the wedding to come across as “*magnanimous*” but was not necessarily being supportive.

*People will attend a wedding in silence protest. [They'll say to themselves,] “I will show up because it will cause an argument within the family, of me outright boycotting.” See [my mother-in-law's] sister outright boycotted and the rest of the family members, the other siblings, did pile on her and gave her crap about it. [So, she must have thought] “So, I'll attend in silent protest because my absence would be noted. I want to make sure no one is talking about me at the wedding.”*

While arguable that the above participant did not know this information about his mother-in-law, because she did not directly tell him this, in light of the remainder of the participant's interview, it appeared likely he was correct.

## **Summary**

All participants had fond memories of their weddings: their eyes lit up, and their voices rose with excitement when they spoke of the main day. Participants' experiences entering into a

same-sex marriage were positive and the society around them seemed to support a positive experience.

*It was wonderful and everyone was just so supportive and we had comments from other people about how different the wedding felt. I said, "How do you mean?" And [one friend] said, "You know everyone who was at the wedding was there for a purpose. They were all there because they supported you." .... Yeah, maybe they [were there] ... because everyone in the room now supports the same thing, right? ... So, I think we had a lot of people make that comment and I never understood why they were making it. But, maybe everyone was there unified not just for a marriage but for a same-sex marriage, [and that] makes them feel a little bit different towards each other!*

Participants also demonstrated a great deal of influence in guaranteeing success by their own choice of guests. In addition, it appeared that the wedding had a positive impact on many of the participants' own or in-law relatives and after some time this became apparent. For example, one participant whose German parents had had reservations about the participant being openly gay, saw such positive reactions at the participant's same-sex wedding that they had not raised any concerns about how public the participant was about his sexual orientation since the wedding.

Another participant had used the wedding as a way to share about his life with his relatives and to show them that he was still the same person they always knew. He also had had his father call him his son for the first time in his life and tell him that as a father, he was proud of the participant at his same-sex wedding. Additionally, he had also intentionally invited people who he knew were not fully supportive of gay relationships to give them a new perspective on

same-sex relationships and it appeared that his efforts were successful. *“We had everyone come up to us and just say what an amazing [celebration] even the homophobes and there were homophobes, and they lost themselves in the event ... how spectacular it was.”* Other participants had also noticed positive impacts. For example, one participant’s husband’s mother was glad to have a son-in-law because she had always wanted her son to get married because she believed in the institution. Another participant felt that the relationship had been much improved by marriage:

*I think the relationship between me and his family has changed, right? Because they now accept me even more as ... not just [my husband]’s boyfriend but now his husband and therefore part of the family. They accepted me and so that’s positive.*

The above descriptions of participants’ negotiations from the beginning of their relationships to marriage will shed some light into their individual experiences as well as those of gay men who choose marriage. Effort has been made to provide a balanced picture that avoids overemphasizing the positive or negative in participants’ experiences. While this chapter explored the steps in the process of marriage entry and what happened as a result, the next chapter will focus primarily on participants’ experiences being in a same-sex marriage. To that end, the focus will be given to participants’ experiences surrounding social support, recognition and how they managed these areas when applicable. Also, focus will be given to the participants’ experiences accessing human services and what participants wanted service providers to know about working with them.



## **CHAPTER 5: FINDINGS – BEING SAME-SEX MARRIED**

The findings from one-on-one interviews with 11 same-sex married gay men living in Calgary, Alberta, Canada continue to be presented here as more of a grounded description and not a theory based on the collected qualitative data. Since the previous chapter explored the process of entering into a same-sex marriage, from meeting their future husbands to their wedding days and the feedback received afterwards, this chapter will focus on the participants' experiences of being same-sex married after their weddings.

For this project, social support was an important area of exploration seven years after the legalization of same-sex marriage in Canada. The main areas of interest were the social support that participants received from family and friends, as well as experiences within work environments. Relationships with family will be explored in relation to cultural and ethnic diversity and accepting the learning curve of others, as this appeared to be crucial for participants to maintain positive social supports with others. Friends will be explored briefly as this group surprisingly appeared to create few issues. The final area within social support will be participants' experiences at work that directly connected to their same-sex marriage.

In relation to recognition of participants' same-sex marriages, areas of interest will include: name and title changes after the wedding, as well as participants' considerations of societal recognition. After that, the area of human service access will be discussed with a focus on what the same-sex married gay men, who participated in this study, believed service providers should know about working with them. In addition, an underlying process of managing risk will be used to summarize this and the preceding chapter.

## **Social Support**

Through the analysis of participants' interviews, two key themes relating to social support among family emerged: race and ethnicity, and accepting the learning curve of others. In addition, social support as it relates to friends and co-workers will also be explored in this section.

### *Diversity Issues within Families*

When participants were asked about their husband's ethnicity, five participants were in some form of interracial marriage and an additional five of the eight Caucasian participants were in intercultural marriages. Out of these latter participants, two were in a Canadian/American marriage, one participant was in a German/Scottish Canadian marriage and two participants were in English/French Canadian marriages.

Considering the above racial and cultural diversity among participants, they were asked if diversity played a role within the relationship with their now husbands. Almost all participants expressed that these differences did not currently affect the inter-marital relationship but the one Aboriginal/Asian participant acknowledged differences in perspective with his Caucasian partner, as follows: *"I think [my partner] finds it very difficult to understand why I have issues around my own race. I mean frankly to be quite honest ... I've encountered far more racial prejudice than I have gay prejudice."*

Excluding the above example, diversity issues were not a concern within the marriage itself. However, more than half of participants experienced issues relating to diversity or culture (in relation to their same-sex marriage) within their extended families. For example, for the participant with German parents, their background experiences in Nazi Germany had led, at least

for the mother, to question the safety of him being an out gay man. For a second participant, his husband's Asian father had promoted, for his son, gay affairs within a heterosexual marriage, instead of an out life. Also, the same participant questioned if his husband's mother spoke more English than she let on.

Similarly, for the two participants in English/French Canadian marriages, language issues sometimes became a barrier to connecting and building relationships with in-law relatives. Another participant had issues with his new in-laws because as he explained it, "*A typical Canadian's interpretation is that I'm either an arrogant American or breaching protocol,*" because this participant had approached his mother-in-law directly to confront her about her treatment of the participant's same-sex marriage. These points are mentioned here because they highlight that sexual orientation is not the only diversity issue relevant to same-sex marriage, but other aspects of participants' diversity also intersect and impact their experiences in meaningful ways. In short, ethnic and cultural issues may play a role in shaping the social support that participants received from their families.

#### *Accepting Learning Curves of Husbands and Relatives*

Consistent with the above observation, another topic that emerged through exploring participants' experiences entering and being in a same-sex marriage involved their willingness to accept the learning curve of husbands and relatives in relation to their own journey of acceptance of their sexual orientation. For example, while meeting a future husband was exciting and memorable, getting to know him proved, for some participants, to require being open to his areas for growth and his own restrictions or limitations about his own identity and/or level of being "out" to others. This was sometimes difficult and sometimes easy to negotiate:

*Yeah our places were very, very different in terms of our starting point [he came out through our relationship] and we had to work through a lot of that, in our first few years as well... [I had to] teach, support, bully, cajole you can apply a whole lot of verbs to that (laughs).*

Another participant had to accommodate and support his partner's concerns:

*[I agreed with him but] I wasn't allowed to come to his work and ... say that I was dating him for like the longest time because he didn't want, he didn't know how his staff would react, how the community would react. So, he's had to work [hard]. But of course now we are married and it's great and I can go in there.*

However, not all issues were resolved by marriage. For example, one participant still did not attend his husband's Christmas parties because his husband worked in a field that they did not consider gay friendly. In addition, for at least two other participants, accepting the learning curve involved accepting the level of outness that their husbands wished to have. One such participant had recently given a media interview based on his creative work, and when asked directly about his husband, he had to weigh answering interview questions with the privacy his husband had requested in very public forums. Both members of this couple were out but, the participant's husband wanted some privacy within their very public lives.

Along similar lines, another participant, who himself used the term husband, had to accept being called partner because his husband was not prepared to use the same term. The participant explained his experience as follows: *"Oh yeah, well, I suppose it could have something to do with [his] gayness too, the internalized [part]. Many people have commented on an internalized homophobia around that."* As the above examples illustrate, marriage did not

solve all issues and participants willingly accepted that their same-sex marriage was an add-on to the already existing relationship. Overall, the most important point around accepting the learning curve of husbands was that it allowed participants to avoid arguments with their spouses, while permitting continued journeys to self-acceptance along with the management of the public and private visibility of their relationships.

Without intending to ask participants about their coming out experiences, it quickly became apparent that context, what came before or while entering marriage, was needed to explain their experiences of being in a same-sex marriage. This exploration clarified that participants had accepted the learning curve of their own relatives as those individuals journeyed their way to acceptance. All participants at some level had had to accept positive and negative reactions while coming out or accept whatever level of support a relative was willing to give.

Among the negative reactions, after being physically abused by his then partner, one participant had asked his mother to come and help him but she refused his request. This participant explained his own reaction by saying, *“She stayed in touch, but I restricted my access.”* Another participant’s relatives, in particular his mother, had had specific reactions to his coming out:

*Well on my side of the family is absolutely the gay thing, “You’re going to hell!” [They say.] My mother threatened suicide when I was 16 years of age. She didn’t know what she did wrong or why. She was going to kill herself because she didn’t know why God punished her for giving birth to Satan’s spawn all this stupid stuff, right? I mean it still hurt to hear it but I was smart enough to realize the day I graduated high school - I’m out of this town and never coming back, and for the most part I haven’t.*

However, the remaining participants' experiences accepting the learning curve of relatives were less severe yet they still had to accommodate whatever progress was possible.

Two participants shared the following stories that illustrated that progression:

*My mom had left me a note on my pillow and it said something along the lines of, "You are our son, we love you and we always will love you, mom and dad." When I got that note; it meant that they understood and they could accept. But ... I always felt that there was some element that she had to realize what was going on. She couldn't understand the capacity either ... She'd ask me, "Are you sure you want to be like that? They have hard lives and you might get into trouble. People might not accept you," and she was asking me these questions but I said, "Mom that's fine I can't change it." So, she was always very accepting; my parents have been great for the most part, yeah absolutely.*

*[My now husband and I] went out ... and then we broke up a year later so I told my sister around [that year]. She didn't take it well, we never talked about it ever again and then in the same year, when my mom visited, I finally told her [as well] and she didn't take it very well either. But it only took [my mother] about a year to [accept]. Yeah, so I think afterwards my sister became okay too.... My mother was even my witness at my wedding!*

Additionally, participants accepted learning curves by taking into account their relatives' own background. For one participant this involved taking into account that his parents had grown up in Nazi Germany where being gay had meant "getting carted away." This participant explained that when he came out, his parents were concerned that if society's attitudes toward a

gay sexual orientation became more negative, their son may be punished similarly to what they had seen in Germany. Other participants took into account relatives' religious upbringing, age and societal context while growing up. One participant expressed these considerations as well as describing his father's progress by one telling anecdote:

*My father is very supportive within a safe environment. But, I mean and at the same time... For example, at this past Christmas we went home, and the small town where he lives, the history book was re-written. Although he included my partner sort of in the family history, he referred to him as, "My friend." I am not that angry about [it] because I know he has to live in [that] environment, where there's [sic] 900 people. I'd like it if, he was a little more open about that. But, considering his generation, [and] considering that he fully accepts my partner as a son-in-law, that's fine. I am willing to let that go.*

Along the same lines, participants sometimes had to accept whatever progress their own relatives had achieved although in some cases participants had to push the process along by confronting such relatives. One participant was direct in his approach, *"I've drawn the line in some people. I do have a very fundamentalist cousin and I knew from her religious beliefs ... that she wouldn't be terribly accepting of this nor would her husband but I read [them] the riot act."*

Other participants were equally direct with relatives:

*I came out in-between living abroad ... so I didn't have a lot of contact with [my parents.] ... So probably a year later I sat down with them and was like "Okay, how are you dealing with this?" And they got a little defensive ... but we had a good talk about it, which was good ... that kind of moved things forward a bit more. And pretty much from that point onward everything was fine.*

*Now this one aunt came to my wedding and that was great and previously in my relationship she was anti-gay, but yeah previously like 10/20 years ago. She used to make jokes in high school about people who were gay in the community and then she wrote a letter one time and said, "I heard you don't want to have anything to do with me," and I called her up and I said, "Well this is why!" And she's like, "Well listen I've changed ... you've enlightened me! I've changed! Okay." Then we can have a relationship. So, now it no longer became the gay issue.*

For one participant whose grandmother had attended the wedding, she would refer to his husband, when introducing him, as the participant's "special friend." Conversely, other participants had to accept their own relatives' circumstances. For example, one participant, who chose to stay in contact with his own family's had much to accept:

*Because of the religious background of my family, my family is religious and so our relationship was considered as invalid and so it has taken a very strong learning curve for my parents to get to a place where they are now and yet there's even now an incredible disparity in treatment amongst the children in my family depending on who their spouse happens to be and whether they are in opposite sex relation or not.*

As might be apparent from the above examples, participants placed a great deal of emphasis on their connection to their relatives. Also, what became apparent from participants' interviews was that they were willing to accept learning curves without terminating relationships, even if sometimes accepting also involved confronting. Moreover, through the analysis of the interviews, acceptance explained why most of them felt satisfied with the social support



received. However, accepting learning curves was not always successful since for one participant trying to accept his mother's learning curve (the one who threatened suicide) did not work indefinitely and in time the relationship ended.

On a similar level, meeting their spouses also meant that participants needed to begin to accept the learning curve of their future in-law relatives. This involved learning stories of support or outright rejection that their now husbands had experienced. In some cases, those stories contextualized the level of trust participants felt towards their new relatives. One participant shared a particularly telling story he had heard:

*He told me in understanding his family that ... there was an episode that they were in a drive through getting coffee and just very blasé, very casual conversation [and] there was nothing leading up to this, my husband's mother said, "Well you are going to hell. Will you like this to drink?" And I called her on it [at one point].*

This participant confronted the mother-in-law and she denied remembering the incident, at first, but at his instance she admitted she recalled it. As a result, the participant was dissatisfied with her response and forgave but remembered the experience. Additionally, another participant had been uncertain how his husband's father would react based on his reaction when his husband came out of the closet (promoting gay affairs within a heterosexual marriage).

In other cases, hearing the stories had simply led participants to accept whatever progress in-law relatives had achieved. As one participant explained it, "*now after a few years she's totally, [well] not totally, she's more accepting of it and understands what exactly we are in right?*" This religious mother-in-law had responded with stunned silence to the news of the

participant's up-coming wedding to her son, a reaction the participant described as, "*very awkward.*"

In addition, for another participant, before their wedding, his future in-laws, "*did make it clear earlier on that they weren't comfortable with us staying [the night at their house].*" This point had never been brought up again, so the participant did not know where the in-laws stood on the issue that day. Also, these same in-laws had not come to the participant's same-sex wedding but the current relationship was close and involved the participant making regular visits to the in-laws home, one even occurring earlier on the day of the participant's interview. The important point about accepting the learning curve of in-law relatives was that similarly to their own relatives, it allowed participants to continue relationships that in time became fully, or somewhat more supportive.

Even though the majority of participants had at least cordial relationships with their new in-laws, this was not the case for everyone. One participant had no contact with new in-laws because his husband had little contact with his own relatives. Another participant, the only one who clearly articulated polite but unaccepting interactions with in-laws, explained, "*I've seen within my in-laws and the extended family that privately they'll accept our marriage, publically 'Please dear God don't bring it up.' So I start seeing how we've traded away certain things [by staying in contact].*" It must be acknowledged that participants had less control over whether to accept the learning curve of in-law relatives because sometimes those choices were made by their husband's desire to maintain those relationships.

To this point in this chapter, participants' experiences have been analyzed through the use of accepting the learning curve of their husbands and others as a metaphor and explanation of the

positive social support participants experienced. It must be acknowledged that this idea of accepting the learning curve of others is not being used to imply that participants were not willing to outright terminate relationships with relatives. However, as became apparent through the participants' stories, sometimes not seeing relatives again at family reunions or other weddings was not always possible. For example, one participant had the opportunity to be *civil to the unaccepting*, a relative who had rejected their wedding invitation:

*And now some years later she's made overtures to being friendly again and funnily enough two years ago ... my husband and I went to a wedding ... and she went to that wedding and she was so happy to see us there because she didn't know anybody ... she was quite congenial so (laughs) it was very odd.*

It is arguable that the above example lends further support to the idea of accepting learning curves when a relationship may not have a definitive end with relatives.

#### *Social Support from Friends was Very Positive*

The analysis of participants' interviews clearly revealed that receiving social support from friends was not an issue. This was the case because friends were self-selected and, as such, participants had a great deal of control over, who they chose to be friends with. Participants had particular criteria for their friendships and these included: (a) accepting the participant, (b) accepting the participant's husband, and (c) accepting their sexual orientation. One participant expressed additional criteria, "*Yeah [the friendship] wouldn't continue, absolutely not and they have to be accepting of gays and of people that [are same-sex] married - guys ... because... it all comes as one obviously.*" In addition, surrounding friends, a theme related to *becoming a novelty* was acknowledged by some participants. One participant clearly articulated this experience, "*I*

*think some people, some of our friends they became closer [to us] as a result of it. Closer I'll say that we were a bit of a novelty! (Laughs) They wanted to collect their first married gay couple!"* However, in spite of the mostly positive reactions participants received, one participant was hurt but later restarted a friendship with a gay friend who had missed the wedding without a response:

*It wasn't anything negative to gayness; it was negative to marriage [itself]. Yea, so that's the only friend that we had the issues with. It wasn't an issue [but] I was offended and hurt ... when I didn't receive a response ... but water under the bridge now.*

As the above quote illustrates, in spite of having specific criteria around friendship including acceptance of the marriage, the only participant rejected by a friend was willing to listen to an explanation and reconsider renewing the relationship.

#### *Ensuring Social Support at Work was demanding*

Some participants had had negative experiences at work and those experiences made it clear that ensuring social support within work environments was complicated. One had been unfairly fired from his job partially related to his same-sex marriage and won a financial settlement, while another had agonized over the possibility of coming out at work because he worked for a religious organization. A third participant had quit his job after being betrayed by a colleague who did not approve of the participant's sexual orientation and made negative comments about him behind his back.

*[In the end I quit my job but the problems started when] the person that I was personally dealing with here in Calgary ... asked me who my wife was and I said, "Well I'm in a same-sex marriage" ... [Soon after] he called my reference, ... "Well, what's going to*

*happen? [Is] this guy going to bring a bunch of gay people in my office? And are they going to become agents? ... And are they going to take over the office? And this ... was withheld from me for about six months [of hell] ...*

A fourth participant had been reprimanded for sharing too much information on social media:

*In my [students' evaluation] comments ... there was one guy who had a comment saying that he saw on my Facebook page that I was married to a man, and that he shouldn't be exposed to that. And I mean then I got some flack [from my supervisor] for him being able to find that on my Facebook page. But my Facebook page is closed down and the only things that you can see on it are like, my name, that I'm married to my husband and where I went to school. And that's the only information that's available there so it's not like its open and frankly I don't think that there's anything wrong with any of that so that was all kind of icky.*

Taking into account the above examples, unlike the level of control participants exerted over relationships with family and friends, they needed to be more cautious at work. As one participant explained it, “[Acceptance]’s only negotiable if it’s a work relationship that you couldn’t sever because you have business to do.” Yet, in spite of the above issues most participants were currently in more supportive work environments. This had been achieved by changing jobs or purposely seeking more accepting work environments.

Benchmarking relationships was the first strategy that participants used at work to promote gaining social support. In other words, they had to decide what the closeness and level of contact of the work relationship would be and how much information would be needed.

*Now if we just work closely together and ... some of the projects I've worked on in the past are big and they take months, which mean lots of long hours working and getting together for meals and stuff like that and families are discussed and professional life includes some level of personal life. And so, I don't hide the fact that I don't have a wife and I don't have kids that I have a husband.*

*The only area where it seems to be an issue whether it is married or common law is with my partner and some of his clients who he won't tell because he knows they are right wing religious type people and he is concerned that they wouldn't like the concept and there is no need to tell them and so he just doesn't.*

The second strategy participants used was to ensure social support at work was to *create supportive others* before disclosing their sexual orientation or same-sex marriage. The goal of this strategy was to ensure that the co-worker would be accepting before providing more personal information.

*But in business or work usually I won't come out for quite a while until, like I said, I know them fairly well and, as importantly, they know me fairly well so that if I decide to tell them or if it comes up for whatever reason they are less likely to rely on stereotypes because then they know me better already. But the question of do they see you different if you are married same-sex vs. opposite sex, there's that potential.*

Furthermore, participants created supportive others by assessing statuses within the work environment. Statuses were of little concern when both the work colleague and the participant were in a similar status position. However, when there was uncertainty about the acceptance

level of equal status co-workers the next strategy became to develop supportive higher status allies to resolve the uncertainty, “*Yeah I just figured even the owner, the founder of the company, knows [and is accepting]. So, anybody that got hired afterwards... I would say, “By the way, [I am gay] ta, ta!”*”

Moreover, another strategy to ensure social support was to control the work environment. One way this was achieved was to work from home. This was the case for a couple of participants who were aware that this arrangement minimized occurrences of rejection and protected them from interactions with co-workers that they may not choose as contacts. However, one of these participants was concerned about what it would mean to return to the workforce in Calgary.

*I might end up trying to apply for a job that is an oil and gas company and [I] might be working in a group of people that are maybe redneck. So what do I do? I do think that may present a little bit of a challenge.*

In addition, another way to control the work environment was to ensure the participant himself had the highest status possible within the company. One participant yearned to becoming the boss because he hoped this would provide more control and resolve any uncertainty around acceptance of his same-sex marriage and sexual orientation within work environments.

*I wouldn't work in a company. ... No, I would have my own company. It would have other professionals working for me. ... I would [be] the leader of the company and then I can set the culture.*

Another participant was already the employer and he acknowledged the freedom inherent in being the boss and setting the tone at work.

*I am completely out ... I do it on purpose, because I know they can't do anything about it. I'd like to be able to say, "Oh I'm so brave!" But, it's not that. I just know my situation. I'm the employer, I set the tone and that's something I've learned even here. You set the tone and everybody follows suit because people are quite lemming like. Often, they do what the people around them [do].*

As the above section illustrates, participants' social supports could be affected by diversity issues and their willingness to accept the learning curve of husband's and relatives. From the analysis of data, participants' friends emerged as very supportive and this was due in no small part to the carefully selected nature of those relationships. Moreover, social support at work was more complicated than in any other area of participants' lives and this may not have been surprising due to the more superficial and less controllable nature of those interactions.

### **Recognition**

A second area of interest for this project was if participants felt recognized in their status as same-sex marriage gay men. Recognition for participants emerged in four different areas: recognition within the relationship, recognition with family and friends, and being recognized within work environments. Also, participants shared concerns around their own experience with societal recognition.

#### *Recognizing the Marriage as a Couple*

In relation to recognition of their marriage, participants' use of titles emerged as a way they could choose to recognize their own relationship. Through their choice of titles participants



demonstrated different priorities around acknowledging their new married status. This became evident as participants disclosed if they had changed their last names after the wedding. Only one participant legally changed his last name to that of his husband. This participant had to travel to the United States to formally change it because he wanted the new last name to be legal across borders. Conversely, participants' reasons for not changing their last names ranged from wanting to avoid the paperwork required (out of these, one participant even decided to keep separate bank accounts), to not being able to agree on what last name to use or if they wanted to hyphenate them. At least one participant creatively attempted to persuade his spouse and another made his decision primarily based on philosophically not agreeing with the practice.

*Yea, we did not change our last names, we didn't fuse them, we just kept our names so that we talked about it but we decided in the end it is just much more practical to stay with the name you have, but my sister never changed her name either. I personally/philosophically do not believe people should change their names when they get married.*

As the above description and quote illustrate, participants were aware that culturally there may be some expectation to consider last name changes after a wedding but in spite of this, the gay men who participated in this study, did not follow it. Moreover, participants were asked what titles (husband, spouse or partner) they used to refer to one another. Their responses broke down as follows: six used the word husband only, three used husband, spouse and/or partner interchangeably and two used partner only to a ratio of six-three-two. As these numbers demonstrate, participants did not wish to uniformly label their relationship and their reasons for choosing terms to call themselves varied.

Moreover, participants' reasons for choosing the term husband revolved around making it a point of pride, and clarifying the nature of the relationship to others.

*We actually started pretty much calling one another husbands right away just because it's the easiest clearest word that conveys exactly the relationship that we have because ... immediate in the word is you're married. That's status is conferred by marriage only so when referring to ourselves to third parties ... we use the word husbands about each other.*

For three participants who chose to use the terms husband/partner/spouse interchangeably, their choice revolved around flexibility or the comfort level of those around them. As one participant explained it, *"Yeah, some people refer to [him as] your husband, which I still can't, [well] neither of us can wrap our minds around that, because it is a heterosexual concept, so spouse seems more neutral, or partner."* Conversely, for the two participants who chose the term partner only, the choice revolved around their own comfort level with the term husband. As one of them explained it, *"I think we are most comfortable going with partner because when you say my husband it seems to imply the personal pronoun, implies a possession and I am uncomfortable with that."* As the above quotes illustrate participants either wished to maintain flexibility around labels or they were definitive in their choices.

#### *Recognition from Family and Friends*

Participants were asked if they felt that their marriage was recognized among their friends and family. For the most part participants felt recognized by both groups but it was desirable to dwell deeper into the nature of that recognition. As a result, participants were asked

if they had received new titles from relatives upon entering marriage to determine if recognition had taken this form within their social supports.

The idea of titles as representing recognition of a same-sex marriage was chosen because there's something either conscious or subconscious about deciding what to call someone after a wedding. For participants, six had gained titles (e.g., son-in-law, brother-in-law, grandpa, uncle). Out of these, one participant expressed one occasion when he was acknowledged by the title uncle through social media and another participant expressed how happy his mother-in-law had been to gain a new son in-law. For the remainder of participants, hearing the above terms occurred in person. One participant summed up all of these titles in his interactions with different family members. It must be noted that this participant was unique in that he seemed to experience title changes across a number of relationships while such consistency, with a few exceptions, was not the case for other participants.

*I guess some of the kids might, like his son might refer to me occasionally as, "My step-dad" but that is very infrequently, his son and my kids all accept us as a couple. And my daughter when she first had kids insisted that her kids call my partner, "grandpa [partner's name]" so I am, "grandpa [participant's name]" and he is, "grandpa [partner's name]" ... So, we just had that label. ... We are step-parents to each other's children [and] it hasn't been as defined as it would have been in a heterosexual relationship. So, some of his nephews jokingly call me, "ma tante," which means, "my aunt" because I am married to their uncle. That is all in fun. Another nephew just refers to us as, "mon oncle," "my uncle," whether [partner's name] or myself, there is some of*

*that. A lot is based by our names ... not a lot of titles that go with it ... My sister says that [my husband] is her favourite brother-in-law... So, yeah he is her only brother-in-law!*

As the above example illustrates even when a participant received a marriage related title, it did not always mean that the title of (uncle, brother-in-law, etc.) was used all the time. Also for the remaining participants, title changes were not consistent across all relatives on both sides of the family. Thus, it became unpredictable if a particular type of relative would be willing to acknowledge the relationship as a marriage, through using titles.

On a different level, close to half the participants had not received new titles at all from relatives but, instead were only called by their first names post-marriage. As one participant explained it, *“Yea, so the titles would be carefully not used. I think that would be a difference between my siblings and our marriage ... it would be his first name yeah so there would be an absence of titles.”*

As the above examples illustrate, inquiring about titles changes for participants uncovered that recognition of their marriage may have been elusive since even after interacting with their own families, differential title use had not become apparent to participants. Conversely, other participants who had not received any titles identified alternative ways that recognition had taken place. For one participant his father had previous referred to the couple as his sons and another participant’s mother-in-law had at one point mentioned becoming the participant’s mom in some way after the wedding. For a fifth participant the recognition received was unspoken.

*Ah interesting, I guess, in terms of that affirmation from my mother-in-law’s point of view putting out the wedding picture and it took until this year [7 years after the wedding] for*

*our wedding picture to be actually placed alongside their other (laughs) children's wedding pictures but that finally happened this year.*

Moreover, and along the same lines recognition was not only received but given to new-in laws. Not all participants had living parents or in-laws or had brothers and sisters but, even when such individuals were available most participants referred to them as for example "my husband's mother," "my husband's father," and "my husband's brother or sister."

At least two participants acknowledged avoiding calling their mothers-in-law anything when speaking to them directly. Also a couple of participants did not know what titles to use with their mother-in-laws because of previous rejection they had received. One participant whose parents-in-law had never been rude but had not attended the wedding simply expressed, "With my husband's parents I generally don't call them anything (laughs) because I just avoid it." Another participant was surprised by his mother-in-law acknowledgement of their connection through marriage but until that point he had not been sure what to call her.

*I mean she did mention a few months ago (long pause). How did she put it? I forgot what she was talking about and then she ended a sentence with, "well now I am your mother too in a way right?" ... That's a very good thing I mean when she didn't go to the wedding I was struggling, "How should I address you now?" ... Can I call her mom? So, I always called her grandma ...*

As the above quotes illustrate participants' histories with their in-law relatives had the potential to shape the recognition that participants were willing to give to those relatives. In addition, whether important to all parties involved, recognition of the marriage emerged as a two way process where participants were able to give as much as receive it.

Beyond their families, participants were given a scenario of being in a group and a friend introducing the couple to others in order to determine how participants were being recognized in social settings and if titles were being used. The scenario was a variation of the following: you are in a group and your friend introduces you to someone else. Your friend says, "*This is Tina and her husband Mark, this is Steve and his wife Joan, and this is ... and ...? How would your friend acknowledge your husband and you?*" In response, most participants said they did not know the answer, one participant said that titles were not important within his group of friends and most participants stated that they and their husbands would be introduced only by their first names even if other people received titles.

In addition, when asked what they thought an explanation of this might be most participants did not know but some stated that they expected their friends may have been making that choice based on the comfort of everyone present. Participants were okay allowing their friends to make that decision for them. When asked if they would feel outed by being introduced as husbands in a public setting, one participant stated that he would not care and that his friends should not care either because the participant and their husband were out already. The remainder of participants were indifferent about these risks and thought that having their friends know about the nature of the relationship was sufficient. They also emphasized that acknowledging the relationship to third parties, in this way, was not needed. So, in essence, while participants themselves had not considered the titles being used by their friends before their one-on-one interview, their responses revealed their willingness to allow room for the comfort level of others to determine their behaviour.

### *Being identified within work environments*

The idea of being recognized within work environments become more about *being identified* as married. This idea emerged because participants' relationships with their work colleagues were more superficial and as a result opportunities for recognition were different than with friends and family. Almost all participants wore wedding rings, and often wearing them led to being asked about wives by co-workers and determining how much information was needed.

*No, no because even amongst the cohort [at work], I mean even in the language that they use, they talk of me being with my wife ... They make that assumption and... At times I have energy to correct and at times I don't, right?*

For one participant the idea of being identified as heterosexually married through a wedding ring was not appealing, *"Yeah, it's identifying me as a heterosexual male ugh? [Maybe] I should get rid of this thing!"* Another participant was teased by his husband for wearing the ring on his right hand as customary in German culture. His husband teased, *"You are doing that just so people think you are not married!" But actually, to me, it feels right on this hand.*" As may be apparent by these examples being recognized at work was less about, for example, receiving a title and more about being acknowledged by the wrong title. The reason this was important is that participants did not always care to share such information with co-workers and correcting the wrong title would require additional work for participants.

### *Societal Recognition*

From participants' interviews, societal recognition emerged as a very important theme because of how it could impact participants' choices of where they would live and how they would travel. As has already been mentioned, two of the participants for this study were married

to one another and in a Canadian/American marriage. For them, their choice of residency was predetermined, *“Yeah, our location we live [in] is impacted by our marriage.”* In other words, they did not have the option to live in the United States because they had no partner rights to make a claim in that country.

Moreover, for participants international recognition of their same-sex marriage often disappeared at the border. In this regard, the United States’ border emerged as one of the most contentious places to manage risk for almost all the participants - and even if they had not tried to cross it they were prepared for a negative experience. One participant expressed it as, *“Oh and it’s scary too like you don’t just say ‘oh my husband’ without your heart racing 100 times ... Like when we go through customs every time now, it is just a horrible experience.”* Another participant felt he had been treated rudely at the border and had been asked to go back in line when they had tried to approach the immigration desk together.

Another participant acknowledged feeling strange at some airports with rights on one side of the counter but not on the other. A third participant was aware that, *“If you put up too much of a stink they’ll turn you away so we haven’t tested that out.”* A fourth participant took a unique approach to handling the experience:

*When we go through customs every time now it is just a horrible experience and they basically tell us the minute we step into the United States you are not married and I can’t walk through customs with him next to me because they don’t recognize it. ... They said, “Go back in line, change your form, you are only travelling with zero family member not one.” I said, “I am married.” [Then, he said,] “Well in the United States you are not married” and I was like, “Are you kidding me?” So I had to go and scratch out my form.*



... [When I went back another agent said,] “Why did you scratch out your form?”

“Because the guy over there told me I am not married” and then ... they just go into all these [questions]. “What do you mean you are not married?” and I am like, (sighs) what’s going on with Americans! There are a lot of aspects that still need [to] change.

It must be added that one participant who had travelled to the United States fairly regularly acknowledged that recently he had been able to drive through the border with his husband as a household (same address) and bypassing the word family.

On a broader level, issues around recognition had led some participants to make specific choices around travel. One participant acknowledged that he would no longer be travelling to the Caribbean because he found it too homophobic. Another participant questioned the ethics of travelling to places where they had no rights as a couple. Yet, some participants seemed to travel to a great variety of places from Asia, to the Middle East to Europe among others where they knew their rights would be non-existent or not guaranteed. However, one approach consistent for most, though not all participants was *staying invisible* while travelling. In essence, they would be careful not to use personal displays of affection or anything that might identify them. Moreover, a noteworthy exception was that one participant who had a child and acknowledged travelling through Asia and introducing themselves as spouses in all hotels, airports, restaurants and businesses where they went as a family. Participants may have made these different choices because they were willing to manage the risk associated with being visible differently, depending on their own perspectives.

As the above examples illustrate while recognition of same-sex marriages is available to same-sex couples by having the right to marry, said recognition may end at the border. This

may cause Canadian same-sex married couples to adapt their perspective and remember where they are in the world. One participant comically referred to this feeling as, *“It did give me some pause and made me realize that, Dorothy you are not in Oz anymore [a magical land] you are in Kansas!”*

As illustrated by this section recognition of participants could cover broad areas of their lives and each area varied in terms of the level of control that participants had when handling the recognition of their same-sex marriages. Overall examining participants’ marriage recognition yielded areas that illustrated the subtle, specific, controllable and uncontrollable forms that recognition could take in their lives.

### **Service Access**

The third area of interest for this project was related to human service access. Participants were asked if they had accessed human services support for their relationship, however nearly all participants acknowledged not accessing such services. One participant saw this lack of access as positive, *“I am lucky that I don’t think I need anything so far because we are in a very healthy relationship.”* As a result it became necessary to explore service access more broadly.

One participant acknowledged having had issues with getting his husband on the title of their property and finding that the worker was either incompetent or lied to them because they received inaccurate information. This was the case because after visiting the agency and having a negative experience, the participant contacted the company by email and was informed that the agency always had the Commissioner of Oaths available even though he had been told by a worker, in person, that such a service was never available. After that experience, the participant

was left wondering if their same-sex marriage was the motivation for receiving inaccurate information as this information had been disclosed. Also the participant questioned a service provider's potential sabotage of a process by giving inaccurate information on purpose or by not working as hard for a particular couple.

Another participant provided an example where accessing services meant he had to come out to the service provider. This made controlling his level of outness in that environment impossible. This occurred when he was required to show photo identification for both himself and his husband in order to receive a basic needs service:

*It was an odd experience and there was a double take in terms of the intake worker because not only do I have to describe on the intake session that we are in financial need, I have to explain I am married to a man right? And then we don't pick up the help at the same time you have to come back at a different time and so then it's like for every time we need support from the service I would have to come out two times.*

What was most noteworthy for this participant was that when he returned to receive the help the volunteer mentioned and the participant was not sure what to make of the interaction. “[She said,] ‘Oh I remember you!’ So, I don’t know if it was flavoured by, ‘oh you are the gay guy,’ right? Because why are they remembering me?” This example illustrates the uncertainty that may be possible for same-sex married gay men while accessing services that may not be completely of their own choosing because they need the help.

#### *Human Service Access*

Participants were happy and satisfied with their marriages and saw no need for additional supports. However, one participant had wanted to go for support from a human service before

but, his husband refused. *“No, [I] suggested it when there were rocky patches but, it was always kyboshed and we worked it out ourselves, yeah, and we haven’t accessed any services.”*

Another participant and his husband had chosen to reach out to services and the experience had been far from satisfactory

*And it wasn’t due to sexuality. It was just the advice that was given was too ambiguous. There wasn’t ... [not] addressing anything. We’d come, we’d sit on the couch and we’d talk. There’s nothing that comes out of it. You just listen and say, “Yeah, that sounds good” and [they say,] “You’re on the right course.” That’s it? I’m like, “Well, we’re kind of having problems here and we need some advice” and so it wasn’t... yeah, [no] direction.*

Another participant had accessed a local over-the-phone support service as an individual when he had first broken up with his now husband many years previously. The experience had left him less than enthusiastic about doing it again.

*I don’t remember now it’s been so long but, I think the reaction I got was very text book ... so I felt [like saying,] “If you reading from a textbook then you are losing me as an individual. You are not looking at me as an individual you are looking at me as what page do I fit to read out the paragraph to use so you can feel better!”*

Based on the above examples participants may have been unlikely to reach out to support services because of their previous negative experiences. In addition, because almost all participants had not reached out to human services as a couple, the intended questions about service access were changed to being more about what participants would like service providers to know about working with them.

Before covering that section, it must be acknowledged that a couple of participants said they would seek referrals from their friends or contacts before accessing a generic human service. This service access may be in general, a similar process to how they went about accessing wedding services.

#### *What Participants Want Service Providers to Know*

Over all participants believed that a gay service provider was preferred if available. As one participant explained it, *“They would almost have to be either gay or very gay friendly absolutely.”* However, if a gay service provider was not available then another type of provider would be acceptable and they hoped that such a provider would make it obvious or visible that the provider was accepting. One of the ways to make that obvious was expressed by one participant. *“It would help you if an agency or professional did like we tend to see [sometimes], a little flag on the door of some business.”*

Also, they would be willing to locate appropriate referrals to good human service provider with experience with same-sex couples as well as be or become a provider who knows the meaning of words from a gay perspective or someone willing to listen, learn, understand and be honest about what they do or do not know. Most importantly they wanted potential service providers be aware of their own preconceptions. As acknowledge by one participant, *“If they don’t know to also admit they don’t know, that they need to maybe find out more, talk to somebody or refer.”* Other participants had additional recommendations. *“The service provider has to go into that equation saying ‘what their marriage looks like could be very different than what I am used to’ so a good service provider would not come in with a lot of pre-conceptions.”*

*I would want somebody who actually counsels gay couples or had some counselling with gay couples and not because I think somebody who counsels straight couples all the time couldn't do it, I just think that there's certain shorthand [language that would help]*

As highlighted by this information, participants were capable of articulating what they would be looking for in a service provider even though most of them had not yet accessed such services to support their relationships. Participants appeared both capable and willing to manage their service access to ensure it met their needs and minimized risk through helpful or appropriate choices.

### **Summary**

As a grounded summation for this qualitative study, *the process of managing social risk* will be introduced now as a way to explain the findings from Chapters Four and Five. From the analysis of participants' interviews the process of managing social risk emerged as a three step process involving: 1) weighing the risk, 2) managing the risk, and 3) conducting a litmus test.

Based on all the information provided so far, participants could be said to be weighing the risk when they assessed the characteristics of others such as friends, family and co-workers. Assessing their characteristics usually meant taking into account potential red flags such as previous history with that person, that person's previous behaviour, their religious affiliation and conservative attitudes. Based on an overall assessment of these characteristics participants would weigh the risk of receiving acceptance and recognition or rejection from that other person.

After the initial weighing stage, participants would need to manage the risk by making a decision and taking action. Taking action was in reference to disclosure of their sexual

orientation and their same-sex marriage and then deciding whether to pursue or continue a relationship with the relative, friend or co-worker based on their reaction.

Assessing the reactions of others was conceptualized as a *litmus test* based on a comment made by one participant.

*Here's my litmus test. If you are going to refer to my husband as my friend?! When we are legally married you have failed the litmus test. I didn't choose who you married! Some of the people that you marry are absolutely repugnant! But, they are now part of the family. I've accepted them.*

A litmus test is an acidity test where a liquid is poured over a piece of paper that changes colour based on the acid content of the liquid poured over it. For this qualitative project informed by grounded theory methods, the paper was the participant's relationship with others, the liquid was the interaction taking place and the change of color was the reaction of the relative, friend or co-worker. For this conceptualization, the most important piece of the process is the reaction of others. If the reactions of relatives, friends and co-workers were positive and affirming that constituted a *pass* and the relationship would continue or become closer. However, if the reactions were negative, within the litmus test, it would be constituted as a *fail* and then the participant would need to decide to either terminate the relationship or continue it because the relationship was important.

Areas that must be further acknowledged in relation to the process of managing risk revolve around the handling of that risk. One such area was the use of titles, where participants could choose to handle the risk by choosing a very specific term such as husband or a vague one such as partner or spouse. One participant explained titles a type of short-hand, "*Before you'd*

*have to have 'the talk' cause you'd have to somehow very specifically say 'Oh by the way my partner is male therefore I'm gay.' Whereas now I just say 'my husband' and everybody knows all those things."* Moreover, participants or their husbands handled the social risk at work by choosing who to tell and how to disclose their marital status. *"Depending on the situation, if you are talking to somebody and you don't want them to know and you just want to use an ambiguous term you might use partner because straight and gay couples use partner."* Another participant's husband restricted who he told certain information, at work, and the participant respected those choices:

However, sometimes participants managed their social risk by deciding to be open with everyone because it was too difficult to be making adjustments.

*Part of it is because it's too hard. It's very difficult to sort of constantly self-censor. ... To go out on these [social functions] and never talk about your husband ... Leave the husband at home? It's too hard. So I guess in some ways I'm kind of lazy and prefer to take the easy route. And the easy route to me is just to say, "He is part of this equation" and then see [their reactions].*

While the above option was very active, participants could choose to handle the risk by being passive. This could be achieved by simply *relying on the grapevine*. This passive approach had occurred while coming out, inviting their guests for their same-sex weddings as well as while disclosing their sexual orientation to co-workers. For some participants this had continued even as they were in the process of entering into marriage. As one participant explained it, *"Still right now there are my aunts and a few of my cousins. [Actually], all my*



*cousins, I've never told them! I am sure that they know because their aunts had come to my wedding.*" Another participant had used this passive approach at work.

*Well I didn't go around and knock on everyone's door, "Guess what?" I told some people and people talk, and so people eventually find out, and then we did go to some office function together so it was out there.*

There were some purposeful elements to participants' approaches to managing their social supports. As the above points in this chapter illustrated, managing risk was an important factor underlying participants' experiences. In addition, demographical characteristics came into play based on the participants' and their relatives' inherent diversity. Also, participants' available social support was dependent on the interaction between what they were given and what they were willing to accept from friends, family and co-workers, though they had the least control over the last group. For this project, recognition of the marriage was conceptualized in terms of title use but, participants acknowledged alternative ways recognition could be expressed. In addition, implications to recognition based on societal recognition were important to participants. Lastly, for this chapter, service access for the current relationship had not occurred for the majority of participants but, some were willing to express what would be important to them if they sought them out. The recommendations given in this chapter were provided by participants.

## CHAPTER 6: DISCUSSION

Same-sex marriage has proliferated around the globe and some countries are either considering changing or have taken steps to change laws negatively affecting same-sex couples to grant them equal status to their heterosexual counterparts. In spite of these possible changes there's still much that social work can do to contribute to the lives of these men because the challenges they face have not been eradicated. Berg and Crisp (2004) on a paper discussing practice issues with sexual minorities argue that, "effective and accountable practice with sexual minorities is not a 'special interest group' issue, but a core part of the cultural competence agenda in social work" (p. 236). Also Lanutti (2005) emphasizes that when speaking of same-sex relationships, same-sex marriage should be considered, at least [sic] at some background level. Based on all the challenges remaining for sexual minorities and the responsibilities of social work, this profession is well positioned to contribute a perspective on the lives of these individuals. This may be achieved by asking the perennial social work question of "who benefits?" from the choices made in different situations. Asking this question can open up areas of exploration whereby taken-for-granted interpersonal dynamics and the implications of people's choices become visible.

With the goal of achieving this understanding, this qualitative project informed by grounded theory methods focused on the interpersonal experiences of same-sex married gay men living in Calgary, Alberta, Canada seven years after the legalization of same-sex marriage across the country. Through the use of one-on-one interviewing, this project explored participants' experiences entering and being in a same-sex marriage with a focus on providing a grounded description of their experiences with social support, recognition and service access. The goal of

this project was to promote a greater understanding of the lives of same-sex married gay men to help practitioners who may work with this population understand their unique social context and relationships.

Few North American research studies have been conducted on same-sex marriage as the focus of inquiry as opposed to as a characteristic of research participants and within a context where its legal status is unquestioned on a nationwide scale. Based on being a new area of research this grounded theory informed qualitative study was more exploratory rather than theory building in nature. Also, because it is a newer area of study, a qualitative approach was used to gather more detail than could have been achieved through quantitative measures.

This qualitative project used grounded theory methods of data collection and analysis as a way to provide more of a grounded description focus on participants' experiences. With that in mind, the following sections will discuss the process of entering into a same-sex marriage, which was the main motivation for this project, as well as other results, using the research questions as a way to ground the discussion. Comparisons to the current research literature will be made and the implications for practice will be discussed. Also, when relevant, this qualitative project will acknowledge implications of the process of managing risk that emerged from the grounded data generated from the participants' one-on-one interviews. Limitations of this project will be highlighted and potential areas of future research will be recommended. This qualitative effort will conclude with a creative synthesis (a wedding toast) that will summarize key themes that emerged from this project.

### **Process of Entering a Same-sex Marriage**

The impetus of this project was to explore the process of entering a same-sex marriage. This exploration was meant to avoid perpetuating a “hetero-normative assumption” (Roisman et al., 2008, p. 99) by interviewing same-sex married gay men in their own right while avoiding the legitimization involved in comparing them to heterosexuals. For this project, same-sex marriage was conceptualized as a new social institution. This was supported by the data because the process of entering and being in a same-sex marriage appeared to have unique characteristics such as the process of managing risk, which may be unique to sexual minorities as it relates to their sexual orientation.

Through this qualitative effort informed by grounded theory methods of data collection and analysis, the participants’ same-sex marriage entry was focused on logistical aspects of hosting an event, any event, at the risk of imposing structure onto the process. If the above choice constitutes what Glaser (1992) acknowledged as forcing instead of letting the process emerge on its own, then, making that judgement is left to the reader. It was hoped that if participants made unexpected or novel choices, such discrepancies would emerge through the semi-structured interviews and the painstaking process of coding transcripts line by line and, in some cases, comparing specific incidents from different participants with one another.

In discussing the process of same-sex marriage entry, it is pertinent to mention if choosing the institution became a coming out of sorts for participants. For the majority of them telling others about their desire to same-sex marry was not seen as a coming out because by the time of the wedding, most participants were already out to the people that mattered, mainly close family and friends. Still, as highlighted in Chapter Four, a couple of participants used the

wedding as a way to disclose their change in marital status and their sexual orientation. This was usually done through wedding invitations or announcements - , for example the one father who found out his son was gay through the wedding and another who invited relatives to the wedding without acknowledging that there would be another groom in the wedding. Similarly, co-workers that did not fit the category of friends found out primarily through the grapevine and in some cases by participants intentionally sending out wedding announcements. This aspect of the process of entering marriage resonates with research that acknowledges that level of outness can be a matter of degrees for gay men and lesbians (Griffith & Hebl, 2002). For this project participants made reference to coming out as something that “never ends;” perhaps, because disclosure would need to occur with all new individuals coming into their lives.

### **Social Support from Friends, Family and Co-workers**

*What is the level of social support same-sex married gay men receive from family, friends, and work colleagues before and after entering into a same-sex marriage?*

In examining the level of social support received by participants, an issue surrounding the research literature must be acknowledged. Dudley et al. (2005) recommend that “... addressing the social ills that foster inequalities and minority stress for same-sex couples is a health issue that deserves *relentless* [sic] research, intervention, and advocacy” (p. 76). While in complete agreement with that statement such a “relentless” focus does come at a price. As mentioned in Chapter Two, it may overemphasize an unintended focus on hardship. In line with the above observation, this researcher was initially shocked by the positive ways that participants described their social supports. This shock was based on feeling saturated by all the potential hardships available to gay men, having examined the literature before data collection. Such a shock

occurred even though I am a same-sex married gay man myself! This observation highlights that going deeply into the literature to learn about a population risks biasing perspectives towards the negative even if that result is unintended. Fortunately, for this project, during data analysis, this discrepancy led me to question what participants were doing to construct positive environments.

The current qualitative project informed by grounded theory methods of data collection and analysis endeavored to explore the social support received from family, friends and co-workers for same-sex married gay men before and after entering into a same-sex marriage. Participants' interaction with each of these groups revealed that they were purposefully managing their relationships and, in essence, shaping their social supports. This is asserted because, after 10 years or longer of being out of the closet, most participants did not wish to be surrounded by unsupportive people. They also revealed that upon entering into a same-sex marriage they had developed acceptance criteria that included acceptance of their sexual orientation, their marriages and their now husbands. Based on these observations and the finding that same-sex married gay men can be purposeful in their relationship management, this project reframes same-sex married gay men not as recipients but as purposeful crafters of their social supports.

#### *Families of Origin and Their Willingness to Be Supportive*

For this project, participants' families of origin were used to provide a distinction between their relatives and friends. With this in mind, participants' families of origin emerged as unpredictable in relation to their supportiveness. In other words, the level of support from parents, grandparents, siblings, uncles or aunts, cousins and other relatives varied widely across participants. This was consistent with studies that show that universal acceptance within families

of origin does not occur in dating relationships and gay men may need to accept whomever is supportive within that group or rely on their partner's relatives instead (Dudley et al., 2005).

Support from family members was complex and in some cases a rolodex would have been helpful for this researcher to keep track of each relative's level of support and to predict if a particular type of relative would be supportive of each participant. Also, support changed in either positive or negative ways as a direct result of the wedding or based on changing characteristics of others, such as if they became religious or acquired more conservative attitudes through the relatives' own life journey and choice of spouses.

Among the main points to emphasize around familial support were acknowledgements that for relatives being supportive came at a price. This is likely because societal negative attitudes can negatively affect both sexual minorities as well as their heterosexual allies (Silverschanz et al., 2008). For this project this awareness of costs to being supportive was acknowledged by either the participants themselves or by choices or comments relatives made around these issues. Such examples include the participant whose father acknowledged the participant's partner as a friend in the town book and the mother who complained about the public level of the wedding announcement of her son and his husband. *"You all don't understand! I have to live here!"*

#### *Friends as Supportive because Self-selected*

The research literature acknowledges gay men rely more on social support from friends than social support from family, when compared to their heterosexual counterparts (Solomon et al., 2004). Based on this and the distinction with relatives mentioned above, participants' friends emerged as a more guaranteed source of social support because of the self-selected nature of

those relationships and the possibility of writing them off if necessary. This element of being selective when choosing friends resonates with research conducted in Alaska with dating same-sex couples that described such an approach as fostering one's "protective circle" (Blumer & Murphy, 2011, p. 283). Moreover, participants acknowledged not being "dumped" by any of their friends because of entering into a same-sex marriage. This finding may further lend support to the importance of families of choice, often composed primarily of friends, after entering into a legally recognized relationship.

#### *Participants Facing Risk at Work*

For gay men, work environments can be places where they may choose to manage the visibility of their relationship and some research studies acknowledge this issue (such as Dudley et al., 2005). Similar to those studies, some of the participants for this project managed the visibility of their relationship at work to avoid discrimination. In essence, participants were managing risk to create positive work experiences. This finding is in line with research that indicates that gay men's and lesbians' job satisfaction and willingness to disclose their sexual orientation at work can be determined by work policies and the attitudes co-workers have toward sexual minorities (Griffith & Hebl, 2002).

For this project, when participants were in a subordinate position they created supportive employers before disclosure or simply avoided disclosure when not needed. Conversely, when participants were in a more equal work status with co-workers they were more willing to be selective in terms of how much information was disclosed with each particular work contact. However, for some participants a third option became one of controlling the work environment either by working from home or being the employer who set the tone. Perhaps the essential point



about work environments is that same-sex married gay men may need to be more selective in coming out at work where relationships may be more superficial and less controllable than with most friends or family.

### *Religion and its Relationship to Acceptance*

The most cited reason for being rejected for all participants was religion. This is consistent with literature that shows that religion plays a role in promoting negative experiences with others for sexual minorities (such as Dudley et al., 2005). Yet, as highlighted by Whitley (2009) it may not be religion per se but perhaps other mediating factors that may impact the degree of positive or negative attitudes towards gay men. This may have been supported within this project since, for example, one participant had a mother-in-law who had previously been a nun but was also very accepting. Moreover, the factors emphasized by Whitley (2009) include the person's level of conservatism among other characteristics. This was in line with one participant experience, whose sister missed the wedding because her husband did not know her brother, the participant, was gay or had entered into a same-sex marriage. The reason given for his sister's missing the wedding was the husband's conservative attitudes. It must be acknowledged that many, but not all, of the participants had religious connection in their backgrounds.

### **Recognition within society and at the interpersonal level**

*Do same-sex married gay men feel recognized in their status as same-sex married gay men?*

Taking into account that other studies show that a lack of legal rights can infer a lack of recognition of the relationship for same-sex couples (as highlighted by Dudley et al., 2005), it was particularly important to ask couples who have these rights if they, in fact, feel recognized.

The answer to the question sometimes brought up responses from participants such as “depends on who is doing the recognition.” In relation to the government and legal rights, all participants felt recognized in their status as same-sex married gay men. This is encouraging considering that legal recognition has been emphasized as important and likely to provide many benefits (Lannutti, 2005). Also, gaining recognition has been enthusiastically acknowledged as a great achievement by participants in other Canadian same-sex marriage studies (Alderson, 2004a; MacIntosh et al., 2010). Thus, from the perspective of legal rights on paper, the goal of recognition within the local and perhaps national context may have been achieved. An encouraging element about this finding is that this study took place in Alberta, a province that as highlighted in Chapter Two has not been known for being very gay affirming.

When the question was asked at the interpersonal level, responses became more nuanced. Recognition of the same-sex marriage could come from others but it could also be given in return when it came to relatives. The use of titles (for example, uncle, grandpa, mother-in-law, and brother-in-law) made this circular interaction visible. As highlighted in Chapter Five, even though they were given and received, the occurrence of titles was not consistent - they were avoided or at times first names were used exclusively. This may have been due in part to a lack of relationship closeness between participants and some relatives.

The importance of titles was acknowledged by participants in the MacIntosh et al. (2010) study where their predominantly lesbian sample had primarily chosen to use partner and spouse to avoid the term “wife” based on its patriarchal history. This stood in contrast to this project where the range of terms varied from husband only, husband/partner/spouse interchangeable, or partner only. As useful as titles were to this conceptualization, they must be accepted with

caution because they may not have been equally important for all individuals involved, including participants themselves.

Friends also appeared to provide participants with recognition. As a group, they had treated participants and their then partners as essentially a married couple well before marriage. For the majority of participants, friends did not verbally use relationship titles such as husband or spouse to recognize the participants' new status in social environments. But, participants did consistently acknowledge that their friends demonstrated recognition by inviting both members of the couple to events as a unit and making them both feel welcomed. Yet, this brought into question if participants were willing to *accept the learning curve of others*, including friends that may have been considered like family. Conversely, individuals at work faced less expectation from participants to recognize the relationship because many of those relationships were more superficial. In some cases, co-workers were important enough to be considered friends so they were conceptualized within that category.

Furthermore, in relation to recognition within the gay community or society at large, participants felt recognized overall. Only one of the two participants who had married around the early time of same-sex marriage legalization acknowledged being accused of trying to assimilate into heterosexual society. This is in line with a point highlighted by Alderson (2004a) around marriage perspective that sexual minorities choosing marriage might face. It is interesting that such a negative view was not acknowledged by more than one out of the 11 participants and may indicate greater acceptance for same-sex marriage within the gay community.

Moreover, some participants acknowledged that gaining recognition and equal status within society may have a cost for the gay community. From their perspective, success in gaining equality had the potential to create less need for the existence of and support from the gay community. Fully knowing that this had not occurred yet, overall, participants felt in the privileged position to either serve as role models to others or as a way to normalize same-sex relationships for heterosexuals. This is consistent with research that acknowledges both of these characteristics, through the expectations of LGBTQ community members on the impact of same-sex marriage legalization in the United States (for example Lannutti, 2005).

It must be emphasized that for some of the participants in this project, choosing marriage had felt like a political act. However, they were considerably less politically involved than some of the Canadian participants or interviewees highlighted in other work conducted with same-sex married lesbians and gay men (namely Alderson, 2004a; Lahey & Alderson, 2004). This may be the case because this project was not conducted within the context of the legalization of same-sex marriage in Canada. In other words, since marriage has been legal for a few years, it may be less politicized than when it was first legalized in Canada.

Furthermore, even though the majority of participants felt recognized within Canada, they were aware that the same rights and entitlements may not exist abroad. This finding is not surprising considering the great deal of debate going on south of the border surrounding the legalization of same-sex marriage, as was evident in the types of court cases highlighted in Chapter Two. Also, taking into account that some countries have few protections towards sexual minorities or provide little recognition for same-sex relationships this discrepancy in recognition is understandable and to be expected.

### **Service Access and Participants' Wish Lists**

*Are same-sex married gay men able to find the services they need to support their relationships?*

Taking into account that sexual minorities can face issues within their families of origin while being part of a stigmatized relationship that may include minority stress (Arm et al., 2009; Mohr & Fassinger, 2006; Otis et al., 2006 respectively) and that some service providers may be receiving little formal training to support sexual minorities (for example Alderson, 2004b), it was desirable to explore participants' service access. It would have been possible to make previous access to human service support for participants' current relationships as a selection criterion for inclusion in this study, though this was not chosen. The rationale was that it would be beneficial to explore service access as broadly as possible.

For this qualitative project, as recruiting progressed, little human service access (e.g., counselling services, basic needs services, financial support services, etc.) for the current relationship emerged and thus, the data dictated exploring how participants would locate such services and what they would expect from professionals working with them. Participants were not asked if they had ever accessed human services for any reason (i.e., while coming out) and in hindsight this would have been helpful by indicating a broader history of service access. This choice would have been supported by research that shows that members of a same-sex couples may access services for reasons related and unrelated to their current relationship (Blumer & Murphy, 2011).

As highlighted in Chapter Five participants believed that a gay service provider was preferred if available and, if not available, another type of provider would be acceptable. Perhaps, the first part of this suggestion is consistent with other studies' research participants that

acknowledge the greater likelihood of gay or lesbian counselor to empathize with their clients (for example, Blumer & Murphy, 2011).

Also, while some participants had extensive knowledge of available services, others did not, and not all participants were equally willing to discuss their expectations from service providers. Some of those who wanted to discuss their desires hoped that service providers would make their level of acceptance obvious (for example, placing an affirming sticker on their door). Both of these points support research conducted in Calgary in 2009, which highlights that social service organizations that serve the general population often fail to indicate that they are affirming environments for sexual minorities and that community members themselves may lack knowledge of local services that are available and LGBT friendly (Ayala et al., 2009).

Moreover, the participants for this project wanted human service providers that would be willing to locate appropriate referrals to service providers with experience with same-sex couples. In reference to the word “appropriate,” participants were referring to human service providers that were gay affirming. This is important because while the attitudes of helping professionals are becoming more positive (Alderson et al., 2009; Kilgore et al., 2005), human service providers may still have their own biases. For example Kissinger, Lee, Twitty and Kisner (2009) examined the perspectives of future helping professionals toward male and female sexual minorities by using the Family Environment Scale - Revised. From this scale, they found a significant correlation between a lesbian and gay non-affirming stance and a history of focus on religious issues within the family. Other research supports this connection between religion and attitudes (for example Fleischmann & Moyer, 2009) though some research questions this connection (Whitley, 2009).

In spite of the lack of consensus highlighted above, helping professional's biases such as their religious stance toward sexual orientation may contextualize the choice of referring a client if the helping professional cannot overcome such issues. So, while appropriate referral is often encouraged for clinical practitioners, some researchers criticise this practice as ultimately ineffective (such as Alderson, 2004b) and others recommend that practitioners confront their negative biases with supervisory support or with more training (Bergh & Crisp, 2004).

Furthermore, participants wanted human service providers that were willing to expand their knowledge base. Thus, as highlighted in Chapter Five, participants wanted practitioners who knew or were willing to learn the meaning of words from a gay perspective or someone willing to listen, learn, understand and be honest about what they did or did not know. This recommendation is supported by research conducted in Alberta in 2009, which showed that more knowledge about sexual minorities can promote more affirming attitudes (Alderson et al., 2009). Also, participants' desire for greater knowledge from helping professionals is consistent with the cultural competency that is recommended for professionals working with sexual minorities that encompasses their personal stance, professional abilities and the practitioners' previous learning (Bergh & Crisp, 2004).

In addition, participants wanted potential human service providers who were aware of their own preconceptions. This desire from participants is agreeable with the Social Work Code of Ethics, which promotes high standards such as transparency, self-reflective practice and continual improvement of professional skills (Canadian Association of Social Workers, 2005). A point to be added about service access was participants' tendency to approach services as a consumer by seeking referrals from individuals they knew and with a sense of entitlement. This

resonates with the sense of entitlement and accountability to being out evident with same-sex couples in same-sex marriages elsewhere in Canada (MacIntosh et al., 2010). For this project, this was most obvious in participants' approach to seeking services related to planning their wedding with certainty that they could access those services as long as they could pay for them.

Participants also desired to access relationship supports in the same fashion by seeking referrals from people they knew and with a sense of certainty that they should be able to access those services. Yet, this approach was not always possible, as was highlighted by the one participant who returned to the basic needs service and was told by the volunteer working that day, "*Oh, I remember you.*" This comment left the participant wondering if he was being remembered as, "*Oh you are the gay guy.*" Perhaps the main point about this idea of approaching services as a consumer is that it would only be effective when the sexual minority accessing the service has the means to take their business elsewhere.

### **Suggestions for Working with Same-sex Married Gay Men**

In this section, effort will be made to emphasize implications of this study that can enhance the understanding of professionals working incidentally or intentionally with this population.

#### *Explore the Coming out Histories to Understand Current Social Support*

For this project, there had been no intention to ask participants about their coming out journeys. However, to explain who came to their wedding, participants needed to elaborate on their history with each person. Often these explanations served to show that some individuals had always been supportive, others had changed their perspectives but were not necessarily affirming around the time the participant came out of the closet. Participants also used these



stories to explain why some people were completely out of the picture. Listening to participants coming out stories demonstrated that they had learned a great deal about how to manage their relationships from being single and gay before getting married.

It is likely that same-sex married gay men who seek supports may have been out for some time before they choose to enter into a same-sex marriage. This statement is supported by work that indicates that gay men and lesbians who choose to marry may already be out for a long time when they have their weddings (for example Lahey & Alderson, 2004). But, even if coming out took place a long time before, counsellors are advised to not dismiss those experiences as they may still serve as important context for current issues. This is not to say that these types of clients hold grudges necessarily, though some might, but because such experiences may contextualize the trust that can be placed on others and ensure that only the most supportive people are kept as social contacts when possible or desired.

#### *Be an Ally for Gay Men and Couples*

As already highlighted, participants wanted human service providers that were ready to learn if required. A good way to accomplish this learning may be through the research literature, which may allow practitioners to become more knowledgeable about gay issues and how to support and work with this population. Also, service providers may benefit from becoming familiar with services available from the gay community or mainstream gay friendly services in their area as was highlighted by participants.

Moreover, as recommended by participants service providers may need to deal with their own attitudes and biases around gay people, which may include self-reflection and examining their own values and experiences to ensure that they can be supportive allies in working with this

population. Practitioners can play a crucial role in helping sexual minorities alleviate any harms caused by the lack of acceptance from others while purposely redirecting focus to the positive aspects of sexual minorities experience (Riggle et al., 2008).

#### *Gay Men and Gay Couples are Men First*

Participants' comments emphasized an awareness of a vulnerability to stereotypes (masculine/feminine paradigms) surrounding same-sex relationships that may, for some, bring into question the participants' masculinity. Also, they may have been vulnerable to pressures associated with most males in our society, such as being good financial contributors within a marriage. Thus, the term *men before gay* was chosen during coding for this study to emphasize the pitfall in having the word *gay* before *men* distract from the fact that having a different sexual attraction does not negate their male status.

#### *Gay Men and Couples Represent a Diverse Population*

As recommended by Berg and Crisp (2004), sexual minorities can be very diverse and practitioners should remember this as well as learn about the different contexts where they have historically faced discrimination (e.g., Nazi Germany). Moreover, this qualitative project's findings suggest that the experiences of relatives and in-laws also be taken into account when exploring sexual minorities' social supports. This is suggested because relatives' and in-laws negative experiences around issues of sexual orientation can affect their willingness to be supportive. An example of this was the participant whose mother had grown up in the aftermath of Nazi Germany and as a result she had questioned her son around the safety of being an out gay male.

Also, in line with the first part of the above recommendation, while the majority of participants in this study were Caucasian, there was diversity in their life context through either the partners they had chosen, language barriers, and cross cultural expectations (i.e. American/Canadian). With this in mind, practitioners are encouraged to avoid homogenizing gay men by dismissing aspect of their diversity that may not be readily apparent because such factors may further contextualize the supports that may be available to them.

### *Become Visible to Sexual Minorities*

Becoming visible to sexual minorities involves making a purposeful effort to become findable and recognizable. Embracing both of these elements may require human service providers and agencies to find ways to advertise their accepting stance. It may not be enough to know in your head or within agency policies that you are accepting. Becoming visible may require human service providers and agencies to come out as allies by perhaps taking note from participants' ways to find services for their wedding. For this project, at least one participant was swayed to choose a marriage commissioner based on having photos of same-sex couples on their website. An agency or human service providers may be able to assess their own visibility by examining either their office or their website and assessing "If I was a gay person and I came into this office how would I know this is a safe environment for sexual minorities specifically?" Similarly in relation to an agency's website, "how would a sexual minority be able to recognize that this agency is accepting? Are we willing to actively seek out those individuals or do we hope to only incidentally acquire such clients?"

*Reframe Sexual Minorities as Crafters and not Just Recipients of Support*

Encouraging practitioners to get more acquainted with the literature on the lives of sexual minorities is likely to help them acquire a more informed perspective of the types of challenges faced by sexual minorities. But, while this knowledge may fuel empathy for this population, it may also draw focus away from all the skills same-sex married gay men may possess both from their gay experience and from stepping into an institution that until seven years ago in Canada was primarily heterosexual. As highlighted by this project, social support and recognition was what participants received as well as what they were willing to accept from others. Perhaps the main point to remember from this perspective is that even when sexual minorities accept less than ideal social support and recognition from others, it may not necessarily be because they have no other choice but because they may have other priorities to maintain some relationships. Also, it may be helpful to follow the advice of Riggle et al. (2008) to emphasize the creation of families of choice to de-emphasize the impact of families of origin.

*Understand the Differences within the Couple*

One of the major strategies used by participants was one of accepting the learning curve of their husbands because of mismatch in their progress to self-acceptance. This point was consistent with other literature that emphasizes the progression towards a gay identity can be a unique process for all gay men (Alderson, 2003b; Cass, 1979). Practitioners working with this population are advised to refrain from assuming that each member of the couple should be at the same level of self-acceptance because such thinking risks viewing one husband as more evolved than the other and inadvertently pass judgement. Instead, accept each person's progress and help

them determine which aspects of themselves they want to address. However, if something is detrimental to the relationship, then be willing to gently and politely confront as needed.

### **Limitations**

Charmaz' version of grounded theory was chosen to inform this qualitative project and with that choice may have come some potential limitations. One criticism of her work is that when a researcher focuses on how something is constructed, that aspect inadvertently becomes the focus of the inquiry and runs the risk of making the researcher miss the main messages of the data. Glaser (2002) emphasized this point when he condemned Charmaz' work for over-focusing on the interaction between the researcher and participant; only one of many sources of data available to the researcher. Yet, even when a focus is objectionable to someone else (Guba & Lincoln, 2005), objections raised do not completely negate the value of both sides of an argument.

Moreover, detractions from the constructivist paradigm include that the researcher may over emphasize their contributions to the research endeavour. Once again, on this point, Glaser (2002) criticized Charmaz' version because through checking that her interpretations match those of participants, she is placing her own perspective at par with theirs, something he considers both unnecessary and perhaps presumptuous. Conversely other researchers see the benefits of checking with participants as an effective way to ensure that what is seen is correct (for example Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Without a doubt, acknowledging the constructivist elements of procedures may invite criticisms that undermine the procedures' importance, but cannot negate that how conclusions are constructed impacts what is seen.

This project used a qualitative methodology based on a desire to capture greater depth and more nuanced detail of participants' experiences of entering into a same-sex marriage. Thus, quantitative methods could have enhanced this project through allowing more questions be asked from more people. For example, a questionnaire provided as an online survey could have allowed for questions about specific areas of the participants' lives (such as experiences at work, with friends, with any vendors accessed, etc.). In general, online surveys have been used successfully locally, to reach larger segments of the LGBT community (Ayala et al., 2009) and could have enhanced this project. However, this multi-method approach was not chosen since managing and collecting such data together with the qualitative elements of this project, would have been prohibitive for one student with limited time and financial resources.

An additional limitation of this qualitative project relates to the timing of the literature review. As stated earlier, this step was conducted before data collection and analysis, a choice that runs counter to the usual way of conducting grounded theory informed research. However, as acknowledged by some researchers (Backman & Kyngas, 1999; Charmaz, 2006) as well as illustrated by the choices of some projects (for example Haas, 2002) this is not always possible. Some benefit existed to collecting and analyzing data without any prior knowledge of the same-sex marriage/unions literature by limiting potential bias. However, this researcher chose not to heed this suggestion to strengthen the rationale for this qualitative project to receive ethics approval (a justification Charmaz, 2006 also acknowledges).

A further limitation of this project was that only one member of each couple was interviewed. As highlighted above, this choice may have run the risk of introducing the "pseudounilateral bias" already mentioned (Fergus et al., 2005). Thus, this project could have

benefited from having both members of a couple as participants to provide a fuller picture of their marriage, a point highlighted by the participant who requested his American husband be included.

Another limitation of this qualitative project is that the majority of participants were Caucasian. This was consistent with other sexual minority research that has named this as one of their limitations (for example Fergus et al., 2009; Riggle et al., 2008; Solomon et al., 2004). Fortunately, because the literature review had been conducted prior to data collection I was already aware of this possibility. As a way to address this issue, this project intentionally included a demographic questionnaire that incorporated questions about a husband's ethnic background. The goal of seeking such information was to yield more areas of discussion about the interaction with in-laws and provide a wider context about the family situation. However, as useful and creative as this choice was, participants' contributions about those areas were second hand unless they themselves identified as members of a particular group.

Also, ideally, I would not have used snowball and convenience sampling for this grounded theory informed project, but instead relied on theoretical sampling. Such an approach would have allowed participants to be selected entirely on their fit with the previous categories emerging from the data to enrich the detail of themes. This technique may have led to unprecedented findings that were not possible due to the realities of completing a program in a timely manner.

A further limitation of this project is that it looked at the experiences of only gay men and not lesbians, bisexual men and women, or other sexual or gender minority group. This choice was made based on: the researcher's experience working with the local sexual minority

community and his own understanding that often lesbians have more in common with other women than with gay men or other sexual minority community members. Moreover, considering that being male or female is more visible than sexual orientation, such characteristics are more likely to mediate concerns and experiences. Also, this project could have benefited from pursuing other sexual minority spouse combinations (for example gay spouse married to transgender male spouse) to provide a larger lens to examine formally recognized same-sex relationships. However, based on limited resources and time available for this project, exploring one population with slightly greater depth was chosen to maximize efforts.

### **Suggestions for Future Research**

This qualitative project informed by grounded theory methods of data collection and analysis aimed to gain some insight into the process of entering and being in same-sex marriage for gay men in Calgary, Alberta Canada. However, a larger Canadian and international focus is desirable for future research. In addition, future studies could explore this topic exclusively with same-sex married visible minority gay men to focus on areas pertinent to their experience because their difficulties may be heightened by issues around race, culture and sexual orientation (Diaz et al., 2001).

Eleven same-sex married gay men were interviewed for this study and they were all white collar professionals with a university degree or higher education. This was consistent with other research projects that consist primarily or entirely of participants with high educational attainment (for example Dudley et al., 2005). Even though effort was made to recruit participants with different educational levels, all such efforts were unsuccessful.



This study focused only on the experience of same-sex married gay men in primarily long term relationships, and did not include lesbians or other sexual minorities in shorter relationships. It may be beneficial to conduct a study with other sexual minorities as their experiences may be different than those experienced by the gay men in this study. During recruitment there was much interest from same-sex married lesbians, in greater numbers than gay men, who were interested and ready to participate. Perhaps they may be a logical next population to explore their experiences.

Moreover, because of this project's focus on rites of passage, an ethnographical approach to studying the experience of same-sex marriage entry would have been helpful. Such a focus with the use of gay culture as a reference point may have provided new rituals that did not emerge without that emphasis. Perhaps future research could use that approach to shed new light onto the process of same-sex marriage entry from a cultural perspective.

Issues of race and ethnicity in research tend to be focused on visible minorities (for example Diaz et al., 2001). However, studies with sexual minorities often cite as one of their limitations that most of their participants are Caucasian (such as Fergus et al., 2009; Riggle et al., 2008; Solomon et al., 2004). This was the case for this study. Yet, as demonstrated by this project, when exploring social support, it may be appropriate to purposely ask Caucasian participants about the ethnic and cultural background of their spouses and the relatives that come connected to their husbands. This is suggested because as became apparent through this project, sometimes interviews had progressed to the half-way point before this researcher realized that couples or relatives were immigrants or culturally diverse. It must be clarified that inquiring about relatives' backgrounds is not suggested here to racially homogenize all social support

focused research. Instead, such considerations are being promoted to further contextualize issues and enrich exploration. For example, a Caucasian individual may, at some level, be affected by ethnic minority issues through the characteristics of relatives. Thus, future projects are encouraged to, at the very least, keep these variables in mind and not dismiss them even when both members of the couple belong to the same-ethnic or cultural group.

Moreover, as mentioned in Chapter Three, analysis did not keep pace with interviewing, and when I realized that I would not be conducting analysis contiguously with data collection I was disappointed. However, for this qualitative project, grounded theory proved to be as flexible as the proponents of this approach had emphasized (such as Charmaz, 2006) because upon working with the coding steps and memoing, I realized the power of the methodology. This power involved allowing the researcher to see processes in action and said power was not neutralized based on the timing of steps. Without promoting a complete disregard for conducting grounded theory “by the book,” when issues interfere, future projects are encouraged to trust that its rigorous steps can transcend logistical realities and still yield a useful understandings of participants’ experiences. This may be particularly true when the research goal has a procedural and descriptive focus.

Moreover, Chapter Five acknowledged the word *risk* in reference to participants’ interactions with others at work. This was not to say that participants did not face some elements of risk with other relationships in their lives such as friends and family. Yet, these risks were perhaps lower than those encountered at work because as participants mentioned they had some control over those interactions. It may be arguable that participants were in fact managing risk when for example they benchmarked relationships before disclosing their intent to marry or their

marital status to new individuals. They may also have managed risk by terminating relationships with others, choosing titles or selectively accessing vendors. In other words, this idea of managing risk may help explain how participants' achieved such positive social support, recognition and service access while entering marriage. It is the intent of this researcher to explore this possibility through a secondary analysis of the data in a future publication. Other researchers are encouraged to consider this social risk possibility for their own research projects when working with this or any other sexual minority population.

### **Conclusion**

Gay men and other sexual minorities have had to take long journeys to gain the benefits they enjoy within Canada in 2012. As a group, they have had to overcome legal battles to gain recognition for their right to have the same entitlements as their heterosexual counterparts. Today in this country, sexual minorities enjoy equal access to marriage, adoption, and the inheritance of property. As this thesis demonstrated, for same-sex married gay men having rights on paper does not guarantee universal social support, recognition and issue-free service access.

This project owes a debt of gratitude to all the research that has been conducted on same-sex relationships and same-sex marriage with a focus on the relationships gay men have with their partners (for example Roisman et al., 2008). Also, a debt of gratitude is owed to studies that have explored the experiences of gay men and lesbians that have chosen to enter into a same-sex marriage within Canada (Alderson, 2004a; MacIntosh et al., 2010). With that in mind and by taking a qualitative focus on gay men's experiences of same sex marriage, it is hoped that this project's findings offer new insights, of some of the ways that gay men achieve positive

social supports, a sense of recognition, and successful navigation of service environments. This observation is consistent with Riggle et al. (2008) who recommend that “practitioners augment a conceptual framework aimed at meeting the challenges of a gay or lesbian identity to include identifying strengths and positive associations” (p. 215). Based on the information provided thus far, the reader may now decide if this project has made claims that are justifiable by the data provided.

Finally, rites of passage may be important to the individual undergoing them as well as to those around them. In a sense, they are invitations to provide support, recognition and in some contexts services. It is hoped that, should any professionals holding negative beliefs against sexual minorities or same-sex marriages, ever come across the information provided on these pages, their beliefs will be challenged based on the dissonant ways that sexual minorities are differentially treated in society. For those who are already supportive of sexual minorities and their rights, may these pages expand your perspective and arm you with further ways to support your work.

### **Creative Synthesis – A Wedding Toast**

Hi everyone and thank you for joining us at our wedding today at this location that was either meaningful to us or met the requirements we wanted for the size of our wedding. I know some of you have travelled far to be here, found out last minute, or were so excited you invited yourselves - ha, ha (I love you guys) - or were still deciding if you were coming until the last minute. At this time, I would like to invite you to share in a toast in celebration of our same-sex wedding!

*To my work colleagues, clients and customers,*

I choose to mention you first because you are the most unpredictable and sometimes I have less leeway with you, because even if you are unaccepting of me as a gay man or of my same-sex marriage, we still have business to do. Most of the time, I may find myself prioritizing the needs of the work by putting my personal need of being out aside, however sometimes this will not be so easy and I will need to make a different choice. This choice may involve being willing to quit my job, to sue if I have been fired unfairly or to simply tell you that I will not be doing business with you. When I see you regularly and I get to know you and you get to know me, the choice to be out to you is easier because I have a chance to learn what information is appropriate to tell you. When I interact with you infrequently, I may end up having to constantly assess risk when I am around you and this may mean that I may or may not tell you about my sexual orientation and/or my same-sex marriage. I may do this by weighing your work status in relation to mine, trying to find supports from people at the top of the company or simply by keeping both my work and personal life separate from each other.

Please know that I am more likely to be the least out with you than any other area of my life and that the way I deal with you will sometimes be one of the main differences between my husband and me. When dealing with you I may end up managing risk by weighing the risk of telling you some information, managing it by making a choice and then watching for your reaction to assess your level of acceptance based on your behaviour. For the accepting among you, I appreciate your support and for those of you that I am not sure where you stand, maybe you already know this information about me since people talk and the grapevine is always active.

*To my friends,*

I have chosen you carefully and I know in my heart that you would not be my friends if you weren't accepting of my sexual orientation, same-sex marriage and my now husband. Your support has always been invaluable to me and I was certain that none of you would dump us the day we chose to get married. What else can I say? I fully expect to become a novelty, since for most of you we may be your first gay same-sex married couple in your circle of friends. For some of you, we may become role models and advocates for gay rights/individuals and that's great. I will embrace those possibilities if they come up! I imagine that some of you did not know what to expect when coming to this same-sex wedding, whether you chose to tell me this or not. We have tried to keep it simple but still with some wow factor. We have incorporated elements to the wedding that you would understand and that are important to us, as well as some elements that will be all our own. Most importantly, we wanted this wedding to simply represent the union of two men.

*To my family,*

I would like to toast my family for being in my life, although family for me does not necessarily include everyone that is related to me by blood or marriage - for example, my conceptualization of family may exclude those who have been unsupportive of me. To those who I do consider my family, I would like to say that when your love has been unwavering and unconditional and you have protected me like a mamma bear protects her cub, you have shown me the meaning of unconditional love and for that I love you. At other times, I have had to accept each of your learning curves to the point that it has felt like I am keeping a rolodex with information about where each of you is at in your progress of accepting me as a gay man and my relationship. Sadly, I am good at this now even though I don't keep a rolodex. As I think about

it now, even when I say that I don't keep track of acceptance, I can answer those questions easily. So, I imagine that might mean that I do keep track after all.

*To my parents and new in-laws,*

Thank you for being as accepting as you can possibly be. I know you have an upbringing and background that is different from mine and you have your own challenges to consider by being connected to me. At times, I have simply been patient, but at other times I have confronted you or given you an ultimatum that you need to accept my sexual orientation as something that I cannot change and just is. Telling you I was planning to get married was met with mixed reactions as some of you were excited and others dumbfounded. I imagine you may have wondered why we needed to get married instead of just staying the way we were. After all, we have dated other men before and we have been in this dating relationship or "shacked up" for some time. Well, that changes today. I know that my previous arrangement may have made it easy for you to call my husband my "friend" and now the choice of using new titles (husband or son-in-law for example) will exist even if they are never openly acknowledged by either you or me. Also, I know the possibility exists that you will refer to my husband as *my friend* even after the wedding or you will purposely use only his first name to refer to him. If this happens, I will try to be as understanding as possible. I don't want you to panic though because I may not pay that much attention to titles.

Maybe when I become aware of titles as a form of recognition, I may discover that you are using them and I will feel recognized and validated. But, if you are not using them at all I may feel disappointed. I hope that there will not be any disparate treatment towards my marriage and that you will recognize it the same way you do with my siblings' marriages. I know I have

no guarantee this will be the case. I imagine I may choose to rationalize that titles themselves are not that important and give you the opportunity to show me you recognize our marriage by making us feel included. Also, I may struggle with knowing what to call my new in-laws since I have never had any same-sex married role models and sometimes your previous negative behaviour will make me wonder what is appropriate. For those of you who wanted to celebrate our decision to marry and became as excited as we were, thank you! I know we would have gotten married with or without your approval, but it has meant the world to have your support.

*To my un-accepting relatives*

Now, even though they are not here I would like to say a few words directed at my un-accepting relatives as I feel they must be acknowledged. They have been an unpredictable bunch. Sometimes I felt blindsided because I did not expect their negative reactions, but that's a kettle of worms I do not intend to open since I don't have the energy to bother or it just doesn't seem important. Also, I must be honest that for some of my experiences I was able to see the red flags based on their religious affiliation and conservatism. I wish them the best and I will be polite and civil when I see them and I imagine they will do the same. I know they will be surprised by this and I hope they know that my motivation for treating them that way is that I know that the ones that have the problem is them and not me. I imagine one day I may dig around or unintentionally find out how they have betrayed me by being unaccepting of gay people or opposing the legalization of same-sex marriage (of course, for some of them I already know they have done this). However, today I can already tell you that I have not appreciated the hateful communication they have sent me about my wedding, and interestingly enough, I have received returned wedding invitations where they let me know they wanted no part in this same-



sex wedding. Some of it has been hurtful and I imagine some of them will be unable to say congratulations for our wedding, but that they may want to continue our relationship the same way it was before because they love me. I may or may not accept this. Perhaps the saddest part is that most of their reasons for rejecting my marriage will be based on religious beliefs, which at times I have wondered if they are virulent because these relatives have either caught such beliefs by choice or by the spouses they have chosen. I will try not to judge their rejection too harshly, but just know I have been gay for a while and I cannot guarantee I will have the patience to surround myself with unsupportive people. I did not choose their spouse so they do not get to choose mine.

By the way, I imagine some of you that chose to attend our wedding today will confront these un-accepting relatives and you will let them know that you think their behaviour was unacceptable. Please let me take a moment to tell you this will be validating of my choice to marry, so thank you.

*Now to my relatives in general,*

While I have tried to choose my wedding guests carefully, I know the possibility exists that some of you may be here in silent protest. Meaning that you don't agree with this wedding, but are here making an appearance or you have covertly discouraged other relatives from attending this wedding even though you did not do this openly. Taking that position has been your choice and I am sure I will find out about it at some point. And when I do it will be my turn to make my choice as to whether or not to continue to have you in my life. Just like at different times before the wedding I chose to show some of you the door but chose to keep others because you were so important to me. I think at some level I keep hoping the unsupportive will change

because I may be willing to go down that road again so long as they prove to me that they have changed.

I am grateful for having lived as a gay man before I married, as I learned much from that experience. I learned to be able to tell the reactions of others and to watch the wheels turn in people's heads, which will serve me well in the future when I want to disclose my marital status. At times I have learned to withhold information until the other person, or I, are ready. At other times, I have simply blurted out information about my sexual orientation. I suppose sometimes I end up assessing and handling risk as a way to navigate a social world that has few guarantees because I am not always able to predict the reactions of others.

*To my husband,*

I would like to thank my husband for his love and companionship and for teaching me about patience and understanding. This is because sometimes I have needed to accept your learning curve around your sexual orientation and at times I have needed to accept how out you are willing or able to be. In addition, I am grateful that sometimes you have done the same for me, and at other times we have decided together around the visibility of our relationship. Granted, we don't always agree. Also, I would like to thank you for communicating with me about how we share tasks and finances.

Once again, to my former fiancé, I will choose what term to call you starting today. Please know that I may make my choice based on personal comfort, habit or the location. Please know that while I may choose to call you any number of titles (my husband, my spouse, my partner, my other half and many others) regardless of my choice I love you and I look forward to our life together. We both know that it will be a life without guarantees of universal acceptance

but I know we are committed to sticking it through, to seeing what's on the other side of bad so if things get really bad, our commitment is to stick through that. I love you.

Please raise your glass with us and to all of this I say, cheers!

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## **APPENDIX A: PARTICIPANT EMAIL INVITATION**

Subject: Seeking participants for a study on the experiences of same-sex married gay men in Calgary

My name is Edwin Morales. I am a Masters of Social Work student at the University of Calgary. I am currently conducting research on the experience of being a same-sex married gay male in Calgary. This project has received approval from The University of Calgary's Conjoint Faculties Research Ethics Board.

### **What is the purpose of this study?**

The purpose of this research project is to examine the experience of being a same-sex married gay male in Calgary, five years after the legalization of same-sex marriage in Canada.

### **Who can participate?**

Any currently same-sex married gay male between 18 years of age or older who has been same-sex married for at least six months and is currently living in Calgary.

### **What will you be asked to do?**

As part of this project, you will be asked three questions to ensure you meet the requirements stated above. If you meet these requirements you will be invited to participate in a one-on-one interview lasting 1.5 - 2 hours at the University of Calgary and to complete a brief demographic questionnaire which will take 5 minutes to complete.

In addition, as part of this project, you will be asked to share about 1) the types of social support received from family, friends and colleagues before and after entering your same-sex marriage, 2) whether you have been able to find the services needed to support your relationship and 3) if you feel recognized in your role as a same-sex married gay man. Your participation will be voluntary, anonymous and confidential.

### **What will happen to the information I provide?**

The results of this study will be summarized in a final thesis manuscript and may be reported through academic publications, academic conferences or public presentation. All forms of reporting will summarize the findings of the research project and will enrich our understanding of the experiences of same-sex married gay men in Calgary.

If you have any questions about this project or you would like to participate please contact:

Edwin Morales  
MSW Candidate, University of Calgary  
Email: eemorale@ucalgary.ca

## **APPENDIX B: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS**

The work of Alderson (2004a) inspired the following questions. A great debt of gratitude is owed to his innovative Canadian and International work on the subject of same-sex marriage and for providing some of the inspiration for this project.

1. How did you and your husband/spouse meet?
2. What happened around the time you decided to get married? (When? Where? How? Dating a long time?)
3. What were your reasons for choosing marriage?
4. Were you politically involved in the movement for same-sex marriage recognition before it became legal all over Canada in 2005? If yes, what was the nature of that involvement?
5. Have there been any benefits to being legally married?
6. Any positive changes that have taken place since you were married?
7. Any negative experiences since you entered marriage?
8. Are there any challenges with being a married gay man?
9. Would some of these be the same or different from other married couples type?
10. What recommendations would you give to other couples considering entering into a same-sex marriage?

The following new questions were used for this study:

11. Any title changes that have taken place with in-laws? (Son-in-law, uncle, aunt)
12. What were your experiences like with vendors and how were they chosen?
13. Any reservations or excitement about inviting certain guests to your wedding?
14. Have any of your relationships changed since your wedding?

**APPENDIX C: DEMOGRAPHIC QUESTIONNAIRE**

|  |  |
|--|--|
| <p><i>What is your age?<br/>(Please check one)</i></p> <p>18 – 25 yrs. <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>26 – 35 yrs. <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>36 – 45 yrs. <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>46 – 55 yrs. <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>56 – 65 yrs. <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>66 or older <input type="checkbox"/></p>  | <p><i>What is the highest level of education you have completed? (Please check one)</i></p> <p>PHD <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>Medical Degree <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>Master’s Degree <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>Bachelor’s degree <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>Technical degree <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>Some university/college <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>Two-year college diploma <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>High school diploma, <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>Junior high school or <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>elementary school <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>diploma</p> |
| <p><i>What is your occupation?</i></p>   | <p><i>Overall how many years have you been together with your spouse?</i></p>  |
| <p><i>How do you identify your race/ ethnicity?<br/>(Please check one)</i></p> <p>White/Caucasian <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>Black/African Canadian <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>Asian/Pacific Islander <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>Native/Aboriginal <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>Hispanic/Latino <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>Middle Eastern/Arab <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>Biracial/Multiracial <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>Other _____</p> | <p><i>How many years have you been legally married to your spouse?</i></p> <p><i>How does your spouse identify his race/ethnicity?<br/>(Please check one)</i></p> <p>White/Caucasian <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>Black/African Canadian <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>Asian/Pacific Islander <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>Native/Aboriginal <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>Hispanic/Latino <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>Middle Eastern/Arab <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>Biracial/Multiracial <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>Other _____</p>  |

|  |   |
|--|---|
| <p><i>Have you previously been heterosexually married? (Please check one)</i></p> <p>Yes <input type="checkbox"/>                      No <input type="checkbox"/></p>   | <p><i>If yes, for how many years? (Please check one)</i></p> <p>1 – 2 yrs. <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>3 – 4 yrs. <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>5 - 6 yrs. <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>6 or more <input type="checkbox"/></p>   |
| <p><i>Are you the parent or guardian of any minor or grown children? (Please check one)</i></p> <p>Yes <input type="checkbox"/>                      No <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p><i>Is your partner the parent or guardian of any minor or grown children? (Please check one)</i></p> <p>Yes <input type="checkbox"/>                      No <input type="checkbox"/></p>  | <p><i>If yes, what is their age range? (Please check one)</i></p> <p>0 – 1 yrs. <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>2 – 3 yrs. <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>4 – 5 yrs. <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>6 – 9 yrs. <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>10 – 12 yrs. <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>13 – 18 yrs. <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>19 or older <input type="checkbox"/></p> |
| <p><i>In the last 5 years I have lived in... (Please check and identify as many as apply)</i></p> <p>Calgary or Alberta                      Yes <input type="checkbox"/>                      No <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>Another Canadian city or province                      Yes <input type="checkbox"/>                      No <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>What city or province?</p> <p>_____</p> <p>Another country                      Yes <input type="checkbox"/>                      No <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>What country or countries?</p> <p>_____</p> |   |

**APPENDIX D: ONLINE RECRUITMENT POST**

Masters of Social Work student looking for research participants on the experience of same-sex married gay men in Calgary. Same-sex married for this project refers to gay men who have signed a Civil Marriage Statement in front of a justice of the peace or another person authorized to solemnize such unions. Please Email [calgarysamesexmarriageproject@hotmail.com](mailto:calgarysamesexmarriageproject@hotmail.com) for more details. (Please direct all project inquiries to the above Email as no replies will be posted here and feel free to pass this information along to any of your contacts).

## **APPENDIX E: MAIN THEMES WITH SAME-SEX MARRIED GAY MEN**

### **Summary of Edwin's Research Findings**

Major Focus – Explore the process of entering and being in a same-sex marriage for gay men, with an emphasis on social support, recognition, and service access.

### **ENTERING SAME-SEX MARRIAGE**

**The Courtship:** (where they met)

**Dating:** Most went from friendship to dating; a couple, dated, broke-up and got back together

**Becoming Common-law:** Occurred by default of living together longer than the stipulated time (1 year), exceptions: one pre-nuptial agreement, two managed their relationship across borders, and one delayed moving-in until engagement.

**Reasons for Marriage:** Being ready, committed and in love; wanting recognition, validation, and legitimacy; making a statement or a political act, showing commitment to partner and to others; gaining social and financial clarity, and resolving immigration issues.

**The Proposal:** Decided together, proposed or were proposed to. When decided together used open communication, discussed thoughts on having children, and relationship legalities.

**Choosing the Guests:** Three motivations: the financial cost (if important), ensuring acceptance, appropriateness of guests and travel logistics. Also, invited selectively: supportive and affirming others. For one, being too selective backfired because those excluded were disappointed.

**Breaking the News:** (1) verbally telling (2) wedding invitations, and (3) word of mouth. Parents and in-laws' reactions: excitement, stunned silence, having a big fuss or one more excited than the other. Faced uncertainty based on relatives' previous behaviour. Some delayed telling until

right before the wedding, some surprised by unexpected negative reactions. All, except one, had at least one wedding invitation rejected.

**The Planning:** Kept it casual or sought all-in-one services. When separate options used, decided with partner/husband. Exceptions: one daughter, who planned out of town wedding and one surprise wedding planned without then partner.

**Accessing Services:** (Minister/Justice of the Peace; venues, sellers of: flowers, cakes, etc.).

None were unanimously chosen. All participants were selective about services accessed. Used own connections or sought referrals rather than unknown providers or approached services as a consumer, certain of vendor's reactions because if negative, vendor would lose business.

**Including Relatives or having them Meddle in Planning:** Some mentioned weddings where relatives meddled, or took over. Yet, participants and their husbands decided mainly on their own. Exceptions: daughter who planned out of town wedding; and one participant, who purposely sought out opinions from relatives. Contrast: in-laws who paid for a husband's brother's heterosexual wedding but, participant received a much smaller financial gift.

**Tying the Knot:** Most participants (except one) had requested no mention of God in their ceremonies because they were not religious. Cultural elements: hand binding, commemorative decorations, traditional clothing and celebrations, having two-spirited friend contribute a reading.

**Reactions after the Wedding:** All had fond memories and were excited when speaking of the main day. Some heard their wedding was the best their guests had ever attended because it eloquently celebrated their love with a wow-factor and in one case made concession for parents with children.

## BEING SAME-SEX MARRIED

### Social Support

#### *Diversity Potentially an Issue with Relatives*

Diversity did not affect the inter-marital relationship, except, one had differences in perspective with Caucasian partner (Aboriginal/Asian). Diversity issues: mother, who questioned safety of being a very out gay man (experiences in Nazi Germany); father-in-law, who had promoted gay affairs within a heterosexual marriage and mother-in-law who may have spoken more English than she let on (Asian). Two sometimes had language issues with in-laws (English/French Canadian). Canadian/American protocol differences (thought of as arrogant American).

#### *Accepting Learning Curves of others*

##### Accepting Husband's Learning Curve

Be open to husband's areas for growth and restrictions: one husband unwilling to use term *husband* but used *partner* instead; not attending husband's Christmas parties (work field is homophobic); not disclosing relationship at husband's work until close to marriage, allowing/agreeing with husband's desired level of outness for the relationship.

##### Accepting Own Relatives' Learning Curve

**While coming out:** staying in touch but restricting access, being rejected, allowing time for relative to accept sexual orientation; taking into account relatives' background, religious upbringing, societal context. Sometimes acceptance created by confronting others directly.

**In the present:** mostly very positive interactions but some accepted relatives' use of the term "friend" to acknowledge husband/partner, others would confront. One faced differential treatment between siblings but stayed in contact; or terminated relationships with relatives.



### Accepting In-law relatives' Learning Curve

Stories of support or rejection from husbands contextualized level of trust felt towards these relatives, accepted their improvements in acceptance from before marriage, some stayed in touch whether in-laws attended the wedding or kept distance with occasional polite interactions.

### *Friends as a Non-Issue*

Friends self-selected and had to accept: (a) the participant, (b) the husband/partner, (c) sexual orientation and d) same-sex marriage. Some had become a novelty with friends early on. One gay friend missed the wedding because he did not believe in marriage.

### *Work as a Less Controllable Environment*

Some desire equal control over work environment as they had with their friends and family. Negative experiences: fired from a job but receiving a financial settlement, agonizing over coming out at religious work environment, being betrayed at work and then “going through hell,” being reprimanded for being “too public” in social media. Protective factors: working from home, being of equal or higher status than co-workers, being the employer. Coping behaviours: benchmarking relationships, telling directly or delaying disclosure, using titles (i.e. husband) to manage outness, being visible through wedding rings.

## **Recognition**

### *Name or Title Changes after Marriage*

Only one changed his last name. Reasons for no changes: avoid paperwork, not agreeing on which last name to use or how to hyphenate, husband not persuaded to change his last name and philosophically disagreeing with practice. Terms used: husband only, husband/spouse/partner interchangeably, partner only.

### *Titles Changes*

#### Receiving Titles

Some gained titles (son-in-law, brother-in-law, grandpa, uncle); others called by first names only. Alternate recognition: partner included in father's town history book as "friend" and participant's wedding photo placed on mantle in mother-in-law's home; being acknowledged as sons by parents or in-laws. Participants asked if friends introduced them as husbands or partners to others, most said they did not know the answer. One participant said titles were not important within his group of friends. When the answer was known they would be introduced only by their first names even if others received titles (i.e. this is Tina and her husband Joe and this is Mark and Steve).

#### Giving Titles

Not all had living parents, in-laws or brothers and sisters. In-laws mostly referred to as "my husband's mother," "my husband's father," and "my husband's brother or sister". Few participants ever used father/mother/brother/sister-in-law at any point during the interview thus, recognition not only received but also given to others. Sometimes in-laws called by their first names only, titles avoided, or participant unsure what to use because in-laws did not come to the wedding.

### *Societal Recognition*

Two lived in Canada instead of the US because of available legal status. Legal marriage recognition and rights usually disappeared at the border. Border sometimes described as uncertain or "scary" and some were treated rudely. While travelling most were invisible as a couple (no PDAs etc.). One traveled with husband and their child, and was acknowledged as a

family at all hotels in Asia. Participants' willingness to manage risk abroad varied depending on their own perspectives on safety. They needed to remember where they were in the world.

### **Service Access**

#### *Counselling Service Access*

Participants were happy and satisfied with their marriages and saw no need for additional supports. One had accessed relationship counselling support but it was not helpful. Another accessed an over the phone support service, but found the support person's responses too scripted. One wanted to go to counselling but husband refused.

Because there had been little access to counselling, service access explored more broadly. One had difficulties getting his husband on the title of a property (questioned if service provider can give inaccurate information on purpose). One faced peculiar reactions from a volunteer when accessing a basic needs service and he showed identification for husband and himself.

Potential service access: Seek referrals from friends or contacts before accessing a generic counselling service. Advertisements that worked: marriage commissioner found on line, participant swayed by website's depictions of same-sex marriages. One appreciated his financial institution having advertisements portraying same-sex relationships.

#### *What Participants want Counsellors to Know?*

Over all gay service provider was preferred if available. However, if not available then another type of provider would be acceptable. Service provider characteristics: make it obvious or visible that she/he was accepting; be willing to locate appropriate referrals to good marriage counsellors with experience with same-sex couples; be or become a counsellor who knows the

meaning of words from a gay perspective; and willing to listen, learn, understand and be honest about what they do or do not know and are aware of his/her own preconceptions.

## **APPENDIX F: INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEW CONSENT FORM**

Name of Researcher, Faculty, Department, Telephone & Email:

Edwin Morales, MSW Candidate, Faculty of Social Work, (xxx) xxx-xxxx, eemorale@ucalgary.ca

### **Supervisor**

Dr. Jessica Ayala, Faculty of Social Work, (xxx) xxx-xxxx, jayala@ucalgary.ca

Title of Project:

The Experience of Being a Same-Sex Married Gay Male

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This consent form, a copy of which has been given to you, is only part of the process of informed consent. If you want more details about something mentioned here, or information not included here, you should feel free to ask. Please take the time to read this carefully and to understand any accompanying information.

The University of Calgary Conjoint Faculties Research Ethics Board has approved this research study.

### **PURPOSE OF THE STUDY:**

The purpose of this research project is to examine the experience of being a same-sex married gay male in Calgary, five years after the legalization of same-sex marriage in Canada. As part of this project, individual interviews will be conducted in order to 1) examine the levels of social support received by same-sex married gay men from family, friends and colleagues before and after entering a same-sex marriage, 2) whether same-sex married gay men are able to find the services needed to support their relationships and 3) same-sex married gay men's feelings of recognition in their role as a same-sex married gay man within the overall Canadian context. The results of this study will be summarized in a final thesis manuscript and may be reported through academic publications, academic conferences or public presentation. All forms of reporting will summarize the findings of the research project and will enrich our understanding of the experiences of same-sex married gay men.

### **WHAT WILL I BE ASKED TO DO?**

You will be asked to participate in one one-on-one interview lasting 1.5 - 2 hours at the University of Calgary and this interview will be tape recorded. During the interview you will be asked to share your experiences with and perspectives about entering and being part of a same-sex marriage. At the end of the interview you will be asked to complete a brief demographic questionnaire which will take

5 minutes to complete. This information is being collected to describe the types of participants involved in the study. This information will only be reported collectively and no personally identifying information will be included.

Also near the completion of this study, the major topics resulting from this research will be E-mailed to you for verification. At that time you will be asked to provide feedback (through E-mail) within a two week period on a voluntary basis. The reason for asking your feedback will be to ensure the final results adequately represent your experiences. Providing feedback on the interview summary is voluntary and not a requirement of your participation in this study.

Moreover, your participation is voluntary and you may withdraw your participation from this study without penalty. Also you may withdraw your participation up to two weeks after your one-on-one interview and your data will be destroyed. However if you wish to withdraw after that two week period your data will be retained as it will be already included in the analysis of the interviews from this study. Also if at any time during the interview you wish to withdraw participation the recording will be stopped. Any data collected up to that point (consent form, interview recording, demographic questionnaire) will be destroyed and none of the data will be incorporated into the study. No one except the researcher and his supervisor will be allowed to see or hear any of the answers to the questionnaire or the interview tape.

#### **WHAT TYPE OF PERSONAL INFORMATION WILL BE COLLECTED?**

Should you agree to participate, through the demographic questionnaire, you will be asked to provide your age (within a range), educational level, occupation, length of time you have been together with your spouse, length of time you have been married, your race/ethnicity and your spouse's race/ethnicity, if you have previously been heterosexually married and for how long, if you or your spouse have guardianship of any minors and their age range, and what cities, countries or provinces you have lived in for the past five years. There are no names on the questionnaire.

#### **ARE THERE RISKS OR BENEFITS IF I PARTICIPATE?**

There are no reasonably foreseeable risks to you as a participant. You will have an opportunity to share your thoughts, experiences and insights and in this way increase our knowledge about the experiences of same-sex married gay men in Calgary. This study will also contribute to the larger social work knowledge base in this area.

You will be able to stop the interview at any time. If you decide to stop, the interview can either be terminated or after a break you can continue if you desire. Also if after participating in this study you wish to discuss your emotions or experiences further, information is provided below, about services you may wish to contact for support:

**Calgary Outlink: Centre for Gender and Sexual Diversity**

**(403) 234 – 8973**

Provides support, education, resources, and networking for the GLBTQ (Gay/Lesbian/Bisexual/Transgender/Two Spirited/Questioning) and Calgary communities, as well as their family and friends.

**Out is Ok Peer and Crisis support line****1-877-688-4765**

24 hr. peer and crisis support line (1-877-Out-is-Ok)

**Calgary Distress Centre****(403) 266-1605**

24 hour crisis line because anyone from any walk of life can find themselves in crisis.

It is hoped that all the questions you will be asked through this study, will be similar to questions you may encounter in your everyday life.

**WHAT HAPPENS TO THE INFORMATION I PROVIDE?**

The results of this study will be summarized in a final thesis manuscript and may be reported through academic publications, academic conferences or public presentation. Only group information will be summarized for any presentation or publication of results. If any quotations are used for any presentation or publication your anonymity will be protected.

Only the researcher and his supervisor will have access to the raw data. Audio tapes/digital recordings will be destroyed upon successful completion of the researcher's thesis defense. Hard copies will be kept in a locked cabinet in the researcher's home for five years. Electronic data files will be kept in password protected computers and will be retained for five years, at which time files will be deleted and all discs destroyed.

**SIGNATURES (WRITTEN CONSENT)**

Your signature on this form indicates that you 1) understand to your satisfaction the information provided to you about your participation in this research project, and 2) agree to participate as a research subject.

In no way does this waive your legal rights nor release the investigators, sponsors, or involved institutions from their legal and professional responsibilities. You are free to withdraw from this research project at any time. You should feel free to ask for clarification or new information throughout your participation.

Participant's Name: (please print) \_\_\_\_\_

Participant's Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Researcher's Name: (please print) \_\_\_\_\_

Researcher's Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

**QUESTIONS/CONCERNS**

If you have any further questions or want clarification regarding this research and/or your participation, please contact:

Edwin Morales, Faculty of Social Work  
(xxx) xxx-xxxx, eemorale@ucalgary.ca

And Dr. Jessica Ayala, Faculty of Social Work,  
(xxx) xxx-xxxx, jayala@ucalgary.ca

If you have any concerns about the way you've been treated as a participant, please contact Russell Burrows, Ethics Resource Officer, Research Services, University of Calgary, at (403) 220-3782; e-mail [rburrows@ucalgary.ca](mailto:rburrows@ucalgary.ca).

A copy of this consent form has been given to you to keep for your records and reference. The investigator has kept a copy of the consent form.