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UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHAMPTON

FACULTY OF SOCIAL AND HUMAN SCIENCES

Sociology and Social Policy

Doing Coupledness: Imagining, Managing and Performing Relationality in
Contemporary Wedding and Civil Partnership Rituals

by

Katie Rose Esther Bruce

Thesis for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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ABSTRACT

FACULTY OF SOCIAL AND HUMAN SCIENCES

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DOING COUPLEDOM: IMAGINING, MANAGING AND PERFORMING
RELATIONALITY IN CONTEMPORARY WEDDING AND CIVIL PARTNERSHIP
RITUALS

By Katie Rose Esther Bruce

This thesis investigates how relationality is imagined, managed and performed by twenty-seven UK-based couples during their wedding and civil partnership rituals. The methodology involves a case study approach with eleven of the couples, who were followed through the planning of their ritual, retrospective interviews with sixteen couples and a photograph project with eight of these couples. Diversity in the sample in terms of age, gender and class allows these factors to be explored along with differences of sexuality between the couples.

Commitment rituals put relationality into sharp focus as they demand practices of inclusion and exclusion. Each chapter of analysis (The Decision to Marry, Wedding Work and The Big Day) highlights how tradition and relationality are particularly significant to an understanding of the fateful moments that commitment rituals represent. The perceived expectations of family members and friends are implicated in the performance of traditional symbols, while these symbols also provide a recognised form for these relationships to take. The Discussion chapter builds upon these ideas in drawing the key themes, of imagining, managing and performing that run through each

chapter, together in outlining a typology of strategies. This typology challenges a central idea of the reflexive modernisation thesis, as asserted particularly by Giddens (1991, 1992, 1994, 2002), that reflexivity involves the disembedding of individuals from their relational networks. In this way the research builds upon theorisations of relationality and embeddedness, particularly those developed by Smart (2007a) and Bottero (2010). The intersubjective nature of reflexivity is emphasised with the introduction of the terms 'reflexive coupledness' and 'relational reflexivity' alongside 'individual reflexivity'. 'Strategies of tradition' is also included in the typology to emphasise how meaning-constitutive tradition continues to shape ritual action. These concepts aim to be of use in future exploration of these rituals as well as in relation to other areas of personal life.

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DECLARATION OF AUTHORSHIP

I, Katie Bruce

declare that the thesis entitled

Doing Coupledness: Imagining, Managing and Performing Relationality in Contemporary Wedding and Civil Partnership Rituals

and the work presented in the thesis are both my own, and have been generated by me as the result of my own original research. I confirm that:

- this work was done wholly or mainly while in candidature for a research degree at this University;
- where any part of this thesis has previously been submitted for a degree or any other qualification at this University or any other institution, this has been clearly stated;
- where I have consulted the published work of others, this is always clearly attributed;
- where I have quoted from the work of others, the source is always given. With the exception of such quotations, this thesis is entirely my own work;
- I have acknowledged all main sources of help;
- where the thesis is based on work done by myself jointly with others, I have made clear exactly what was done by others and what I have contributed myself;
- none of this work has been published before submission

Signed:

Date:.....

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Introduction

People continue to buy into the 'traditional' white wedding and recent figures show that couples spend an average of £17,370 on their nuptials (British Social Attitudes, 2008). Tradition refers to sets of symbols or practices that are assumed to represent the only correct belief(s) and/ or practice(s) (Giddens, 1994:104). This concept is explored further at the beginning of chapter 1. The traditional wedding denotes a religious setting, bride in a long white dress, tiered cake, matching attendants, flowers, a reception and a honeymoon (Otnes and Pleck, 2003). This traditional wedding model is far from being in decline. In fact, the model is spreading to those previously excluded such as same-sex couples, pregnant brides and the previously married.

With the introduction of the Civil Partnership Act in 2004 (Women and Equality Unit, 2004) same-sex couples can now enter into civil partnerships, which have been described as marriage in all but name (BBC News, 2005). This legislation has opened up a new area of research in the UK which can build on the work on non-legal commitment ceremonies by, for example, Lewin (1998) and Shipman and Smart (2007). Marriage is also back on the political agenda, with the UK Coalition government aiming to extend marriage to same-sex couples by 2015 (Home Office, 2011). The government are also looking to remove the ban on conducting civil partnerships in religious premises, and proposing an opt-in scheme for faith groups which was put out for consultation earlier in 2011 (Home Office, 2011). Marriages and civil partnerships are important because they are not only personal events, but also social and political events of inclusion that provide access to citizenship rights denied to other types of relationships in the UK. The ways in which weddings and civil partnerships are referred to in this thesis are informed by the language use of the participants themselves and this use of particular language is reflected upon in

chapter 3 (The Decision to Marry). This thesis often utilises the heterosexualised language of 'weddings' to refer to the rituals of the same-sex couples, and indeed the Decision to Marry chapter does this in its very title. However, this is justified by the widespread use of this language by most of the same-sex couples during the interviews, who feel that this language best represents how they feel about their commitment ritual.

A huge industry surrounds the wedding ritual which perpetuates the ideology that a person's (particularly a bride's) wedding day is the most important and best day of their life, and highlights its importance as an economic event. *Bridesmaids* (2011) and *Something Borrowed* (2011) are the latest in a long line of films which represent this message. Weddings, and occasionally civil partnerships, are intruding more and more into our everyday lives in terms of being a new focus of reality television. There is now even a wedding channel. Increasingly popular programmes such as *Four Weddings*, in which four brides (with the occasional civil partner) go 'head to head in out and out wedding warfare' according to the show's description, focus exclusively on the bride (Sky, 2011). This 'wedding warfare' is encouraged by the general use of four different 'types' of bride in each programme; the 'traditional' bride who gets married in a church, the 'princess' bride who wears a huge wedding dress and spends a fortune, the 'wacky' bride who does not wear white and chooses an unusual venue such as London Zoo, and the gay bride (referred to as a bride irrespective of gender). The brides attend each other's weddings and score them on the performance of the wedding: the venue, the wedding dress, the catering and their overall presentation, with the winner receiving a free exotic honeymoon. Here wedding planning is constructed as exclusively female (with the inclusion of gay men, who are constructed as feminine brides). One exception to this focus on brides is the reality television programme *Don't Tell The Bride*. In this case couples who cannot afford the wedding of their 'dreams' are given £12,000 to pay for it as long as the

groom can organise it in three weeks with no contact with the bride. The show's format is premised on the assumption that 'wedding work' is women's work, and that therefore it would be amusing to see what would happen if a man had to manage the organisation alone. The show is centred on whether the groom can construct a wedding that lives up to the bride's imagined wedding. The climax of the show is always the moment when the bride gets shown her wedding dress. This is constructed as the most important decision that needs to be made so actually the gendered nature of weddings is not challenged by switching the focus to 'grooms', but is actually just presented for entertainment purposes.

The relatively small body of literature about wedding rituals (see, for example, Otnes & Pleck, 2003; Howard, 2003; Ingraham, 1999, 2007) has tended to focus on the industry surrounding the wedding ritual, such as on the films discussed above as well as wedding advertising and the jewellery industry, for example, with little consideration of how couples and individuals negotiate this wedding complex and make decisions (Schweingruber, Cast & Anahita, 2008). Weddings are seen to support capitalism, hegemonic heterosexuality and patriarchy, and Currie (1993:404) argues that "it is quite likely that this view of wedding customs as 'irrational' accounts for the lack of research interest in weddings". Since Currie's (1993) article, other researchers, such as Humble, Zvonkovic and Walker (2008), have turned the focus on to the couples themselves. However, even when including male partners methodologically, this research generally focuses on brides. While this may reflect the larger role that women tend to play in 'wedding work', it also serves to reinforce the sexist nature of wedding work and takes for granted the heteronormative language and assumed roles of bride, and groom without challenging them and exploring how people negotiate these roles. Heterosexual female ritualisation is focused on at the expense of heterosexual male and same-sex ritualisation and, therefore, the heterogendered nature of weddings is reinforced. This thesis

extends the focus to same-sex couples and male as well as female heterosexuals.

To date wedding research thus tends to emphasise the social construction of gender without problematising the heterosexual context within which gender is negotiated (Oswald and Suter, 2004). The appropriation of heterogendered symbols by same-sex couples, such as the white wedding dress, could actually represent more of a challenge to heteronormativity than avoiding anything seen as 'too heterosexual'. The queering of tradition both claims authenticity and resists and subverts the tradition at the same time. Thus, by moving away from a simple heterosexual versus homosexual comparison, it is hoped that this study will shed light on how heteronormativity may shape the experiences of both groups (Oswald and Suter, 2004) in addition to highlighting the relevance of other factors, such as age.

As we are surrounded by discourses of increased gender equality in the media and in much sociological theory (see chapter 1), it is important to consider the impact that these have had on weddings as they are constructed around gendered and heterosexualised scripts. This research is important because dominant ideas in sociological theory, such as Giddens' (1992) post-traditional order in which people are unconstrained by tradition and patriarchy, as apparently pioneered by gay couples, ignores the socio-cultural constraints on this supposedly all-pervasive reflexivity (Heaphy, 2008) and the importance of recognising how tradition can take a meaning-constitutive form (Gross, 2005). The reflexive modernisation thesis, led by Giddens (1991, 1992, 1994, 2002) and Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (1995, 2002) makes it difficult to account for the socio-cultural pressures to enact a normative ritual script that couples face when planning a wedding or civil partnership and the centrality of social constructions of gender and sexuality to constituting identity and influencing ritual practices. The concept of tradition is important in this thesis because the

heterogendered scripts that structure wedding rituals are referred to as such by the wedding industry and society more generally. This helps to legitimate and justify these practices without them challenging the identity and everyday practices of the participants. The pressure that couples perceive to conform to tradition is central to the analysis, as are the ways in which relational contexts intersect with notions of gender and sexuality to influence the ritualised practice. In fact, as is argued in relation to the construction of the rituals, the perceived expectations of family members and friends are implicated in the performance of traditional symbols while these symbols also provide a recognised form for these relationships to take. As Smart (2007b:672) notes "a decision to marry is a relational process". Relationality is a core concept used in this thesis to highlight how kinship ties are implicated in the identities and practices of individuals. It "is then a mode of thinking which not only influences decisions and choices, but also forms a context for the unfolding of everyday life" (Smart, 2007a: 49). It is the focus of the research question that this thesis explores:

How is relationality imagined, managed and performed in contemporary wedding and civil partnership rituals?

In order to investigate this research question, interviews were conducted with eleven case study couples (who were followed through the process of planning their wedding/civil partnership) in addition to sixteen retrospective interviews (with couples who had recently entered into a marriage/civil partnership). A photograph project was also carried out with eight of these couples. These methods will be discussed in much more detail in the Methodology chapter (chapter 2).

This thesis, while not disputing the role of the wedding industry in repackaging tradition and particularly gendered roles, considers the importance of wedding and civil partnership rituals in understanding the doing of coupledness and relationality more widely. These rituals

represent 'fateful moments' (Giddens, 1992), where relational boundaries are negotiated in the context of heterogendered traditional scripts, in the display of ritualised coupledness. This research looks beyond the roles of the individual partners to consider how coupledness is reflexively and relationally constituted in the imaginings, management and performances of these commitment rituals. Reflexivity is used to refer to as the "more or less continuous interrogation of past, present and future" by individuals, aided by the growth in reflexive resources, such as therapy, self-help manuals and television programmes" (Giddens, 1992:30). Giddens (2002) argues that reflexivity is so pervasive in late modernity that tradition must now be justified as a choice amongst a variety of options in a plural, globalised world.

This thesis investigates how and why couples decide to marry (chapter 3), how they go about the planning of their wedding/civil partnership (chapter 4) and how they construct the wedding/civil partnership ritual itself (chapter 5). Running throughout these chapters of analysis are three themes: imagining, managing and performing. Imagining as a theme is inspired by Smart's (2007a) connectedness thesis, in which she highlights the significance of the realm of the imaginary to an understanding of contemporary personal life. The imaginings of the couples encompassed cultural norms interwoven with personal hopes and desires, and the implicit and explicit expectations of others. The focus within each chapter is on what was being imagined, how it was imagined as well as who was doing the imagining. Managing is about exploring the process whereby the imaginings of different participants come together along with practical considerations, constraints and opportunities. Finally, performing refers to the enactment of the ritual practices by the couples and their family and friends. The term performance is used to capture the ongoing and dynamic nature of these practices. Here it would be useful to distinguish between the use of the term performance in this thesis and Butler's (1990) term 'performativity'. Butler (1990) focuses on how gender is enacted

through repeated performance. Gender, then, for Butler, is something that one does rather than something that one is (ibid). These ideas are useful in thinking about the ways in which gendered performances are both scripted and produced through ritualised performances by individuals in wedding and civil partnership ceremonies. However, the focus of this thesis is on the ways in which relationality is performed (as well as imagined and managed) rather than on the performances of the individual participants themselves and their individual identities.

Butler's (1990) concept of performativity does not allow for sufficient exploration of how these performances are situated within and affected by wider relationships. In contrast, Finch (2007) concentrates on conceptualising the enactment of family practices, but argues for use of the term display rather than performance. In this study, however, it is useful to combine the two and think about moments of display within the performances. Performances stretched beyond aspects that were displayed to others. The use of the terms performance and display in this thesis is reflected upon further in chapter 6.

These themes are therefore used to investigate not only the ritual symbols and practices that are displayed, but also how, behind the veneer of the ritual, these symbols and practices are imagined and managed by the ritual participants. The Decision to Marry chapter (chapter 3) looks at the meaning of marriage and civil partnership for the couples and how they came to decide to formalise their relationship in this way. The Wedding Work chapter (chapter 4) focuses on the division of wedding work labour during the planning process of the ritual and patterns noted in terms of the form that this division of labour took. The Big Day chapter (chapter 5) then examines the rituals themselves in terms of how they were constructed and experienced by the couples.

This thesis contributes to conceptualisations of wedding and civil partnership rituals in developing a typology of strategies (individual

reflexivity, reflexive coupledness, relational reflexivity and strategies of tradition) that can also be utilised in future research on personal life. The Doing Coupledness: Reflexivity and Relationality chapter (chapter 6) outlines this typology of strategies. In drawing together the three themes (imagining, managing and performing) that run through the chapters of analysis, the importance of considering the concepts of tradition and relationality in an understanding of contemporary commitment rituals is highlighted. The first strategy is that of individual reflexivity, where reflexivity is employed to construct something that reflects individual identities. However, the typology of strategies also challenges the idea that greater reflexivity involves the disembedding of individuals from their relational contexts through the introduction of the concepts of reflexive coupledness¹ and relational reflexivity. Reflexive coupledness refers to a different level of reflexivity in which the couple become a reflexive unit, rather than the coming together of two reflexive individuals as described by Giddens (1992) in his concept of pure relationship. The strategy of relational reflexivity is about how even couple relationships, described here in terms of ritualised coupledness, may not be as 'pure' as depicted and rely on wider processes of relationality. The typology also includes the term strategies of tradition to emphasise the way in which meaning-constitutive tradition is enacted and often unreflexively adopted by couples in their wedding and civil partnership rituals. Traditional symbols can be chosen, but the choice needs to be contextualised in relation to the power of traditional symbols to legitimise these ritualised choices to others. The typology aims to go some way in capturing the complexities of intimate life through sociological language that Plummer (2003) calls for. Finally, the conclusion considers the substantive and theoretical contributions of this research and also the limitations and suggestions for future studies to develop research in this area further.

¹ Credit and thanks are due to Paul Sweetman for his suggestion of the term 'reflexive coupledness'

Chapter 1: Literature Review

Introduction

This literature review considers the argument postulated by Giddens (1991), that a process of detraditionalisation is occurring in late modernity in the West, in which tradition becomes stripped of its authority and relegated to a choice amongst other options available to individuals. Giddens (1991) boldly states that due to the process of detraditionalisation, we now live in a post-traditional society. This is interesting as he rejects the idea that we live in a post-modern society. In fact, the reflexive modernisation thesis that he proposes, along with Beck (1992; 1994) and Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (1995; 1996; 2002), is more concerned with charting “movements towards new universalities and new forms of global connectedness” than privileging the postmodern emphasis on deconstruction and fragmentation (Heaphy, 2007:77). Postmodern and poststructuralist theorists, such as Bauman (2000), often point to the same societal trends, such as the way in which tradition is said to be increasingly chosen rather than inherited, but the interpretation of these trends and the perceived outcomes for contemporary individuals, differs significantly. Foucauldian theories, for example, would argue that processes of individualisation involve power and governance in terms of how intimacies become self-monitored (Heaphy, 2007). Giddens, however, sees processes of detraditionalisation and individualisation as opening up opportunities for individuals in the new post-traditional order.

This literature review focuses on Giddens, Beck and Beck-Gernsheim’s reflexive modernisation thesis for three reasons. Firstly, personal life is placed at the centre of transformations said to be occurring in late modernity, with processes such as detraditionalisation having implications for the ways in which intimate practices, such as

coupledom, are experienced. Secondly, the processes of individualisation and detraditionalisation have implications for the role of relationality in contemporary personal life due to the disembedding of individuals from traditional family relationships. Finally, this theoretical perspective is of great significance in researching weddings and civil partnerships because it makes up the dominant discourse surrounding intimacy research, and thus provides the context within which this research is undertaken. Brannen and Nilsen (2005:413-4) claim that these theories have been so uncritically accepted in the social sciences that they have not been tested adequately, and because they chime with current political discourse, they take on the mantle of 'truth'. So there is a need to explore how useful this thesis is in investigating contemporary personal life.

The literature review begins with the concept of tradition, before setting out the debates surrounding the reflexive modernisation thesis, of which Giddens' work on tradition forms a part, and, in particular the ways in which the role of tradition in contemporary society is theorised. In order to challenge this thesis and the notion that society is now post-traditional, the remaining sections of the chapter raise problems with these ideas and argue that a more complex understanding of the ways in which tradition is negotiated, perpetuated, challenged and appropriated is required. These issues, and how these different ideas can be explained and further investigated, will be the primary focus of the second part of this review.

The first challenge is that the process of detraditionalisation is not universal and that social divisions (such as gender and class) mean that while some lives are detraditionalised, others are not. The next section considers the argument that the process of detraditionalisation has not been as pervasive as is argued, and that actually tradition lives on in a meaning-constitutive form (Gross, 2005). Attention is then turned to the challenge levied at individualisation that there is a need to recognise

how connections and relationships have a bearing on social action. It will then be argued that these theoretical debates have overlooked the importance of emotion, focused as they are on rational action.

As these debates have largely concentrated on the detraditionalisation of everyday life, the specific issue of the role of tradition in rituals will be considered at the end of this review. Many other researchers investigating weddings and other commitment ceremonies (see, for example, Lewin, 1998; Schweingruber, Anahita & Berns., 2004; Humble et al., 2008) argue that tradition remains aspirational and continues to shape social action. Therefore, it is important to explore the specific ways in which ritualised coupledness has been theorised and researched. It will be argued that research in this area tends to focus on gender and neglects the heterosexual context within which gender is negotiated (Oswald and Suter, 2004). Wedding traditions are heterosexualised as well as gendered, and this thesis will investigate why these traditional symbols persist in a supposedly post-traditional society through wedding ceremonies, and why they are appropriated by same-sex couples. It is argued that a focus on universalising processes of individualisation and detraditionalisation is inadequate to understand the continued role of meaning-constitutive tradition and relationality in contemporary wedding and civil partnership rituals.

Tradition

This literature review starts with the concept of 'tradition'. Despite the widespread use of the term, both in everyday life and academic discourse, it has assumed a largely unquestioned and taken-for-granted status, much like (it is supposed) the action to which it refers. This section will consider definitions and explanations of tradition and reflect on its role in late/post modern British society.

Giddens (1994) suggests that tradition is the repetition of rituals which provide a moral and emotional binding force and presume endurance over time. Giddens (1994:104) further explores the concept by arguing that traditions are connected with a formulaic notion of truth, in that their authority lies in the assumption that they present the only correct belief(s) and/ or practice(s). In this account traditions are created through discourse. This serves to naturalise power relations and provide a source of identity for those who follow the tradition.

Thompson (1996:93) develops a more comprehensive definition of tradition, and suggests that it is made up of four aspects: the hermeneutic, normative, legitimation and identity. The hermeneutic aspect refers to the framework of understanding through which the social world is viewed by its actors, which is taken for granted and may be transmitted to the next generation, providing them with an interpretive scheme (ibid). The normative aspect refers to how beliefs and practices that are passed down can act as a normative guide for the present (ibid). The way in which tradition can serve to support the exercise of power and authority is called the legitimation aspect, and the identity aspect refers to the symbolic materials that traditions provide for the formation of individual and collective identity (ibid). Giddens' (1994) definition incorporates all of these aspects of tradition, but the analytic distinction between them is useful in considering the relationship between tradition and modernity, and the idea that tradition is declining in importance in late modernity. This thesis will be informed by the definitions of tradition discussed above, which emphasise the dynamic nature of tradition and see tradition as a framework for making sense of the world, as normative, as involving power relations, as incorporating beliefs and practices and as being a medium of identity.

Campbell (1996:162) defines tradition as "shared and acknowledged social practices; usually ones which have endured over several

generations". Giddens (2002), however, draws on Hobsbawm's (1983) notion of invented traditions to argue that it is only the appearance of endurance over time that is central to the concept of tradition. Hobsbawm (1983:1) describes how "'traditions' which appear or claim to be old are often quite recent in origin and sometimes invented". For example, he argues that the Scottish kilt was actually invented by an Englishman, and the whole concept of a Highland tradition is a retrospective invention (Trevor-Roper, 1983:15). This could be applied to weddings as traditional symbols such as the white wedding dress and the tiered wedding cake are actually a product of Victorian England (Otnes and Pleck, 2003:31). Giddens (2002) argues that as many traditions are fairly recent inventions, and are constantly invented and reinvented, their authority is due to the underlying assumption of formulaic truth rather than their endurance over time. Durkheim (in Thompson, 1992:329) himself noted how society is "constantly creating sacred things out of ordinary ones". Bell (1992) describes this process of distinguishing between the sacred and the profane as ritualisation. Ritualisation can thus 'invent' tradition by designating certain things as sacred and creating a sense of legitimised continuity with the past (ibid:89). This emphasises the dynamic and socially constructed nature of tradition, with tradition being a process open to agency and thus subject to change.

In conceptualising the relationship between the process of modernisation in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries and tradition, I argue that theorists have tended to emphasise the exposure, dissolution, reinvention and containment of tradition. Exposure, because, paradoxically, tradition is seen as a creation of modernity (Giddens, 2002). It makes no sense to speak of something as traditional prior to modernity. This is because it is precisely the lack of debate and controversy that is central to the meaning of tradition (Bauman, 1996). Bauman (1996) argues that by questioning a tradition it ceases to exist as a tradition because its authority lies in the silence that surrounds it.

Thus a process of detraditionalisation occurs in which tradition is dissolved into a choice among choices (ibid). The dissolution of tradition is emphasised by Beck (1992) who argues that modernisation in the nineteenth century occurred at the expense of tradition. However, while Giddens (1994:91) agrees that “modernity destroys tradition” he posits that although these phenomena appear to be in opposition, “for most of its history, modernity has rebuilt tradition as it has dissolved it” (ibid:56). The persistence and recreation of tradition is argued to have been essential to the legitimation of power in simple modernity (ibid). Containment refers to the suggestion that, until late modernity, detraditionalisation was largely confined to the public sphere, with a symbiosis between modernity and tradition. Modernity was dominant in the public sphere and tradition was dominant in the private sphere. However, in late modernity, detraditionalisation is said to have permeated the private sphere (Giddens, 1994). For example, Giddens (1992:137) argues that the detraditionalised ‘pure relationship’ has emerged, in which equality between partners replaces the traditional gendered roles in previous relationships. This will be explored later in the chapter.

Despite recognising the ability of traditions to adapt, Giddens (1991) argues that globalisation has facilitated a process of detraditionalisation in late modernity. Detraditionalisation is a process that is used by many (such as Giddens and Beck) to explain the current relationship between tradition and modernity. While its definition is not often made explicit (Gross, 2005) it refers both to the abandonment or reconfiguration of traditions and the decline in action justified in relation to tradition (ibid). Detraditionalisation is said to be caused by the separation of time and space, and the growth of abstract systems and institutional reflexivity (Giddens, 1991:16). The relationship between the powers of tradition and the forces of modernity has been one of the most enduring themes in Western social theory since its inception (Luke, 1996). In fact, the detraditionalisation thesis could be seen as an extension of the classical

sociological idea that over time tradition gradually declines in significance (Thompson, 1996). For example, Durkheim's (1964) distinction between mechanical and organic solidarity is used to describe the weakening of tradition as a cohesive social force through the process of industrialisation and the division of labour. However, as Thompson (1996:89) points out, this would do a disservice to the detraditionalisation thesis, which refers more to the changing status of traditions in modernity rather than their complete disappearance.

Reconstructing the Post-Traditional Order

While most theorists agree that some form of detraditionalisation has taken place, the idea of a post-traditional society is a contentious one. It would be easy to assume that by labelling contemporary Western society as post-traditional, Giddens (1991) is heralding the triumph of modernity over tradition. However, he states that this does not mean that tradition no longer exists, but instead that it becomes only one authority among others. In terms of what remains of tradition in the post-traditional order, Giddens (1994:100) suggests that in the contemporary world traditions exist in one of two frameworks. They are either discursively articulated and defended in relation to competing values or can be described as fundamentalisms (ibid). The first framework refers to the way in which tradition is no longer defended in the traditional way (Giddens, 2002). "The traditional way means defending traditional activities through their own ritual and symbolism-defending tradition through its internal claims to truth" (Giddens, 2002:43). Instead, for Giddens (2002) tradition must now be justified as a choice amongst a variety of options in a plural, globalised world. As Fee (2007:403) points out, this "hardly sounds like a tradition".

Turning now to the second framework, Giddens (2002) argues that fundamentalism does not represent the continued adherence to

tradition in late modernity, but a reaction to detraditionalisation. He describes how "fundamentalism originates from a world of crumbling traditions" and refers to the assertion of formulaic truth without regard to consequences (Giddens, 2002:4). Not all traditions retain their status in the post-traditional order, and those that do not fit into either of the frameworks discussed above become habits or relics (Giddens, 1994). Giddens (1994) argues that those traditions that have lost all tie with the formulaic truth of tradition become habits, and relics refer to those invested with meaning as examples of a transcended past. This can be likened to Charsley's (1992) concept of 'marooning', which will be discussed later in relation to ritualised tradition.

In post-traditional society, Giddens (1992) proposes that a radical transformation of intimacy has occurred, where 'confluent love' (in the form of the self-consciously conditional and revisable relationship) has replaced 'romantic love' (Giddens, 1992:61) and the 'pure relationship' (a relationship maintained for its own sake and where both partners are of equal status) has emerged (Giddens, 1992:137). The pioneers of the post-traditional order are said to be gay couples as they are not constrained by tradition or patriarchy (ibid:135). The fragmentation of tradition creates spaces in which new innovations of intimacy can appear, allowing individuals more freedom to create their own identity as they wish, rather than fitting into existing social forms (Bhattacharyya, 2002:167). Beck-Gernsheim (2002) argues that the concepts traditionally used by sociologists are in crisis as new lifestyles are emerging that do not fit into the usual categories (ibid). Giddens (2002:58) expresses this sentiment when he labels marriage a 'shell institution' as its seemingly unchanging facade masks enormous changes within the institution, such as in relation to the division of labour.

It is argued (by Giddens, 1991) that contemporary social conditions have facilitated a change in the role and function of tradition. Therefore, in

order to understand the process of detraditionalisation it needs to be contextualised in relation to concurrent trends that are said to be occurring in late modernity. This section first focuses on individualisation, which is a process often discussed alongside that of detraditionalisation. They can be seen as parallel developments because, as tradition is challenged and reconstructed, individuals are transformed into agents and forced to develop their own 'do-it-yourself-biography' (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2002:7). This leads to the increasing fragility of social forms such as the family (ibid). This can become a cyclical process whereby traditions such as marriage are then challenged by increasing individualisation. Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (2002) go as far as to argue that individualisation only makes sense in the context of detraditionalisation, and that they should be theorised together. It is due to detraditionalisation that individuals must decide for themselves how to shape their lives (Beck-Gernsheim, 2002). There is no consensus regarding which process is driving the other. For example, while Adkins (2003) suggests that the context of detraditionalisation intensifies the process of individualisation, Lash (1994) argues that individualisation is the motor of social change in the transformation from simple to reflexive modernity, as it is individualisation that has broken down the traditional structures. What is clear is that these processes are complex and intertwined.

Individualisation means both the disintegration of previously existing social forms (such as class and family) and the new demands, responsibilities, controls and constraints that are being imposed on individuals (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 1996). This does not mean that individuals become more egoistic; but that society becomes more focused on the individual (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2002). It also does not mean that people were not previously individuals (Hall, 1992:281). What has changed is the way in which individuality is lived, experienced and conceptualised (ibid). Declining rates of marriage, increasing age at first marriage, increasing divorce rates and the pluralisation of family

life are all seen both as evidence of, and also leading to, individualisation (Jamieson, 1998:32), and listed at the beginning of articles and books to both describe and explain recent social change (Lewis, 2001:251). Bauman (2000:13) defines individualisation as signalling the transformation of identity from a given into a task due to the disappearance of traditional forms of stability and identity. Individuals are now responsible for the consequences and effects of their actions, and their lives become reflexive projects of the self (Giddens, 1992). The notion of reflexivity and its relationship to the process of detraditionalisation will be considered later on in this section.

Much research that supports the individualisation thesis uses quantitative research to map changes in relationship patterns. For example, Noack and Wiik (2008) undertook a demographic study of women's choice of surname upon marriage in Norway and which factors influence name keeping. They argue that "marital name keeping practices can be understood as a barometer of gender ideology and women's standing in society" (Noack and Wiik, 2008:507). Favours egalitarian work and family roles increased the chances of a woman keeping her birth-given surname by forty-two per cent (ibid:514) and overall twenty per cent of women who married between 1980 and 2002 kept their name. The fact that more women are keeping their surname upon marriage could be seen as symbolising the greater equality and opportunity that pure relationships allow. However, name keeping alone cannot be used as evidence of gender equality. Qualitative investigation into why women keep or change their surname after marriage would help gain a deeper understanding and perhaps warrant the conclusions drawn by Noack and Wiik (2008) because it is what keeping or changing their surname symbolises for the women in the study which really reveals its sociological significance. This could be used to add weight to the arguments of the reflexive modernisation theorists, but what can be concluded from this statistic is limited without exploring the significance of this choice for the couples themselves.

Similarly, Gross and Simmons (2002) set out to empirically test Giddens' 'pure relationship' using data from a representative self-administered questionnaire survey of US citizens in mid-life. They restrict their sample to the 98.2 per cent who identify as heterosexual, despite Giddens' (1992) argument that non-heterosexuals are the vanguards of the pure relationship. Respondents were classified as being in a pure relationship if they scored "in the upper quartile of the intimacy measure, in the lower quartile of the attitudinal traditionalism measure, and in the upper quartile of the housework equity measure" (Gross and Simmons, 2002:543). They found that being in a pure love relationship is positively associated with autonomy and is a predictor of relationship satisfaction. However, this finding is based on the assumption that pure love relationships exist and can be meaningfully distinguished from other types of relationships. The fact that only 3.3 per cent of their sample were in pure relationships and the vast majority (81.3 per cent) were in hybrid-type relationships (Gross and Simmons, 2002:544) demonstrates the difficulty of differentiating between 'types' of relationships (although Giddens (1992) might argue that this represents institutional lag whereby practice takes a while to catch up with discourse). Smart (2007a:59) questions the usefulness of such discrete categories as the boundaries between 'types' are so fluid that the categories may be more of a hindrance than a help. In contrast, the typology that this thesis develops in chapter 6 aims to develop sociological language in the field of personal life and chart different strategies associated with doing coupledness, rather than categorising couples in such a rigid way.

Uncertainty remains regarding what individualisation means for individuals. Giddens (1991) is optimistic about the increasing freedom and opportunity that the opening up of the project of the self will allow. Conversely, Bauman (2000:8) perceives individualisation as a fate characterised more by responsibility than choice. Responsibility is also

something that Beck-Gernsheim (2002) emphasises when stressing the close relationship that individualisation has with the concept of risk due to the fact that there are no well-adapted rules and rituals to fall back on. She argues that with opportunity comes responsibility. It is easy to fail to differentiate between the positions of Giddens and Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, especially as their theoretical positions are similar in many ways. Here, however, there is a clear difference in terms of the outcome of the processes of detraditionalisation and individualisation for individuals. Giddens (1991, 1994, 2002) emphasises the freeing of agency that individualisation enables. In relation to intimacy, he constructs the couple as a site of social progress and claims that love is no longer limited by external constraints, which suggests the increasing redundancy of feminist critiques (Langford, 1999:23). This, however, is strongly contested by many, such as Jamieson (2002) and McNay (1999), who critically evaluate Giddens' lack of consideration of feminist debates and the presence of persistent inequalities. Beck (1992, 1994) and Beck-Gernsheim (1996, 2002) emphasise the imposition of individualisation on individuals and are more pessimistic about the possibilities that this 'freedom' entails because couples have to constantly negotiate two biographies that are often competing, and thus relationships become increasingly difficult to sustain.

It is in relation to the idea of the place of love or romantic discourse in late modernity that a significant difference between Giddens' and Beck and Beck-Gernsheim's theories emerges. Gross (2005) notes how there are two strands of thought documenting the relationship between romance and social change. The first is that traditional narratives of romantic love have been displaced by a more contingent idea of what love is, and the second is just the opposite; that narratives of romantic love are increasingly evident because they provide meaning in an individualised and fragmented world. While Giddens (1992) famously adopts the first position, Beck and Beck-Gernsheim's theorising is more in line with the second. These issues will be picked up in the following

section which considers the assertion that these processes of individualisation and detraditionalisation result in greater possibilities for self-reflexivity, and in fact that they demand it.

Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (2002) argue that in late modernity individualisation has permeated the private sphere, and that marriage itself has become individualised. This is said to involve a gradual rejection of the traditional model of lifelong marriage and a gradual reorientation to the possibility of divorce (Beck-Gernsheim, 2002). Bauman (2001) argues that the marriage commitment becomes temporal by definition and design. Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (2002) argue that marriage is no longer an institution raised above the individual, but is a product and construct of the individuals forming it. This is exemplified by Gillis' (1999:52) notion that "today's marriage rituals are less about creating social relations than about constructing personal identities". According to Leeds-Hurwitz (2002), as people marry later and are more likely to pay for their own weddings they gain greater control over the event and are less likely to be concerned with maintaining tradition and following their parents' wishes.

Legislation in the UK can be seen to have facilitated this process of individualisation with the Marriage Act 1994. This act allows weddings (and now civil partnerships) to take place in approved premises, such as hotels and castles. In his study of the role of religion in contemporary weddings, Walliss (2002) found that couples who married in approved premises were greatly influenced by the amount of control that they could exercise over their day and the ways in which they could make it more personal, such as through decoration. However, Walliss (2002) also found that the majority of couples still invoked an abstract notion of 'tradition' to inform their choices and often transported a traditional church wedding to a different venue, with the religion 'hollowed out'. The standardisation of weddings is something that Otnes and Pleck (2003) pick up on in their critique of the lavish wedding. They argue

that there is a huge discrepancy between the ideology of individualisation that the wedding industry perpetuates and the reality that weddings are routinised and highly scripted.

Smart and Shipman (2004) challenge the extent to which individualisation has occurred by arguing that with regard to same-sex couples' commitment rituals, (prior to the introduction of the Civil Partnership Act 2004), these "ceremonies were essentially relational events set within networks of friends and family". This suggests that these relationships are still a central part of these rituals. There is a real divergence of opinion regarding to what extent late modernity has extracted individuals from their relational contexts, and this issue will be picked up later in the chapter, where Smart's (2007a) connectedness thesis will be explored, along with its implications for notions of individualisation.

Reflexivity is one of the most over-used and ill-defined concepts in sociological theory (O'Brien, 1999:24). This section will focus on self-reflexivity, defined by Giddens (1992:30) as the "more or less continuous interrogation of past, present and future" by individuals, aided by the growth in reflexive resources, such as therapy, self-help manuals and television programmes. Individuals can see themselves as objects through reflexivity and "derive a sense of who they are from the standpoint of others" (Turner and Stets, 2005:47). Again, while Giddens is largely optimistic about the implications of self-reflexivity for individuals, Beck, Bonss and Lau (2003:4) argue that reflexivity does not necessarily mean that individuals have greater freedom, but that they become increasingly aware that their actions cannot shape global forces (Beck, Bonss and Lau, 2003:4).

Self-reflexivity can be described as the outcome of the processes of detraditionalisation and individualisation for individuals. Relating it first to detraditionalisation, Giddens (2002:47) argues that as tradition

declines in significance the project of the self is opened up. While individuals are seen as free to choose from many different lifestyles, they are not free to decide not to choose at all (Giddens, 1991) as "once fragmented into options, everything must be decided" (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2002:5). Late modernity is said to lack the traditional frameworks that allow for inheritance of lifestyle, so even traditional forms of life become dependent on decisions (ibid). This suggests that the continued existence of the 'traditional' white wedding may mask the changes to the meaning of this ritual and the complex decision-making processes behind its continued existence. Additionally, these choices are not meaningless, but help to form the reflexive narrative of the self: the individual's identity (Giddens, 1992). Here Giddens, Beck and Beck-Gernsheim are advocating the idea that detraditionalisation involves a shift of authority and responsibility to the individual, with self-reflexivity being the acting out of this individualisation.

The relationship between self-reflexivity and individualisation is conceived of similarly to the one between self-reflexivity and detraditionalisation. Individualisation is said to force individuals to construct a "do it yourself biography" (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2002:5). Warde (1994:889) argues that Giddens' individual has "turned egoism into a virtue, making what for Durkheim was a pathological problem into a highly positive form of conduct". This, however, is an exaggerated version of Giddens' argument. But what is clear is that Giddens is more optimistic than Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (2002). Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (2002) claim that individuals are caught up in forces beyond their control and must live out reflexivity as personal risk (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2002:27). Lash (1999:137) captures this paradox that Beck and Beck-Gernsheim allude to in describing reflexivity as consisting of a "moment of self-ordering and a moment of 'ambivalence' or 'contingency'".

This section has focused on three key components of the reflexive

modernisation thesis: detraditionalisation, individualisation and reflexivity, and has discussed the relationship between them as well as some ideas about what their implications may be for contemporary personal life. While Brannen and Nilson (2005) note that this thesis has been largely uncritically accepted, various challenges have been made to accuracy and applicability of this thesis, which will now be explored.

Challenges to the Reflexive Modernisation Thesis

As outlined in the introduction to this chapter, the reflexive modernisation thesis faces challenges regarding the extent to which detraditionalisation and individualisation are universal processes, the continued role of tradition and connectedness in late modernity and the importance of considering self-reflexivity as emotional as well as rational. These challenges will be addressed in turn in the following section of this chapter. In the final section of the chapter these challenges will be considered along with the reflexive modernisation thesis to looking more specifically at wedding and civil partnership rituals.

Universality

This review will now consider the idea that talk of a post-traditional society neglects to consider social inequalities which persist in late or post-modernity. While self-reflexivity can inform decision making, social divisions can prevent individuals from acting upon this. Many argue that the processes of detraditionalisation and individualisation do not mean that society is any more equal, and that these concepts in fact mask the continued importance of structural factors in determining the lives of individuals. Lash (1994) poses a question which has the potential to reveal a fundamental flaw in the ideas of Giddens and Beck.

He says “why, we might ask, do we find reflexivity in some places and not in others?” (Lash, 1994:120). It could be suggested that self-reflexivity is used more freely by some people than others. If class is still relevant then it can be used to critique universal notions of reflexive action. Payne (2000) suggests that choice is constrained by both material and non-material factors and that while consumption unites individuals as consumers in a global market, it also allows for new differentiations to emerge. Some, such as Scott (2000:53), argue that “no amount of personal choice to ‘mix and match’ consumption behaviour or symbolic life goals will remove the underlying constraints of class situations”. These structural inequalities may be masked by superficial self-reflexivity where individuals are less aware of the structural factors that constrain their action because of a discourse of choice (Corrigan, 1997). Atkinson (2010) makes a similar argument with the use of his term ‘faux reflexivity’.

Payne (2000) demonstrates how societies are stratified along gender, ethnic, age and disability lines, among others. These divisions intersect and overlap, creating multiple inequalities. Feminists refer to this as ‘intersectionality’; whereby identity is the “intersection of various axes of difference and subordination” (Corber and Valocchi, 2003:10). While Giddens and Beck suggest that these inequalities can be overcome, it can be seen that individuals begin their reflexive project from unequal starting positions. However, within the context of individualisation, the choice ideology creates a situation where the individual has no one to blame but themselves for making the wrong choices, as structural constraints are downplayed and individual responsibility emphasised (Brannen and Nilsen, 2005). It could be argued that there are both “reflexivity winners” and “reflexivity losers” in contemporary society (Lash, 1994:120). Lash (1994) suggests that the deciding factor in whether an individual becomes a winner or loser depends on their place within the mode of information. This can be likened to Castells’ (1996) network society in which certain places and individuals can be socially

excluded and denied participation in the information network.

It could be suggested that not only does the ability to act on reflexive thought depend on the circumstances of the individual, but so does reflexivity itself. If detraditionalisation and individualisation are not conceived of as universal processes, but ones that are more pervasive in certain places and spaces as argued earlier, then it is likely that self-reflexivity is also unevenly distributed. Adkins (2002:128) extends this line of argument by claiming that reflexivity should not just be viewed as an outcome of social change as it is also implicated in "reconstituting the social". She argues that reflexivity, mobility and risk are not neutral but open up possibilities for new social divisions (Adkins, 2002:125), such as the way in which the resourcing of reflexive agency is structurally ordered (Lash, 1994:6). Adams (2006:525) notes how reflexivity not matched by resources to act upon that reflexive awareness leads not to choice, but awareness of the lack of it.

Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (1996) use the example of urban-rural differences to concede that different spaces within society are more individualised than others. Some commentators have gone further and argued that within these urban and rural spaces the process of individualisation has a differential impact. For example, McNay (1999:103) argues that the process is gendered, as female individualisation is more complex due to it being at odds with the conventional expectation of caring for others. Brooks (2008:539) notes of her research about professional and personal gender identity that "there is little evidence in the research presented here of any systematic reconfiguring of gender identities leading to a detraditionalisation of gender as suggested by the 'reflexive modernisation' theorists". This suggests that there is perhaps a tension between individualisation at the level of theoretical rhetoric and individualisation in practice. McRobbie (2004) claims that theorists such as Giddens have airbrushed feminist struggles and the enduring inequalities between men and women from

their accounts of contemporary social life.

A relationship unconstrained by tradition or romantic discourse, the pure relationship is inextricably linked to high levels of self-reflexivity and results in a greater level of democracy between partners (Giddens, 1992). However, while commending Giddens (1992) for integrating same-sex relationships into his theorising on intimacy, Heaphy (2008) argues that he erases differences amongst lesbians and gay men in describing them as the vanguards of the pure relationship. Heaphy (2008) argues that Giddens (1992) assigns gay men and lesbians a 'reflexive habitus' (Sweetman, 2003), which offers only a partial understanding of contemporary gay and lesbian lives, ignoring socio-cultural and power differences. In this critique he uses Bourdieu's (1984) notion of habitus to describe how there are limits to the extent to which social action and interaction can be reflexively managed. This again raises the issue of how reflexive possibilities are shaped by economic and socio-cultural factors. Evans (2003) echoes Heaphy's (2008) critique in asserting that Giddens (1992) presents a view of love and agency as only available to educated, middle class individuals. However, this critique rests on the assumption that reflexivity is equivalent to mobility between and within socio-cultural fields; something Adkins (2002) also accuses Lash (1994) and McNay (1999) of. This again highlights the differences between Giddens' and Beck's ideas, in that Giddens' (1992) reflexivity is largely equivalent to mobility, whereas for Beck, Bonss and Lau (2003) reflexivity is more akin to an awareness that the global forces in which we are entangled cannot easily be changed.

Theorists such as McNay (1999) have drawn on Bourdieu's (1984) concept of habitus, which has been used to critique the pervasiveness of reflexivity that Beck and Giddens propose. This concept can be used to challenge the ideas mapped out earlier in the chapter because it is about how deeply embedded individuals are in class structures and refers to

the ways in which people embody class culture through their tastes, wants and desires (Sweetman, 2009:3). McNay (1999:113) argues that Bourdieu's work provides a corrective to theories which overstate the extent to which individuals can reshape identity in the post-traditional order. Traditions may be even more embedded than Gross (2005) suggests with his concept of meaning-constitutive tradition.

The uneven nature of the transformation of gender relations mentioned above is seen as an example of the continued existence of habitus. McNay (1999:106) suggests that many theorists mistake symbolic detraditionalisation (such as gender equality policies in the workplace) for social detraditionalisation (such as equal treatment of men and women at work) and ignore the endurance of social traditions in contemporary society (such as the continuation of sexism in the workplace). This is an interesting way of distinguishing between rhetoric and practice in terms of detraditionalisation, and supports the idea that "stories about personal life have changed much more dramatically than private practices" (Jamieson, 1998:158). McNay (1999) points to the continued embeddedness of individuals within differing sets of power relations, and it could be argued that in theorising detraditionalisation, authors such as Giddens remove individuals from their social context and ignore how these contexts shape action.

Adams (2006:516) argues that this perceived persistence of habitus in late modernity, as well as claims that Giddens' reflexivity borders on voluntarism and Bourdieu's habitus is overtly deterministic, has led some theorists to hybridise the concept of habitus and reflexivity. Sweetman (2003:537) attempts to do this with his notion of 'reflexive habitus'. He argues that in late modernity reflexivity becomes so ingrained as to constitute part of the habitus for some individuals. This is a way of considering the idea of self-reflexivity within the context of the individual's social conditions and showing how these conditions can actually encourage reflexivity to be embedded in the individual.

According to Sweetman, habitus is, therefore, not necessarily incompatible with the notion of self-reflexivity.

This thesis explores patterns in the role of relationality and tradition in the couples' imaginings, management and performances. In addition to sexuality, the chapters of analysis also investigate the significance of gender, age and class to an understanding of contemporary commitment rituals.

Detraditionalisation

This section will now consider the concept of meaning-constitutive tradition, which I argue is more convincing than Giddens' (1991) notion of a post-traditional society in this research study. Heelas (1996:1) argues that it is a huge leap from highlighting the process of detraditionalisation to announcing the arrival of a post-traditional society. He argues that the concept of post-traditional society is unable to encapsulate the complexity of the role of tradition in late modernity. Heelas (1996) points to the continued maintenance, construction and reconstruction of traditions. Thompson (1996:91) also argues that the reality is not as simple as that proposed by Giddens and that the language of detraditionalisation and post-traditional society is not helpful.

There are some clear differences in how the continued relationship between tradition and late modernity has been conceptualised by different theorists. Heelas (1996) distinguishes between the radical and coexistence theses of detraditionalisation, which propose different relationships between tradition and modernity. He argues that the radical thesis of detraditionalisation relies on binary oppositions, for example between fate and choice and assumes a past/future dynamic whereby, in this case, choice will erode fate over time (Heelas, 1996:3).

Here a one-way, dualistic and mutually exclusive relationship between tradition and modernity is proposed, whereby modernity destroys tradition. Heelas (1996) locates Giddens' and Beck's detraditionalisation theories in the radical camp. Those in the coexistence camp argue that the relationship between tradition and modernity is more complex and reciprocal than the radical thesis acknowledges (Thompson, 1996). The general argument is that 'traditional' society was not as tradition-dominated as assumed, and that late modern society is not as detraditionalised as argued (Heelas, 1996:7). Luke (1996:116) suggests that "there is 'a modernity' to tradition and 'a tradition' of modernity". Traditions adapt and are shaped by modernity, and modernity takes on the properties of a tradition (ibid). This version of the relationship between tradition and modernity is one of coexistence and interpenetration. Adam (1996:147) argues that it is this process of interpenetration, rather than the dualistic analysis of fixed states, that should be the focus of future theorisation as dualistic analyses are fundamentally unsuitable for conceptualising a complex global reality. This is not to say that something resembling detraditionalisation has not taken place, but that it is not a one-way process whereby modernity destroys tradition (ibid).

However, I do not completely agree with Heelas' (1996) characterisation. For example, it is perhaps unfair to label Giddens' (1994) thesis as radical, as he is referring more to a shift in the authority of traditions in late modernity, rather than the decline of tradition altogether. The difference between his theory and that of many of those labelled as coexistence theorists has more to do with how the re-emergence or persistence of tradition is conceptualised and what it is said to signal. Giddens (1991) and Beck (1992) describe this phenomenon in similar terms as counterveiling tendencies and counter-modernisation respectively. They argue that this does not contradict late modernity, but is an expression of its paradoxical nature. Counterveiling tendencies and counter-modernisation are seen as reactions to

modernisation, in that tradition serves as a refuge against the forces of modernisation. However, others such as Thompson (1996), Adam (1996) and Luke (1996) have termed this retraditionalization, emphasising the continuation of certain aspects of tradition and its integration into modern lifestyles.

It is useful here to think back to Thompson's (1996) four aspects of tradition and how they may enable a more sophisticated analysis of the relationship between tradition and modernity. He argues that in modernity while the normative and legitimation aspects of tradition gradually decline, the hermeneutic and identity aspects of tradition are maintained. Tradition may no longer be used to justify or prescribe behaviour, but it does survive as a framework for understanding the world and for creating a sense of belonging (ibid). However, while criticising Giddens (1991) for simplifying the relationship between tradition and modernities, by distinguishing unproblematically between the different aspects of tradition, Thompson (1996) ignores the tensions and overlappings between them. He appears to suggest that people can quite easily integrate elements of tradition with new styles of living. Heelas (1996) is less optimistic, arguing that individuals are in a constant state of conflict between external voices of authority and internal expectations. The following section will take up this debate in considering more closely what is left of tradition in contemporary society. It will also consider an alternative conceptualisation constructed by Gross (2005) of the role of tradition in late modernity which in many ways is similar to Thompson's four aspects of tradition and may help to explain the persistence of the 'traditional' white wedding.

Benton (1999:54) supports the idea that traditions are subject to change by arguing that Giddens understates the diversity, historical fluidity and adaptability of all traditions. Thompson (1996) does not agree with Giddens that the disembedding of tradition in late modernity necessarily

means that it becomes relegated to a relic, but that tradition can live on more discreetly in the form of background frameworks that shape action (what he refers to as the hermeneutic aspect) or implicitly embedded in an individual's identity (the identity aspect). Heelas (1996) proposes that while ideologies of the autonomous self may be prevalent in contemporary society and our voices of authority appear to have come from within ourselves, they have been acquired through already established values and practices through socialisation. Heelas' (1996) idea relates to Thompson's (1996) hermeneutic aspect of tradition, which Heelas (1996) argues is informing the very faith in the value of individual autonomy. However, by pointing to the continued importance of social relationships, Heelas (1996) also highlights a tension not examined by Thompson (1996). It is suggested here that the idea that tradition has shifted from being an external constraint to an internal framework masks the importance of social relationships in creating and maintaining this framework. It could be argued that Giddens' (1994) concept of detraditionalisation underplays the role of structure in constituting social action (Brannen and Nilsen, 2005:422). This would be an odd claim as Giddens (1984) created his structuration theory to overcome this exact problem in sociological theorising. However, Alexander (1996) argues that Giddens has ignored the theoretical insights he himself generated in his structuration theory and come up with a theory of detraditionalisation which emphasises agency at the expense of structures, traditions and habits that continue to impact on the types of action that are possible in late modernity. Jamieson (2002:458) makes a similar point in highlighting how the detraditionalisation thesis is strangely cut off from his earlier work on the interrelationships of structure and agency. This structure and agency debate is complex and long-running and unfortunately justice cannot be done to it within the confines of this literature review, except to acknowledge that it remains an issue in relation to conceptualisations of the process of detraditionalisation.

Gross' (2005:296) differentiation between two different ways in which social action can be shaped by traditions can be seen as a corrective to Giddens' (1991, 1994, 2002) process of detraditionalisation, and was indeed developed in response to it. The first is regulative traditions, which are the ones most theorists have in mind when referring to tradition, and defined as those where the individual faces potential exclusion from a moral community if they fail to engage with certain practices, such as lifelong marriage in certain communities (Gross, 2005). The second is meaning-constitutive traditions, which refer to patterns of sense making passed down from previous generations, such as the way in which lifelong marriage continues to function as a hegemonic ideal (ibid). Gross (2005:296) also considers how regulative and meaning-constitutive traditions function. He argues that regulative traditions operate by constraining action from the outside, whereas meaning-constitutive traditions enable action from the inside. These concepts in some ways parallel those proposed by Thompson (1996), with regulative traditions encompassing the normative and legitimisation aspects of tradition, and meaning-constitutive traditions encompassing the hermeneutic and identity aspects of tradition. However, it could be that regulative traditions function to embed frameworks of sense making and identity as well as normalising and legitimising action, and vice versa for meaning-constitutive traditions. Gross' (2005) concept of meaning-constitutive traditions can also be likened to Bourdieu's (1984) notion of habitus. Habitus can be defined as a set of durable dispositions that enable individuals to navigate around their field (their social environment) (ibid). This is similar to Gross' (2005) idea that individuals have values and interpretive schemes that shape their action.

The distinction that Gross (2005) makes between different types of tradition aims to demonstrate some of the ways in which traditions remain of central importance in contemporary society, with regulative traditions on the decline, but tradition living on through meaning-constitutive traditions (ibid). For example, Beck (1992:104) argues that

some traditional relics are not easy to dispense with, such as the ascription of gender roles, which could be seen as a meaning-constitutive tradition as, despite equality legislation, gendered inequalities persist in late modernity (Adkins, 2003). Gross (2005:287) also points out that "the strength and meaning of traditional expectations are varied by geography, ethnicity, religion, class and generation". It is not easy to consider these variables in the language of Giddens' post-traditional society, as discussed earlier in the chapter, and it may be that some people's lives are more detraditionalized than others.

According to Giddens (1991, 1994 and 2002), the post-traditional order does not mean the end of tradition, but rather the end of its authority. The future of tradition is tradition defended in a non-traditional way, and not in relation to formulaic truth, (which is no longer tenable in a globalised and late modern society) but justified as one possible truth among plural possibilities (Giddens, 2002:45). However, Giddens' analysis can be seen as focused on regulative or normative and legitimisation aspects of tradition and he therefore overlooks the meaning-constitutive or hermeneutic and identity aspects of tradition (Gross, 2005). Thus it may be more accurate to speak of the post-regulative traditional order than the post-traditional order. This idea links well with the rise of 'the individual' in recent sociological theory, as meaning-constitutive traditions which are still in evidence relate more to the individual than social groups according to Thompson (1996) and Gross (2005).

Gross (2005) also describes how romantic discourse has changed over time to become more about the fusion of two souls than the adoption of gendered roles. While Giddens (1992) sees this as indicative of the 'pure relationship', Gross (2005:304) states that "when agents enplot themselves in romantic love narratives, even of distinctly modern sorts, they are drinking from the well of tradition". Even though people are

not so constrained by regulative traditions, narratives such as romantic love act as meaning-constitutive traditions because they take on a taken-for-granted and naturalised form (Gross, 2005:306). Even Giddens' so-called 'arch inventors' (same-sex couples) continue to be indebted to tradition, especially since it has been reshaped by other forces such as capitalism (ibid:306). The discourse of romantic love is fuelled by the media and continues to shape people's aspirations (Evans, 1998:273). These rituals of consumption may function to perpetuate tradition as it is repackaged as a choice. Currie (1993:421) argues that tradition is presented in wedding magazines as a "wedding theme rather than a wedding practice". This highlights the role of these magazines in reshaping tradition and presenting it as something that is at least superficially compatible with contemporary lifestyles.

Illouz (1997) takes this argument further and implicates the wedding industry in idealising 'traditional' gendered scripts. She refers to the papering over of the contradiction between the genderless ideal, and the persistence of gender differences and inequalities, as the romantic utopia, a pervasive discourse which reproduces traditional ideas of masculinity and femininity. This is exemplified by Elaine, a focus group participant in a study of the selection and meaning of artefacts in American weddings, who said; "I always imagined myself, ever since I was little, in, you know the perfect huge white gown. And I just, you know, it's not something that I could settle for, it had to be the one" (Otnes and Lowry, 1993:326). Illouz (1997) argues that this romantic utopia is constructed and reinforced by bridal magazines.

Gross (2005:307) argues that more research is needed into how debts to tradition act as cultural constraints, in terms of the meanings involved, the way in which these traditions impact on social action, and the effect that this has. Even if tradition is not experienced as a cultural constraint, the 'traditional' white wedding could still be aspirational for many heterosexual and also same-sex couples. This thesis aims to

explore the role of tradition in the ways in which relationality is imagined, managed and performed as traditional symbols provide frameworks for the display of these relationships.

Individualisation

While the previous sections referred to generic social divisions and cultural scripts that can shape behaviour indirectly, this section is about more direct influences on social action from those connected to individuals, such as family members and friends. As well as being culturally embedded, weddings are also largely relational events. Focusing on commitment ceremonies as individualised and about the construction of personal identities downplays the involvement of others in constructing the event, and perhaps their role in perpetuating tradition. Castrén and Maillochon (2009:369), in their research about how wedding guests are chosen and by whom, argue that weddings are still familial affairs, and that these family ties can constrain as well as enable the choices made by the couple. They emphasise this point because most studies about the modernity of weddings focus on the material aspects of the day, such as the time schedule of the event and the influence of films, and ignore the relational dimension of the ritual (ibid:371).

There is, however, some evidence that family involvement in weddings is decreasing. In her study Currie (1993) argues that in some ways bridal magazines are replacing mothers as the source of wedding knowledge, with it being typical for interviewees to only include their mothers in the planning in a token way (Currie, 1993). This is something Blakely (2008:650) picks up on in her study of the professionalization of wedding planning, in which wedding planners act as “stand-in mothers” and sell themselves as “better than the real thing”. Instead of a detraditionalisation of weddings and traditionally gendered practices,

wedding planning remains feminised as wedding planners target brides in their advertising and deal with them during the process far more than the groom (ibid). So while the reduction in the role of the mother of the bride in the wedding planning could be taken as evidence of detraditionalisation and individualisation, women still do the bulk of wedding work and brides turn to other feminised sources of knowledge, particularly bridal magazines and wedding planners. However, wedding planners are only involved in a small proportion of high-budget weddings so most weddings are still organised by the couple, perhaps with the assistance of friends or family members.

Walliss (2002) found that couples were often influenced by their parents, and especially if they were paying for the wedding. For example, some parents insisted that the couple get married in a church rather than in a civil ceremony, and during an argument over the reception buffet one mother even told her daughter, the bride to be, that "this is my wedding" (Walliss, 2002:3.6). In an ethnography of intercultural weddings, Leeds-Hurwitz (2002:235) argues that familial conflicts are inevitable in planning weddings because of the number of decisions that need to be made and the input of so many different opinions. The involvement of families and friends in the planning of the rituals and the roles that they play on the day itself is a particular focus of this research.

Despite the tradition of maternal involvement in the planning of daughters' weddings, Otnes and Pleck (2003) suggest that this is not the case in same-sex ceremonies. In an ethnography on same-sex marriage in Canada, Onishenko and Caragata (2009:257) note how many couples reached out to families who had previously rejected them, but that in some cases the marriage acted as a catalyst for the severing of familial ties. Smart (2007b:683) describes how relationality can influence the style of the ritual from her research with same-sex couples just before the implementation of the Civil Partnership Act 2004. As

well as being concerned with what they wanted the event to be like, the couples interviewed were very much concerned with negotiating their way through multi-dimensional webs of relationships and taking into consideration the needs and desires of all of their friends and family members (ibid). This sometimes meant that only a small ceremony was held, or only friends were invited, so that everyone, including themselves, could feel comfortable (ibid:677).

Lewin's (1998) case studies of same-sex commitment ceremonies also demonstrate both the importance and volatility of family ties, with these ceremonies more than weddings being the site of the collapse of family ties, rather than a demonstration of their resiliency. The involvement of blood relatives was something that couples reflected on considerably during interviews (ibid). The presence of family members at a ceremony was seen to demonstrate support and add legitimacy to the ritual, with reflections also made on the gifts received and whether family members are willing to travel long distances to attend (ibid). For example, one of Lewin's participants, Bill, had problems with his mother, who, while making it clear that she was attending, constantly suggested that he and David reduce the guest list and advocated a small at-home ceremony, which she thought would be most appropriate for this type of event, and one that would cause her least embarrassment (Lewin, 1998).

Experiences of acceptance and rejection continued to preoccupy many couples long after the event (ibid). Smart (2007b) points out how important it is to consider friends as well as family when exploring relationality, especially as friends can act as a 'family of choice' (Weston, 1991) for many people.

Some researchers have researched individuals or families from minority ethnic or cultural groups to assess whether the processes of individualisation and detraditionalisation cut across cultural and ethnic boundaries. Smart and Shipman (2004:494) set out to test the individualisation thesis through interviews with members of

transnational Indian, Pakistani and Irish families living in Britain. They were interested in the way in which kinship was achieved across geographical boundaries, with a particular focus on sustained obligations and commitments. A continuum of kinship obligations was constructed to demonstrate the differences between interviewees' experiences. The continuum ranges from those with strong kinship ties and experiencing arranged marriages to those with few family and kinship obligations, with a mid-point where kinship and family culture provide the context within which choices are made. Smart and Shipman (2004) argue that the individualisation thesis presents a homogenous picture of family and married life. It ignores arranged marriages and marriages in which partners are vetted by each other's families before going ahead (ibid: 497). In these cases marriage is seen as a family rather than an individual matter. Smart and Shipman (2004) thus emphasise the continued importance of connectedness and tradition. In terms of weddings more specifically, Leeds-Hurwitz (2002:95-6) undertook an ethnography of intercultural weddings and argues that "by definition, intercultural weddings are more reflexive than mainstream weddings because they require that participants more actively decide what elements to include, rather than taking for granted that what others have done in the past will be appropriate for them". While this thesis does not have the scope to include an intercultural study of weddings, it is recognised that it is important to bear cultural differences in mind, and that this is a fruitful area for future research. Also, Leeds-Hurwitz's (2002) notion that intercultural weddings are necessarily more reflexive may apply also to civil partnerships rituals as civil partnerships in and of themselves are not traditional, but they are often referred to as weddings (Smart, 2007b) so some traditions may be reflexively adopted by same-sex couples. This idea is investigated further in this research.

Smart (2007a), in conceding that empirical research has had little impact on the broad individualisation thesis tackles it head on in a book aiming

to link empirical research with theorising in a new way. Along with Brannen and Nilsen (2005:426), Smart (2007a:9) warns of the way in which theoretical concepts not grounded in empirical research can take on rhetorical and ideological aspects, especially when they feed into popular political discourses, which the individualisation thesis is seen to do. Therefore, she proposes an alternative approach to go beyond the limitations of Giddens' and Beck and Beck-Gernsheim's work and offer a new theoretical direction which is empirically grounded.

Smart (2007a) reflects on several research projects that she has been involved in over a number of years and has used induction to identify themes and construct a conceptual framework to challenge the individualisation thesis (within which she categorises processes of detraditionalisation and individualisation and the concept of reflexivity). She proposes a 'Connectedness Thesis' to stand in antithesis to the individualisation thesis (Smart, 2007a:187). This aims to re-embed people in the webs of connectedness which shape their action, while at the same time acknowledging the agency of individuals. It stresses the importance of memory, biography, embeddedness, relationality and the imaginary in studying what she terms the field of personal life. Memory is implicated in the construction of these connections through shared histories and identities that memories can create (Smart, 2007a). Smart (2007a) refers to biography to advocate the methodological use of individual biographies to explore how these individuals are situated in specific contexts and times as well as the meanings that they attribute to their relationships. Embeddedness is used as more of a descriptive theme and used by Smart (2007a:43) "as the counterweight to concepts of individualism, liquidity or even the older 'anomie'". She notes, for example, how family relationships do not necessarily end with death and how many people continue to be embedded within these relationships, which are often sustained through particular symbols or practices. Relationality is used as a concept to note how kinship ties are implicated in the identities and practices of individuals. It "is then a mode of

thinking which not only influences decisions and choices, but also forms a context for the unfolding of everyday life" (Smart, 2007a: 49). Finally, imaginary refers to the way in which connectedness is not only enacted but also imagined (ibid). She notes that people engage in imaginary conversations with people, which influence their thoughts, but also their practices. Here Smart (2007a) draws on Gillis' (1996) distinction between the families we live 'with' and the families we live 'by'. The families we live 'by' refer to normative constructions of ideal families which are constructed in the imaginations of individuals, as well as affecting lived practice. These different aspects combine to emphasise the importance of connections between individuals in late modernity. Individual biographies are embedded in webs of relationships and in their past and sense of location, as well as being constituted through close kin ties (relationality). Smart (2007) is influenced by Morgan's (1996:11) concept of 'family practices', which uses family as an adjective "to refer to sets of practices which deal in some way with ideas of parenthood, kinship and marriage and the expectations and obligations which are associated with these practices".

Bottero (2010:5) also emphasises connectedness in calling for a "greater emphasis on the intersubjective negotiation and coordination of practices in studies of identity". In focusing on Bourdieu's theory of practice rather than the reflexive modernisation thesis, she argues that Bourdieu's focus on the interrelationship between habitus and field underplays intersubjectivity. She argues that practices can be seen instead as "the outcome of negotiated relations between variously disposed individuals" (Bottero, 2010:14). In this way practices are collectively accomplished. Bottero (2010) suggests that future research could explore the links between dispositions, individual reflexive accounts and collective action and how these components relate to one another. This thesis aims to do just this through studying relationality in contemporary wedding and civil partnership rituals.

Drawing inspiration from Smart and also Bottero, this thesis investigates the relationalities involved in the construction and performance of wedding and civil partnership rituals, and the extent to which they may encourage the perpetuation or adaptation of traditions. Imagining is used as an analytical theme throughout the chapters of analysis to demonstrate its value in understanding how tradition resides within this space as a framework for understanding these rituals. It is also important in investigating how relationality is constituted through the imaginings of the ritual participants.

It could be argued that the concept of individualisation is not particularly useful when considering how couples construct their wedding or civil partnership. By suggesting that institutions are now all directed towards the individual and that the individual has sole responsibility for determining his or her own life course, other levels of social action are ignored. Marriage and civil partnerships involve two individuals projecting a public image of themselves as a couple. Reducing relationships down to their parts surely cannot provide an accurate representation of the complex negotiation and conflict between the individuals forming the couple. In chapter 6 these ideas are developed further into a typology of strategies that includes 'relational reflexivity' and 'reflexive coupledness' to highlight how many of the couples' ritual decision making was relationally embedded and collectively accomplished.

Cognitive Reflexivity

This literature review turns now to the issue of emotion. As well as being relational events, weddings and civil partnership ceremonies are also emotional events as they represent the affirmation and celebration of an emotional attachment. Increasingly the couple relationship is looked to for the fulfilment of emotional needs and desires (Langford,

1999). Giddens' work can be seen as an example of the reclaiming of emotion by sociology as a source of knowledge about social life (Brown, 2006:50). However, along with many other sociologists, he attributes reason too much control over emotion and the irrational (ibid:6). Brown (2000:39) provides an example of this in relation to Giddens' concept of confluent love; "so, although confluent love (as an ideal type of love) tells us what we should do with our feelings (disclose them, open them up), it is dependent upon the idea that our capacities for rational decision making can overcome irrational obstructions with increased levels of self-reflexivity".

Other theorists have given more consideration to the importance of emotion. For example, Sweetman (2001:60) highlights the ways in which lifestyle practices, such as fashion, are not exclusively about creating self-identity by suggesting that they may also contribute to affectual forms of identification. It may be that while self-reflexivity is significant in processes of detraditionalisation and individualisation, it is not the only thing that is significant. It is important not just to consider the importance of emotion in parallel with reflexivity, which could produce another false dichotomy, but also the points of intersection and overlap between these concepts, such as the way in which the belief in rationality itself is passionately held (Williams, 1998). Holmes (2010) also argues that reflexivity is more than reflection as it involves emotions, practices and bodies as well.

Lash's (1993:2) concept of aesthetic reflexivity is designed to challenge what he argues is a one-sided notion of subjectivity produced by a purely cognitive understanding of reflexivity. For Lash (1994) reflexivity dwells, not within the self, but in shared background practices and is, therefore, not about structures and agents but about the uncovering of unthought categories. Thus Lash (1994) uncouples reflexivity from individualisation and expands the definition of reflexivity to be able to account for the creation of collective identities in late modernity (Adkins,

2002:37). This definition of reflexivity is more compatible with Smart (2007a) and Bottero's (2010) emphasis on the relational or intersubjective nature of personal life.

Many empirical research studies conducted in the field of intimacy have also accorded emotion central importance. In their interviews in the UK with same-sex couples planning commitment ceremonies before the implementation of the Civil Partnership Act 2004, Shipman and Smart (2007) highlight the importance of emotion in decisions to hold a commitment ceremony. The reasons given for holding a commitment ceremony fell into 5 categories: love, acknowledging mutual responsibility, the importance of family recognition, legal rights and recognition, and the importance of a public statement of commitment. Along with Lewin (2001), Shipman and Smart (2007) found that love, commitment and respect from wider family featured just as strongly in couple's accounts, as reasons for wanting to have a commitment ceremony, as equality and legal rights.

Otnes and Pleck (2003:89) argue that weddings are particularly stressful times and couples (particularly the bride) often swing emotionally from elation to desperation to depression, and back again. The wedding industry solution to manage this 'emotion work' (Hochschild, 2003) is the wedding co-ordinator, and in fact this is one of their main duties, along with actually organising the event. Weddings can affect emotions long after the event, with the phenomenon of 'post-wedding blues' as reported by psychologists, in which many brides report feeling let down and disappointed after their long-anticipated wedding day is over and the real marriage has begun (Jellison, 2008:145).

It is important to remember that emotions are not just naturally occurring, but are also socially constructed. Hochschild (2003) demonstrates this with her ideas of feeling rules and emotion management. Rituals such as weddings have emotional scripts which

help social actors know how they should be feeling (ibid). On her wedding day a bride is aware that it should be the happiest day of her life, and if the way she is feeling does not match this then she may engage in emotion work to correct this discrepancy and this emotion work leads into emotion (Hochschild, 2003:60-1). Unfortunately, Hochschild (2003) only considers the emotion work of the bride, and not how male emotion management may play out in this ritual. This thesis also considers heterosexual male and same-sex couples' emotional expectations relating to their decisions to marry, wedding work and the big day itself.

Not only does culture influence our expectations of emotion in certain situations, but emotions are also argued to be behind commitments to culture because they provide cultural symbols with meaning and the power to direct behaviour (Turner and Stets, 2005:292). Additionally, Turner and Stets (2005:1) propose that emotions are also what drive people to challenge cultural traditions. This is significant because it suggests that emotion is central to an understanding of why people appropriate, reject or adapt a tradition. Therefore, this research will aim to be attentive to the role of emotion in enabling or constraining ritualised action.

Ritualised Coupledness: Reflexivity and Relationality

This final section of the literature review focuses more specifically on research that has been conducted on commitment rituals. It first discusses research that utilises and supports aspects of the reflexive modernisation thesis. It then moves on to consider research that challenges components of the reflexive modernisation thesis. The arguments outlined in the previous sections are thus reflected upon in relation to wedding and civil partnership rituals. Finally, gaps within this body of research and the particular focus and research question of

this thesis are outlined.

Research into same-sex everyday relationships does tend to affirm Giddens' (1992) idea that non-heterosexuals are more likely than heterosexuals to be in more egalitarian (or 'pure') relationships. For example, Solomon, Rothblum and Balsam (2004) compared lesbian and gay couples in civil unions (in Vermont) with lesbian and gay couples not in civil unions and also married heterosexual couples. They found that there were more significant differences between same-sex and heterosexual couples, with heterosexual couples being more likely to have a more traditional division of labour than same-sex couples. Dunne's (1999) research with lesbian mothers also supports this idea. In her interviews she found that these lesbian couples typically negotiated equal divisions of labour, and generally felt greatly advantaged by the absence of 'gender scripts' to guide their relationships. However, there is far less research about the ways in which these couples formalise their relationships through ritual.

Of the research that does explore same-sex ritualization, some of the findings can be used to support the idea that same-sex couples are the vanguards of Giddens' (1992) post-traditional order. McQueeney (2003), for example, suggests that commitment ceremonies for gay and lesbian couples provide the ideal opportunity for these couples to be reflexive, particularly regarding how to articulate their own identities. The use of reflexivity by couples is particularly emphasised by Lewin (1998) who researched non-legal same-sex commitment ceremonies in the US. These ceremonies are seen by couples as sites for creativity as they are relatively new and not constrained by norms or traditions (Lewin, 1998). Many couples that Lewin (1998) interviewed were highly reflexive about their ceremonies. For example, Nasser and Paul were keen to research the significance of different aspects of the wedding ritual and choose aspects that they felt were relevant for them (ibid:141). They avoided fertility rituals, such as the throwing of confetti

over the couple, because they wanted all symbols that they included to be 'appropriate' for same-sex couples.

Weeks, Heaphy and Donovan (2001) interviewed 96 same-sex couples and gay/lesbian individuals ranging in age from early twenties to seventies, from both rural and urban areas, and from different class and ethnic groups about the meanings of intimacy, family and relationships today. In terms of commitment they found that respondents were torn between wanting equality and legal rights, and not necessarily wanting to emulate the heterosexual marriage model. For example, "Charles feels it is 'bullshit' for gay couples to get married- 'think it shows a distinct lack of imagination', he comments" (Weeks et al., 2001:194). Many couples felt that conforming to traditional marriage-based models of family life meant that they would have to sacrifice the creativity and egalitarianism that have characterised their intimate lives (ibid:193). This lends support to Giddens' (1992) argument that 'families of choice' (Weston, 1991) represent creative responses to detraditionalisation and that many same-sex couples invert traditional practices or use them in creative ways. Weeks et al. (2001) could have explored this further by asking interviewees exactly which symbols of weddings they perceived to be 'too traditional' and which ones were acceptable, as well as considering the incorporation of queer practices and traditions.

In relation to heterosexual ritual practice, Humble, Zvonkovic and Walker (2008) undertook an exploration of the gendered nature of 'wedding work' (the division of labour during the ritual planning process) in Canada. Their conceptual framework is a gender perspective and they focus on the mismatch between gender ideology, gender display and gender assessment in heterosexual relationships. While this research does not set out to explore Giddens' thesis, some of the findings can be used to support the process of detraditionalisation. Retrospective interviews were carried out with heterosexual couples approximately one year into their marriage. Participants were sampled from an

obtained list of those who had recently married in the area. They used their findings to create a typology of couples based on gender relations during the planning of their weddings, in a similar way to Gross and Simmons' (2005) typology of everyday relationships as mentioned earlier.

One of the types was named 'egalitarian couples', and was made up of couples who rejected the gendered ideology surrounding wedding planning. They shunned bridal magazines and expressed frustration at the gendered assumptions that those in the commercial sector made—such as the way in which one 'groom' described the florist directing questions to the 'bride' and ignoring him. These couples took on broadly equivalent roles in the planning of their wedding, although many experienced pressure to conform to the 'traditional couple' model, especially from family members. The final, and largest, group, 'transitional couples', was characterised by a mismatch between ideology and practice. These couples shared the desire for equality with the egalitarian couples, but also enacted traditional gendered practices. Some 'brides' tried to overcome this contradiction by encouraging their fiancés to help with the planning, and involving them in the final decisions, so that on the surface they maintained the illusion of equality, despite doing the brunt of the work themselves.

This typology is useful in helping to understand the complexities of social change and the importance of distinguishing between ideology and practice. Humble et al.'s (2008) research does fit with a lot of what Giddens' (1992) argues in terms of the egalitarian couples representing his 'pure relationship' and the transitional couples demonstrating his notion of 'institutional lag', where ideas about the organisation of intimate life permeate society faster than changes in practice. This supports Roseneil's (2000) argument that reflexivity has permeated heterosexuality and forced it to become a conscious state that requires self-monitoring. This raises the question: if heterosexuality is

increasingly reflexive, what implications does this have for the wedding ritual which is constructed around a heterosexualised script?

Schweingruber et al.'s (2004) research on heterosexual marriage proposals can be used to suggest that one implication is that while marriage proposals survive in late modernity, this masks how the decision to marry was negotiated by both partners beforehand amongst all twenty of the couples in their study. This highlights the importance of investigating behind the veneer of the ritualised performance to explore the, perhaps reflexive, ways in which heterosexualised scripts of traditional symbols and practice are engaged with by the heterosexual and same-sex couples.

Despite how aspects of the reflexive modernisation thesis are supported by some research on commitment rituals, research also demonstrates that this thesis presents a particular view of intimate life not shared by all. As mentioned earlier in the chapter, social inequalities are glossed over, particularly in Giddens' (1992) account of the transformation of intimacy. Heaphy (2007:176, emphasis in original) notes how "the absence of difference in the sociology of reflexivity raises questions about whose self-identities are being theorised and explored, whose are made invisible, and the operations of power that the sociological erasure of difference support". This thesis investigates issues of difference within the sample of participants, particularly those of sexuality and gender. Gender has been a particular focus of wedding research (see, for example, Currie, 1993; Humble et al., 2008; Otnes & Pleck, 2003; Schweingruber et al., 2004), which emphasises differences between the ritual experiences of male and female partners in the decision to marry, the process of planning and during the ritual itself.

While Humble et al.'s (2008) typology notes how egalitarian some couples are, they also create a group called 'traditional couples'. This group was made up of couples who saw wedding work as naturally gendered. Both partners were in agreement that the wedding was the

'bride's day' and the women organised almost all of the wedding details. Even when stressed and overwhelmed by the organising this ideology was not challenged and brides did not ask the groom for help, but turned to female family members and friends instead. Humble (2009) also notes, in relation to couples marrying for a second or third time, that remarriages tended to involve smaller and less complicated weddings, and that the majority of the couples replicated gendered patterns from their first weddings in subsequent weddings. The traditional couples in this typology do question the extent to which society is detraditionalised. This is not to do with the persistence of tradition per se, but the way in which it is unreflexively adopted, rather than being a choice amongst a variety of options as Giddens (2002) argues tradition has become. These more traditional couples are not accounted for in the reflexive modernisation thesis.

Currie (1993) interviewed 13 'brides' and 3 'grooms' in Canada to explore why traditional weddings remain popular and how weddings reproduce gendered family relations. She found that there was a conflict between the egalitarian values that the interviewees were committed to and expected in their marriage, and the way in which women assumed responsibility for the work of weddings and continued to have traditional weddings. One interviewee demonstrated the symbolic importance of 'following tradition' by saying; "For some reason I didn't think it would be a proper wedding if I didn't have the traditional" (Currie, 1993). Currie (1993:415) emphasises this paradox by referring to them as 'modern traditional' weddings in which couples try to establish "'modern' relationships in the name of 'tradition'". She argues that this contradiction can be maintained as weddings are seen as distinct from everyday life and therefore the gendered nature of the wedding does not threaten their everyday practices. Strano (2006), who studied wedding photography (the types of shots couples asked for, who was included in the photos and which photos were displayed or presented in an album, for example) to explore the perpetuation and

resistance of gender norms, argues that it is important to recognise that the wedding, as a ritual, is defined in part by its juxtaposition with everyday life. Therefore, it is argued that tradition or gender norms are not necessarily actively chosen and internalised, just not rejected (Strano, 2006). This supports the idea that the distinction between the ritual and everyday life allows for the perpetuation of gendered traditions without threatening the couple's everyday relationship.

However, as noted by Oswald and Suter (2004:882), "research on heterosexual people's wedding experiences has emphasised gender without examining the heterosexual context within which gender is negotiated". Oswald (2000), in his research on heterosexism at weddings, showed that when LGBT guests were included in wedding celebrations, their presence was often conditional on their appearance and behaviour approximating gender conformity. Thus he argues that not only do weddings reproduce gender relations, but this relationship is complicated by the interrelationship between gender and heterosexism. Many of Oswald's (2000:360) participants made a conscious choice not to dance at weddings because of it being a performance governed by heterosexist rules in which women are expected to dance with men or other women (but not slow dance) and they were worried about the reaction they might get if they broke these rules.

Heterosexualities are the focus of Hockey, Meah and Robinson's (2007:4) research and they highlight how "being 'everywhere and nowhere', heterosexuality resists critical reflection, yet demands conformity". As suggested by Oswald (2000), Hockey et al. (2007) argue that heterosexuality transcends the boundaries of sexuality and is difficult to reflect upon and do differently. Heteronormativity, the institutionalised normative status of heterosexuality, thus frames all sexualities (ibid). If this is the case, then heterosexualised scripts associated with the wedding ritual may also be relevant to an

understanding of same-sex couples' commitment rituals. This is supported by Lewin (1998) who, despite describing how many of the same-sex couples who had non-legal ceremonies were very creative and reflexive, also noted how couples tended to naturalise their choices in the framework of a vague notion of 'tradition'. So while an analysis of the rituals themselves would invoke an image of post-modern pastiche and parody, this is not representative of the meanings that couples attributed to them (ibid). Most couples, once they had been through the creative process experienced the event "as though it couldn't possibly have been otherwise" (Lewin, 1998:54).

While couples deliberately brought queer symbols into the ceremony, many ceremonies also contained powerful symbols of heterosexuality such as "the white bridal dress and veil, tuxedos, white multitiered cakes, diamond rings, elaborate floral decorations, and, most notably, the use of wedding liturgies from various religious traditions" (Lewin, 2001:47). Tapping into the imagery and symbolism of the wedding unleashes a "flood of highly charged meanings" that are not easily controlled (Lewin, 1998:196). For example, one couple, Rachel and Nancy, were determined to have an ordinary Jewish wedding, but their act of conformity in wearing gendered clothes was seen as a subversive use of drag by the rabbi (ibid:247).

Traditional symbols could be described here as relationally embedded as they require recognition from other ritual participants to be seen as legitimate. In her research, Lewin (1998) states that the most fundamental thing for these couples organising a commitment ceremony was that it would be seen as a 'wedding', also implicating others in the legitimisation of this ritual as a 'wedding'. Smart (2007b), in her research with same-sex couples having non-legal rituals, emphasised the significance of these rituals as 'fateful moments' (Giddens, 1992) in which meaningful relationships are reflected upon and negotiated. Decisions have to be made about past and future

relationships, but these decisions were also affected by the responses of those around them to the couple's choice to hold a ceremony. Almost all of the couples in this study experienced some ambivalent feelings from family members or friends which had to be managed. Sometimes this was pre-empted by these individuals being excluded from knowledge of the ritual. Smart (2007b) concludes by emphasising the lengths that people went to in include both family members and friends in their rituals.

The symbols invoked in rituals can have different meanings for different people, in different contexts and can stand simultaneously for different things (ibid). This can be linked to Charsley's (1992) concept of marooning, which can help account for how and why same-sex couples can appropriate traditional wedding symbols, and not just in an ironic way, without challenging their identity as gay or lesbian and their everyday relationship. Marooning is a concept created by Charsley (1992) to explain the relationship between wedding cake tradition and social change. He suggests that "what is common, even standard and merely practical, at one time, assumes a new aspect when it is prolonged into an era of changed practices and practicalities...It is deprived of much of its context, becomes to a degree mysterious and open to interpretation" (Charsley, 1992:133). Marooned traditions are cut off from the context in which they were created, so while the practice continues the meaning changes (ibid). For example, traditionally the wedding cake was cut by the bride, but this task was redefined as a joint one in the 1930s when cakes with very hard icing were beginning to be made (ibid). By the 1980s this practice of the bride and groom cutting the cake had taken on the meaning of symbolising their first joint task in life (ibid).

Marooning can be seen as similar to Giddens' (1991) process of detraditionalisation, and a fuller explanation of how this process works at the micro level, and in relation to ritualised behaviour. However,

while Giddens emphasises the way in which tradition must now be chosen and defended in a non-traditional way, Charsley (1992) notes how, while open for reinterpretation, marooned traditions are, on the whole, still unreflexively adopted. For example, he argues that the role of the wedding cake is rarely questioned and its presence makes sense to all, despite many people being unsure of its meaning or if it even has one. Otnes and Pleck (2003:112) also point to the way in which practices can become severed from their original meaning, such as how most brides redefine being 'given away' by their fathers as 'tradition' rather than a ritual of subordination. Jellison (2008) implicates the wedding industry in recasting the purposes of a formal wedding to guarantee its survival. The meanings that couples attribute to their actions is a key focus of this research, with particular attention given to the ways in which these rituals are imagined and managed as well as performed.

The irony of same-sex couples employing heterosexual traditions perhaps serves to highlight the pervasiveness of the 'white wedding discourse' and the difficulty of imagining a commitment ceremony outside of this discourse. Kitzinger and Wilkinson (2004), in writing about their own same-sex wedding in Canada, note how:

For many people, mention of our marriage evoked- even when we took them to be joking- a flower-bedecked church, where, swathed in white lace (or tuxes), we would walk radiantly up the aisle, accompanied by strains of organ music, to the waiting priest at the altar. There have been enquiries, some serious, others less so, about the hen night, the matron of honour, the confetti, the cake and the speeches at the reception. The jokes (a question about who would be 'giving us away'; a father's humorous complaint that he had not been 'asked for (his) daughter's hand in marriage'; objections from several lesbian and gay friends that we hadn't invited them to be bridesmaids) depend, of course, on precisely this

contrast between the conventionalised image of the traditional wedding (which is invoked) and what we were assumed to be doing (p.136-7).

This could be used to challenge Giddens' (1992) idea that gay couples, as they are not constrained by tradition, are the pioneers of the post-traditional order. The 'white wedding discourse' that both Lewin (2001) and Kitzinger and Wilkinson (2004) describe can be seen to work as a meaning constitutive tradition, reinforced by the media, such as the way in 2003 the BBC illustrated a report on UK civil partnership rights with a pink tiered wedding cake topped by two figurine brides (Kitzinger and Wilkinson, 2004:144). However, the quotation above could be interpreted in a number of different ways, especially as many of the comments made were in jest. In fact, appropriating heterosexual symbols, such as the white wedding dress, could be seen as more of a challenge to heteronormativity than avoiding anything seen as too heterosexual. The queering of tradition, such as the way in which Bob and Mark combined 'traditional' tuxedos, bridesmaids and a wedding cake with images that evoked their involvement in the leather and uniform communities (Lewin, 1998:77), both claims authenticity and resists and subverts the tradition at the same time.

From a queer theory perspective, Ingraham (2007:199) stresses the role of what she calls the 'heterosexual imaginary' in naturalising the institution of heterosexuality and suggests that "we may even find ourselves challenged to marry without an elaborate white wedding". The meaning-constitutive tradition of the white wedding may act as a discourse through which all meanings must be filtered, even if the white wedding as a practice is rejected. For example, in McQueeney's (2003:58) case study of a lesbian commitment ceremony in the US, one member of the couple says: "You know when you're a little girl, you just have these dreams and you plan what your wedding's going to be like...I wasn't going to let my sexuality get in the way of having everything I

wanted". Despite seeming to explicitly challenge the heteronormativity of weddings and resisting exclusion from this ritualised tradition, she is not reflexive about the way in which she is reinforcing the gendered nature of weddings in terms of them being the realisation of girls' dreams. By appropriating some heterogendered traditions, McQueeney (2003:61) argues that this couple constrained the potential of their ritual to achieve a more fundamental social transformation because it reproduced the same oppressive dynamics that had contributed to their own oppression. This highlights the interconnectedness of heteronormativity and gender and the need for future research to consider their interactions.

There is a huge gap in the literature because heterosexual female ritualisation has been focused on at the expense of heterosexual male and same-sex ritualisation. Nelson and Otnes (2005:94) suggest that future research could focus on the wedding planning process more intimately and direct questions to brides and grooms themselves regarding negotiations with friends and family. The focus on brides that Nelson and Otnes' (2005) research has, along with that of many others, while reflecting the larger role that women may play in 'wedding work' (Humble et al., 2008) also serves to reinforce the gendered nature of weddings and takes for granted the heteronormative language of bride, groom and wedding, without challenging it and exploring how people navigate through and use this terminology. This is particularly pertinent in a study considering same-sex as well as heterosexual couples.

Conclusion

This literature review has outlined theoretical arguments surrounding the processes of detraditionalisation and individualisation and the associated concepts of self-reflexivity and post-traditional society. It has been argued that there are many issues with the applicability of these

ideas and that the role of relationality and tradition are also important to consider in an investigation of contemporary wedding and civil partnership rituals. Even if tradition is not experienced as a cultural constraint, the 'traditional' white wedding could still be aspirational for many heterosexual and also same-sex couples as it lives on through meaning-constitutive tradition.

Charsley (1992:135) argues, in his research into the tradition of wedding cakes, that in major and infrequent events, such as weddings, the role of tradition is bound to be greater. Rituals not only mark tradition, but they also serve to maintain it (Leeds-Hurwitz, 2002). In fact, it could be argued that the continuation of tradition in rituals does not mean that everyday life has not been detraditionalised. But, at the same time, an emphasis on the detraditionalisation of everyday life could mask the continued centrality of tradition in rituals. Smart (2007b) points to the significance of relational negotiations in non-legal same-sex commitment ceremonies. This thesis aims to extend this work to consider the importance and role of relationality in a new legislative context, as the Civil Partnership Act 2004 was implemented after their fieldwork had finished, and also in relation to both same-sex and heterosexual couples. The concepts of 'relational reflexivity' and 'reflexive coupledness' were introduced (and are developed in chapter 6) to try to address the way in which these aspects of personal life have been neglected.

Social differences and inequalities have been shown to be important to consider too in order to challenge the way in which the individualisation and detraditionalisation processes are often seen as universal, which masks unevenness in the extent to which they have permeated social life. Attention is paid particularly to differences of gender and sexuality, and also age and class (ethnicity is not addressed within the confines of this study as discussed in chapter 2), within the sample.

This thesis will now outline the methodological approach that has been taken to address the issues that have been raised in this literature review, and in order to address the research question below:

How is relationality imagined, managed and performed in contemporary wedding and civil partnership rituals?

Chapter 2: Methodology

Introduction

In order to address the issues raised in the literature review, a study of the meanings and practices that encompass wedding and civil partnership ceremonies was undertaken. This was done through the use of case studies of couples planning a wedding/civil partnership, retrospective interviews with couples who had recently entered into a marriage/civil partnership and a photograph project with many of these participants. It was important to capture both the planning stage of the event; in which choices, constraints, influences and emotions combined to create the style and content of the ritual, and also the aftermath of the ceremonies; where couples could reflect back on the planning process, the ritual itself and what it meant to them. This chapter discusses the above methods that were employed in this study as well as reflecting on the underlying epistemology that informs this research, my role and identity as a researcher and the ethical considerations.

Epistemology

This thesis aims to take a sociological approach to consider the ways in which relationality is imagined, managed and performed in contemporary commitment rituals. Queer theory has focused attention on the homosexual/heterosexual binary and heteronormativity (Corber and Valocchi, 2003) and drawn attention to the importance of studying the inside (i.e. heterosexuality), as well as more marginal groups in society (Stein and Plummer, 1996). For Roseneil, (2007:87) "taking a queer approach meant both being open to seeing differences between homosexual and heterosexual lives, and according analytical importance to these, but at the same time not treating the categories of

'homosexual' and 'heterosexual', and the individuals who carry these identities, as essentially different, as fixed and firmly constituted". This is of central concern in this thesis and I want to use the insights of this work, but apply them more sociologically. Queer theorists, however, have been accused of rarely moving beyond the text (ibid), and are said to have "an underdeveloped concept of the social, and a lack of engagement with 'real' material, everyday life and social practices and processes" (Roseneil, 2000:2.2). However, some more recent theorists have moved beyond the text, such as American academics, Goltz and Zingsheim (2010), who analyse their own civil union celebration. Law and Urry (2004:395-6) hint at a way in which the epistemological gulf between the relativism of queer theory and the realist position of mainstream sociology can be bridged by suggesting that "the world we know in social science is both real and it is produced...so the real is real enough...but it is also made" (emphasis in original). In this way the narratives and meanings of social actors can be investigated without having to conclude that reality is arbitrary. However, as Hockey et al. (2007:8) highlight in their research on 'mundane heterosexualities', "accounting for the practice(s) of heterosexuality is therefore complex" because of the reflexivity required on the part of the researcher to investigate something "that exists in a practical state in agents' minds and not in their consciousness or rather their discourse" (Bourdieu, 1977:27). Hockey et al. (2007) approach this issue by focusing on instances in which heterosexuality was seen to have 'failed' in the narratives of their participants. This was also found to be useful strategy in this analysis so as to highlight the importance of the often unarticulated ways in which practices were embedded in tradition and heterosexuality.

Along with Weeks (2000:9), I argue that in research "we have to tell our truth, on the basis of our research, while recognising that there are many possible truths". Morgan (1996:189) notes that "the perspectives of observer and observed are necessarily different", which is recognised

in this study. The participants have been given a voice through quotations and the use of some of the photos complete with their own captions, but these have all been selected, structured and presented by the researcher. The couples did not talk about the ways they imagined, managed and performed their rituals in such terms. However, these themes and the typology of strategies, which has been developed from these themes, do aim to allow for differences between the couples, within the couples, and differences over time, to be considered. Also, the findings, themes and strategies were developed out of the narrated experiences of the couples.

This thesis also aligns itself with feminist methodologies which are committed to excavating mainstream sociological concerns to reveal what has been ignored, suppressed and excluded (DeVault, 1996). My research took on this task of excavation; but in this case to uncover the experiences of heterosexual men, as well as homosexual men and women, who have been largely overlooked in research about weddings. Much feminist research makes the researcher visible to overcome the traditional boundary between knower and known (DeVault, 1996) and to acknowledge the power that the researcher has in representing the participants in particular ways (Markham, 2005). This has been done in a variety of ways; for example Smart (2007a) uses autobiography in part to acknowledge the interplay between the real lives of those researched and those researching. She intersperses her own family photographs with her reflections on past research projects to present her connectedness thesis. While my focus was on my participants rather than my own experience, I reflect later on in this chapter on my own wedding and how the experience of getting married impacted on my interpretations of other weddings and civil partnerships. This is particularly important as many of the participants asked me about my wedding, and I relived certain aspects of my wedding and the planning process through the interviews as they brought back memories and made me reflect differently on my experience.

Methods

Smart (2007a:42) argues that a few purposively selected lives can be used to capture a complex picture of social change and connections with networks of kin located within a particular time and space. They are ideal for the study of meanings, motivations, desires and aspirations. Case studies are ideal for investigating wedding and civil partnership rituals because they enable how and why questions to be addressed about real-life events (Yin, 2004). This research used case studies and retrospective interviews to focus on the meanings that the participants themselves attributed to their actions. As Lewin (1998:86) highlights, a study of the ritual symbols included in a commitment ceremony may point to a postmodern assemblage or bricolage, but this may not represent the meaning attributed to these symbols by the couple, who may interpret them as “natural symbols to which they have an authentic claim”. Case studies and retrospective interviews were thus an ideal way to explore the ways in which these rituals were imagined and managed.

This in-depth qualitative research was carried out with twenty-seven couples living in the South, South-East and South-West of England between February 2009 and August 2010. These couples either took part in a one-off interview or were followed through the process of planning their ritual. In addition, the opportunity to participate in a photograph project was offered to all of the couples. The following section describes all of these methods before moving on to discuss the process of data collection.

Retrospective Interviews

Retrospective, semi-structured interviews were carried out with sixteen couples (eight heterosexual and eight same-sex couples- consisting of three lesbian and five gay couples) who had entered into a marriage/civil partnership since December 2005 (when the Civil Partnership Act was implemented). Semi-structured interviews allowed space for some exploration of meanings that participants attributed to their actions and room to follow up issues raised by the participants. The interviews involved the couple reflecting on their experience of planning a wedding/civil partnership, the nature of the wedding/civil partnership itself and the memories and mementos of the day (see Appendix 1 for a copy of the interview schedule). These interviews lasted between one and two-and-three-quarter hours and were carried out at the homes of the participants. They were recorded on a dictaphone and then transcribed.

Humble, Zvonkovic and Walker (2008) studied the gendered nature of wedding work through the use of retrospective interviews with married couples. Similarly, Weeks, Heaphy and Donovan (2001) carried out semi-structured interviews to explore the meanings surrounding relationships for same-sex couples. They argue that a questionnaire survey would fail to reveal the complexity of meanings around identity and relationships. Alternatively, semi-structured interviews allow space for exploration of meanings and for brief life-histories which helps to ground the narratives (Jones, 1985). The retrospective interviews carried out for this study were found to be a rich way of gathering data. The wedding/civil partnership ritual was a very significant day for all of the couples and almost of the participants showed me a variety of wedding-related paraphernalia, from planning spreadsheets to photographs, and wedding cards to speeches in addition to verbally narrating their ritual events.

Retrospective interviews alone, however, may have problems of participants not remembering certain details of the planning. This was, in fact, mentioned without prompting by David, a counsellor in his early fifties, at the end of his interview:

Well it's actually quite good to have the opportunity to be made to sit down and talk about it and to remember it because we are already remembering it in slightly different ways and have different impressions and there are things that I've nearly forgotten. So it's quite nice just to kind of remember it really and it isn't even a year yet since it happened so it's not like we're in our rocking chairs, but even with just that short period of time it's nice to have another look at it.

David was referring here to slight variations in the way in which he and Gavin remembered and narrated their civil partnership after less than a year had passed. The joint interview approach highlighted these differences. It has also been suggested that people look back with rose-tinted glasses and gloss over conflict to project a happy image. Otnes and Pleck (2003), for example, argue that people look back and erase the bad memories of their 'magic' day. Emotion work may come into play more here; especially as romantic discourse constructs the wedding day as the happiest day of your life and couples may be reluctant to talk about the negative aspects of their experience. However, this desire to present a happy event may be indicative of the emotional expectations surrounding these rituals, and their narratives may mask more ambivalent or negative experiences. Thus it is important to remember that the couples' narratives were constructions of the event based on what they remember, how they want to remember it, and also what they feel comfortable in disclosing to me. This also highlights the importance of following couples through the planning process rather than just conducting retrospective interviews.

Case Studies

Eleven couples (six heterosexual and five same-sex- comprising of two gay couples and three lesbian couples) who were planning a wedding/civil partnership were used as case studies. This involved an initial interview with each couple, and then another interview before the wedding/civil partnership in all apart from two cases, followed by a post-ritual interview. The couples were then followed through the planning process for approximately six months each. Only two interviews were conducted with two of the same-sex case study couples (Jessica and Nicola, and Ryan and James) due to the event happening a month after I made initial contact with them, which meant that there was not the same opportunity for gaining in-depth data about the planning of the event. Ideally there would have been a minimum length of time before the wedding/civil partnership so that imaginings and management strategies could be mapped at different times through the planning process. However, recruitment of same-sex couples who were planning their civil partnership was difficult despite the multiple purposive sampling methods used (see data collection discussion, below). Therefore, these couples were also included as case studies despite only being able to conduct one pre-ritual interview.

Between interviews the couples (usually one member of the couple) were kept in contact with via telephone or email (depending on the participants' preferred method of communication) approximately every two weeks during the planning of their wedding/civil partnership. Participants thus reflected on events and feelings relating to their wedding/civil partnership at different stages of the planning process and also after the event had occurred. This was particularly useful in tracing how the imagined ritual became shaped into the one performed on the big day, as is discussed in chapter 5. The interview questions for the initial interview (Appendix 2) were similar to the ones used in the retrospective interviews, and subsequent interviews consisted of loosely

constructed questions specific to each couple and their wedding/civil partnership ceremony.

Most of the couples were happy to be interviewed together. In only one case, that of Holly and her partner Kieran, did both partners not consent to be interviewed, and also in only one case, also with a heterosexual couple, Jenna and Brian, did the male partner assume that I would not be interested in interviewing him. This was to do with the assumption that 'wedding work' is women's work, as will be discussed in chapter 4. Most of the participants had expected that they would be interviewed together as a couple and wanted this to be the case, even before I asked whether they were both free to be interviewed. Smart (2007b) also interviewed couples together about their commitment ceremonies and notes how these interviews have a different dynamic to individual interviews as couples interact and produce additional recollections, as noted above in the case of David. However, she suggests that couple interviews may produce more consensual accounts. This is part of the emotion work of a relationship, in which a uniform and happy front may be projected to outsiders (Hochschild, 2003).

Duncombe and Marsden (1993:237) also raise the ethical issue of the researcher inadvertently encouraging the process of uncoupling by trying to persuade one partner to articulate feelings about the other or probing about issues of conflict. They reflect upon experiences of couples arguing in interviews and express guilt that it was their presence which fuelled this conflict and that they did not try to smooth things over. While I did not intentionally fuel any conflict during the interviews, some of the participants (mainly heterosexual women in the case study group) did use the interview to express negative feelings about the lack of support and involvement of their partner in the planning process, such as Patrick and Amanda, whose experience is discussed in chapter 4. Having said this, it was far more common for conflict with other friends and particularly family members to be

mentioned, and in this way the partners played a supportive role while this conflict, and the emotions that it generated, were discussed.

I was invited to one wedding and one civil partnership to observe the ceremony. Fieldnotes were taken at the wedding to be used in conjunction with the interview transcripts for the purpose of analysis. I gave the couple a small gift to express my gratitude for letting me observe their personal ritual and because of social convention. I also gave them copies of the photographs that I took during the day.

Photograph Project

After starting my fieldwork I realised just how important some consideration of the visual nature of weddings and civil partnerships was in order to achieve a more comprehensive understanding of these rituals. Participants proudly showed me planning folders, magazines, spreadsheets, table plans, guest books, cards, certificates, gifts, photos, DVDs, invitations, clothing, rings and much more. While they have described these visual artefacts to me, these narratives do not fully capture what I have been shown. This view is supported by many, such as Halford and Knowles (2005:1.2) who argue that “visual work allows us to see the ongoing and embodied practice [of] everyday life, productions that are multi-dimensional and chaotic: skills and performances that cannot be reduced to words and which words alone cannot represent”. Therefore, additional ethical consent was obtained from the ethics committee and a photograph project was carried out with a total of eight interview and case study participants who wished to take part. These participants comprised of five heterosexual couples and three same-sex couples (two male couples and one female couple).

Participants were asked to take or provide five photographs of things that are significant to their wedding/civil partnership and provide a

caption for each one to describe and explain why they chose those particular images, what they mean to them and why. This added depth to the case studies and interviews as participants were reflecting back on their wedding/civil partnership in a different way which added another perspective on what they said in their interviews.

While we should avoid using a particular research method for its own sake, visual methods may uncover parts of social life that other methods miss (Sweetman, 2009:16). Sweetman (2009) argues that Bourdieu's concept of habitus can perhaps more fruitfully investigated through the use of visual methods as Bourdieu places it largely in the unconscious; therefore, it is difficult to articulate through other methods. I think that this can also be applied to the study of emotions. Brown (2006:6) argues that the sociology of emotion is inadequate because it "continues to afford the intellect and reason too much control over feeling and the irrational". Perhaps visual methods can help to inject some emotion and complexity to Giddens' (1992) rational and reflexive individual in relation to the ways in which people interact with tradition. Perhaps they will also help to capture more of the messiness and complexity of social life that Back (2007) attempts to uncover through the 'art of listening'; by being more attentive to complex layers of meaning and all of our senses. The photographs that have been used in chapters 4 and 5 build upon themes emerging from the couples' narratives and add a visual element to these narrative themes. All of the photographs (apart from those that displayed the names of people or places) that the participants provided as part of this project have been reproduced in Appendix 9 complete with original captions.

Partly to try to address this issue of power that the researcher has over the representations of participants, the couples had some say in the way they were visually represented in the thesis, which is an attempt at a more collaborative and ethical way of undertaking research (as well as attending to the visibility of wedding and civil partnership rituals). The

extension of the research in the form of a photograph project allowed the participants to 'show' as well as speak for themselves. In fact, Knowles and Sweetman (2004:13) argue that compared with snippets of quotations taken out of context, photographs are potentially less ambiguous or misleading. However, the photographs were not very good at representing the relational nature of these rituals. This is due to the additional written consent that would have been required to publish photographs with other people in them. Some of the interview participants decided not to partake in the photograph project because of this. They felt that they could not represent their ritual visually without photographs that included family and/or friends, which supports the centrality of relationality to an understanding of these rituals. One couple, Natalie and Jakob, did take part in the photograph project, but Natalie said in an email that the photographs were her choices and not Jakob's. She explained that for him the most important things were the people so the photograph that would best represent the ritual would be the one of all of the guests. However, this was not practically possible due to all of the permissions required. Perhaps this issue can be taken up in future studies.

Mason (2002:190) suggests that research validity can be enhanced by the use of multiple methods as they encourage the researcher to approach the research questions from different angles. They also allow for investigation of the consistencies and inconsistencies within and between participants' narratives (Latham, 2004). It is not argued that it is possible to fully capture the meaning of these events through the additional visual method, but that it complements the more conventional interview method and encourages engagement with their visuality of weddings and civil partnerships (Latham, 2004:130). The couples' photographs and written descriptions added complexity to what they said in the interviews and/or my interpretation of their wedding or civil partnership rituals. Thus the photographs were used to add layers of meaning and complexity to the analysis, rather than

merely using them to illustrate the written analysis.

Data Collection

Potential interview and case study participants were recruited using a variety of purposive sampling methods and the table below shows how many participants were recruited using each method:

Figure 1: Table showing how the heterosexual and same-sex participants were recruited

Recruitment method	Heterosexual couples	Same-sex couples	Total
Researcher network	4	2	6
Internet advertisements	2	3	5
Wedding/civil partnership fair/gay pride	1	4	5
Registrars/ceremony venues	1	1	2
Snowballing	6	3	9
Total	14	13	27

The research project was advertised on gay and lesbian websites, civil partnership websites and wedding forums, and facebook groups, with a link to my own website which contained information about the project

and my contact details. I handed out hundreds of leaflets at two large wedding fairs, approached people at a gay pride event and placed two adverts in the Pink Paper. Six register offices agreed to hand out my leaflets to couples registering their intent to marry or form a civil partnership, a humanist wedding celebrant passed on my details to her clients and a couple of venues forwarded the project information to some couples who had used their premises for their ceremony. I also left leaflets in local gay venues, contacted a dozen churches, mosques and temples, and emailed a university LGBT society who forwarded the project details to all of their members. However, as can be seen from the above table, the most effective recruitment method was snowballing from existing participants.

I snowballed by asking the couples if they knew anyone else who was planning or had recently had a wedding or civil partnership as well as recruiting through my own social network. Snowball sampling is often used because the population under investigation is 'hidden'; either due to low numbers of potential participants or the sensitivity of the topic (Browne, 2005:47). In this case it was appropriate due to the small number of couples who have had, or are currently planning, a civil partnership, as well as wanting to capture weddings (and civil partnerships) of differing size and content (as I felt that those planning smaller events may not put themselves forward). I did not interview any of my friends and family; but used them to recruit other couples who I did not know well or had never met before. This allowed for the inclusion of people who may not have come forward through advertising. Weston (1991), in her study of non-heterosexual 'families of choice', recruited through her personal connections as she argues that participants gained through agencies and advertisements are more likely to be highly educated, politicised individuals who see themselves as central (rather than marginal) to the population in question. A few of the couples recruited this way, particularly those who had a small event, said that they would not have responded to advertisements because

they assumed that researchers would be interested in more lavish ceremonies.

In justifying her sampling method of snowballing from her own social network, Browne (2005:51) said that she did not attempt to be statistically valid and conduct proportionate sampling because, due to the small sample involved, it would have had to have been assumed that one or two people can speak for a sector of the population, such as 'black', 'working class' or 'disabled' groups. This "runs the risk of reinscribing particular categories of difference and makes assumptions of homogeneity within predefined categories" (Browne, 2005:51). This research was concerned primarily with exploring the meanings surrounding contemporary weddings and civil partnerships for the case study and interview participants. This study did not have the scope to be representative of different groups in British society, and as there are so many different cultural groups with different wedding traditions this is something that could not be adequately addressed in a study of only twenty-seven couples.

Sample Description

The sample consisted of twenty-seven couples, with whom I conducted forty-seven interviews. The participants ranged in age from twenty-three to fifty-eight at the time of the wedding/civil partnership (please note that ages at the time of interview are used in the chapters of analysis). Same-sex participants were generally older, with an average age at the time of civil partnership of thirty-eight, compared with thirty-three-and-a-half for the heterosexual couples. This is partly due to older same-sex couples being unable to legally formalise their relationships at an earlier time, and was also reflected in the length of relationships, as the same-sex couples had been together an average of two years longer than the heterosexual couples (seven and five years respectively). A third of the

couples were working class and two-thirds middle class (according to occupation), which was evenly spread amongst the heterosexual and same-sex couples. They were all white and almost all were white British. Geographically, they were spread all across the South, South-East and South-West of England. The amount spent by the twenty-seven couples who had a ceremony totalled an estimated £280,800 (some of the couples were unsure of the exact figure) with an average spend of £10,400. The same-sex couples spent £4,500 less than the heterosexual couples on average. Please refer to the table of participant characteristics for more information about the research participants (Appendix 11).

The chapters of analysis draw on the forty-seven interviews conducted with all of the twenty-seven couples, as well as being informed by email and phone updates from the sixteen case-study couples, the photograph project conducted with eight couples and the experience of attending two of the events.

Ethical Considerations

It could be argued that any topic can be a sensitive one and cause emotional stress to participants, and particularly those that intrude into the private sphere or relate to personal experience (Lee and Renzetti, 1993:6). Weddings and civil partnership ceremonies are very personal and lots of the participants were stressed or upset about certain aspects of the event or the planning of it (mainly due to interference or lack of support from family members or friends). However, while this was the case, many of the participants actually expressed how it was nice to have someone neutral to talk about the issues with so they gained a positive experience out of the interviews.

In order to comply with ethical guidelines and ensure that the

participants were aware of how the data may be used, the research design was approved by the University of Southampton Social Sciences Ethics Committee (see Appendix 8). Informed consent was obtained from each participant before the interviews started. The interview consent forms included information about the nature of the study and contact details (see Appendices 3 and 4). Participants were also informed about anonymity and confidentiality procedures and how the results would be disseminated in my PhD thesis and potentially in articles and books in the future. The interview consent forms stated that participants could withdraw their participation from the study at any time and also that the interview could be terminated at any time. Participants were also informed that they could freely refuse to answer any questions that they did not wish to answer. They were then asked to sign a consent form once I had answered any questions they may have had.

The case study consent forms (Appendix 4) emphasised the fact that phone conversations, emails and other forms of communication, as well as more formal face-to-face interviews, were to be used for research purposes. It also mentioned the possibility of observing a wedding/civil partnership related trip (such as to view a possible venue), but this was not carried out with any of the couples during the planning process due to the time and travel logistics involved. However, one of the weddings and one of the civil partnerships (Patrick and Amanda, and Mike and Robert) were observed as I was invited along to the ceremonies.

In addition to the more formal consent, I made sure always to ask before I audio-recorded an interview (in subsequent interviews as well as first interviews). Interview recordings have only been listened to by me, and are stored in a locked filing cabinet, as is my fieldwork diary. The transcripts are kept securely on my computer, accessible only with my password. Transcripts have only been seen by myself and in some cases, my supervisors.

In terms of the photograph project, interview participants were asked if they would like to participate in the photograph project. It was presented as an optional extra, rather than a requirement of the research. All participants were given a copy of the same instructions (i.e. Appendix 5) and were not guided to take photographs of particular things. Once the participants had emailed in their photographs and descriptions they were sent a letter (Appendix 6) and consent form (Appendix 7) to allow the researcher reproduction rights over the photographs for educational/non-commercial use in publications, websites and presentations connected with the PhD project. Copies of the photographs were printed onto the consent form so that the participants could both sign next to each image to demonstrate their consent, and so that they could choose to give their consent for some images but not others.

All participants in the research have been anonymised so that they could speak freely about their experiences. They have all been given pseudonyms and other information that may identify them has been changed (excluding the photographs). In her study of non-heterosexual commitment ceremonies, Lewin (1998) found that most of the couples were willing and even eager to have their real names revealed in the research. However, she decided to assign them all pseudonyms to conform to anthropological tradition and so that the findings were not seen as solely about the specific people named. In this research all names have been changed, although it should be noted that this was not something that concerned the majority of the couples in this study.

Conducting interviews in participants' homes could be seen as a potential health and safety issue. However, the benefits in terms of convenience for the participants, and the chance to see wedding/civil partnership artefacts (outfits, photos, videos, invitations etc) outweighed the potential risks. This risk was mitigated by having a buddy system.

Someone always knew where I was and what time I am supposed to be back.

Ethically there was an issue of sensitivity in terms of the language used in interviews. For example, I worried that some of the same-sex couples may be offended if I referred to their civil partnership as a 'wedding', and others may be offended if I did not refer to it as a 'wedding'. I made sure that I discussed this issue of language and how they refer to their ceremony, and the role each partner will have in it, during the interviews. The couples interviewed actually were generally ambivalent about the language surrounding civil partnerships and were unsure themselves of how to refer to the ritual, which will be discussed further in chapter 3.

Another issue of concern was that the participant observation of the two weddings/civil partnerships could be seen as covert in terms of other guests or wedding industry employees not consenting to or being aware of the research. However, I only made fieldnotes (rather than recording the event) and all people and places are anonymised so as to reduce the risk to others who may not be aware of the research. At the wedding I attended I actually spoke to lots of the guests and was very overt about my research as the couples had encouraged me to be and received only positive responses. In fact, guests were eager to tell me their own thoughts about that wedding, their own and others they had attended. These narratives do not feature in this thesis, but could be explored in further research, as discussed in the Conclusion.

In terms of the ethics of using participants' photograph, Wiles et al. (2008) point out that it is in relation to images that visually identify, or potentially identify, individuals that ethical issues arise. By giving participants power over what is photographed they have more control over how their wedding/civil partnership is represented in the research. Their meanings remain central, rather than photographs taken by the

researcher, which reflect what the researcher sees as significant. They could then decide whether to include images of themselves, places or things that may compromise their anonymity, or not and were made aware of the fact that they may be potentially identifiable in the project information letter (Appendix 5). However, despite this, some of the couples sent photos that displayed names of people and/or places. One couple even sent me a photograph of their wedding certificate with their full names and address visible. Thus, the photographs that include names of people or places have not been included in the thesis.

A more significant ethical issue arises in relation to photographs which include people other than the participants (Wiles et al., 2008). The information letter encouraged the participants to think carefully before taking or choosing images which identified other people, and to get their permission to do so. Due to these practical and ethical considerations none of the participants submitted photographs that identified people other than themselves, as discussed above.

Researcher Role, Identity and Reflections

Having outlined the research strategies employed in this project along with the ethical considerations, I will now reflect on my position as researcher. In addition, I also reflect on how my own wedding, which was held a couple of months into my PhD, may have shaped my findings and my interpretation of those findings. Gray (2008:936) suggests that "reflexivity here involves a turning back of inquiry on the formative conditions of its production by variously addressing questions of the researcher's biographical relationship to the topic, the multiple voices in the text, different potential readings and the instability between the research text and the object of the study or representation". The idea that research can present a snapshot of 'reality' has been challenged by

postmodern and poststructuralist critics, who argue that this reality is constructed in academic texts (Adkins, 2002:86).

Reflexivity on the part of the researcher is seen to respond to these critics by recognising the role that they played in constructing the 'reality' that they are presenting (ibid). Edwards (1993:184), for example, argues that the researcher should reflect upon their feelings and how they may have impacted upon the research and analysis. In her own research, Edwards (1993) also asked her participants in the final interviews to reflect on how they felt about taking part. I did the same with the case study participants to explore any effects on the ritual, or their experience of it, that they felt had occurred due to being involved in the research project. The couples generally responded that they did not feel that their participation in the study had affected their plans, but some mentioned how it had got them to reflect more on their ritual decisions. One participant, Patrick, also mentioned that the interviews had allowed him to be more involved in the planning of his wedding to Amanda than he would otherwise have been (as discussed in chapter 4). The interviews did encourage participants to be reflexive about their actions, however, which may have inadvertently impacted upon the decisions that they made in planning their wedding/civil partnership. My presence could therefore be seen to have helped construct the narratives of the rituals that were presented to me.

My identity as a young, white, heterosexual female may mean that the participants who shared these characteristics were more likely to open up to me, and may also have been more likely to agree to participate. It was certainly the case that all of the participants were white and that in the heterosexual couples the women were more likely to make the initial contact and to take the lead during interviews. However, this may also have been due to the gendered nature of wedding work (as discussed in chapter 4). Weston (1991:14) notes how many of her participants said that they would not have participated if she had been straight, which

could have been an issue in recruiting same-sex couples. However, sexuality is only one aspect of identity with which to relate to others and I did not directly experience any suggestion that my sexuality was an issue for participants. All of my interviews have been very positive experiences. Even when difficult issues were discussed by participants, such as one participant whose father died a few weeks before the wedding (where he was to walk her down the aisle and give a speech), participants perceived the wedding as a positive occasion and were pleased to talk about it to someone who was not fed up of them talking about it (as some said many of their friends and family were).

My own wedding is also important to reflect on, especially as our decision to get married sparked an interest in this particular area of research. To an outsider my wedding in December 2007 could have represented the epitome of tradition (and perhaps it did to some insiders as well). My husband and I married in a church in the village where we grew up (despite now living a couple of hundred miles away) and had all of our immediate family in attendance. We were both young (I was 23 and he was 25) and neither of us had been married before or had any children. I wore an off-white full length wedding dress and walked down the aisle carrying a bouquet with my father to my husband dressed in a dark suit. I was wearing something old (my mum's eternity ring), something new (my shoes), something borrowed (my great nan's earrings) and something blue (a blue ribbon inside my dress), and even had a silver sixpence in my shoe. Confetti followed the ceremony, as did lots of group photographs (taken by my future step-father) and a 3 course sit-down meal at a hotel. There were speeches from the top table by my father, my husband and the best man (his best friend since childhood), the cake (made by my step-mother) was cut and a cheesy disco followed. We went on honeymoon after the wedding and when we returned I changed my surname to my husband's. However, this is only part of the story. Focusing on the event itself overlooks all of the decisions that were made during the planning of the wedding and the

meaning that each symbol held for us.

At the outset we were determined not to have a traditional wedding (myself in particular) as we did not think that this reflected our values or our relationship. At one stage, we considered having a double wedding with our friends abroad. We decided against this for a variety of reasons, but mainly because we felt that making it a public event with all of our family and friends was important to us, as was holding it in a place that we felt was 'home'. We debated for a long time about the venue because neither of us are religious and did not want to be hypocritical and get married in a church. However, a combination of that being the only licensed place in the area to get married apart from the pub, and perceived pressure from our mothers and grandmothers (about it not being a 'proper' wedding if it was not in a church) meant that it became the venue of 'choice'.

Reflecting back, it is easy to gloss over the stresses of planning the wedding and remember what a great time we had on the day. However, we did find planning the wedding very stressful and it caused some family conflict. My mother in particular was very excited about the event and had even encouraged my husband to propose long before he did. She wanted to be involved in every aspect of the wedding. For example, I bought my wedding dress on ebay to save on cost and she felt denied of the experience of wedding dress shopping with her only daughter so travelled up to visit so that she could take me out to buy me another dress to wear at the evening reception. Also, I found it particularly stressful that both our families and our friends would always ask me rather than Mark about aspects of the planning, and it was a similar story whenever we interacted with wedding 'professionals', such as the wedding coordinator at the reception venue. This did not reflect our roles in the planning of the day and did come as a surprise (especially from friends and family) as they know us. For me this signified the detachment of the wedding from everyday life and how it involves a

different set of expectations and norms.

Combining post-modern relationships and a 'traditional' ritual also proved difficult. It was important to us that all of our close family attended. This meant that my mother's family would meet my step-mother and her family for the first time, and that my step-grandmother, step-grandfather and his new partner would be there, as well as my husband's uncle with his wife and ex-wife both in attendance. Drawing up the table plan became a logistical nightmare because of worrying about everyone else and trying to be sensitive to potential conflict. Due to these experiences I was perhaps more likely to be looking out for family conflict in the interviews, or expecting this issue to arise. However, the centrality of relationality was a feature throughout the interviews, as is demonstrated in all three chapters of analysis.

Methods of Analysis

The focus of the analysis was the interview transcripts, email and phone communication updates from the case study couples, researcher notes made after each interview and at the wedding and civil partnership that were observed, and also the photographs and descriptions provided by some of the participants. The data was analysed thematically and coded using NVivo. This was a very thorough process of evolving coding criteria, during and after the fieldwork. The three themes of imagining, managing and performing emerged as a way of structuring and making sense of the data and the centrality of relationality to an understanding of these rituals and the reflexive engagement of the participants. This analytical focus was the result of findings from the narratives of the couples informed by previous research and theory as discussed in chapter 1, and was also guided by sociological language (such as Smart's (2007a) concept of the imaginary) in structuring and articulating these findings.

Brannen and Nilsen (2005:423) argue that narratives tend to emphasise agency and reflexivity as they characterise so much of contemporary public discourse. Plummer (2003) also raises this issue, which he says reinforces a sense of individualisation, but suggests that grounded moral stories would help overcome this problem. Therefore, this analysis has paid particular attention to the ways in which these narratives are grounded in relation to more structural factors. The analysis not only drew comparisons between the opposite-sex and same-sex couples, but also looked for similarities, as well as considering other variables, such as age, gender and class, which cut across both the heterosexual and same-sex couples.

Some of the photographs have been used in combination with the interview transcripts, and informed by the fieldwork notes and email and telephone correspondence, to build up a multi-layered and in-depth account of these rituals. The idea that an image can be taken out of its social context and 'read' to uncover a hidden internal message is rejected in favour of emphasising how it is embedded in social relations and a wider social context (Banks, 2001:11-12).

The descriptions of the photographs provided by the participants help to ground and situate the images. Chaplin (2005) took photographs of the residents of a particular street outside their front doors and asked them to provide captions for photographs, which she analysed along with the images. She argues that "even the most factual-sounding captions are not just add-ons to the image. They are never neutral; even what they leave out is significant, because the omission indicates that something in the picture was not considered important enough to mention" (Chaplin, 2005:1.7). These descriptions and photographs added to the picture of what these rituals meant to the participants.

Conclusion

This methodology chapter has described and explained the rationale behind and the details of the interview, observation and photograph methods that were undertaken for this research study. Some of the characteristics of the participants have been described to give some indication of the make-up of the sample whose experiences have been drawn upon in the following chapters of analysis, as well as referring to how this particular sample was recruited. The chapter has also reflected upon the ethical considerations of this research, such as the anonymity of the participants, and the role and identity of the researcher, particularly as I shared the experience of a recent marriage with the participants. Finally, the methods of analysis were outlined. This thesis now moves on to the three substantive chapters, which are first outlined in the introduction to the chapters of analysis.

Introduction to the Chapters of Analysis

The following chapters of analysis focus on the interconnected nature of wedding and civil partnership rituals and how these interconnections are embedded in the imaginings, management and performances of these rituals. Weddings and civil partnerships are embedded relational practices with common or shared meanings which varied by sexuality, gender, age and class (ethnicity is not explored in the confines of this study). These factors and the intersections between them will be explored in each of the three analysis chapters. Real and imaginary relationships influence and provide the context for these rituals.

Relationality as a concept is used here to encompass family relationships and friendships and acknowledge the importance of both in personal life. Rituals put relationships into sharp focus as they demand practices of inclusion and exclusion and allow for the possibility of reconstructing relational boundaries. As has been shown in the literature review, the majority of wedding research focuses on discursive representations of romantic love and marriage, whereas this analysis is focused on the relational nature of the rituals and how these connections affect the imaginings, management and performances of these rituals. These wider cultural discourses inform the participants' ideas of what a wedding or civil partnership does or should consist of, but it is important to explore how these cultural scripts are perceived, explored and performed at the micro level within relational contexts.

Smart's (2007a) concept of 'imaginary' is particularly useful in considering rituals such as weddings and civil partnerships because they can involve so many cultural and relational expectations. They can be highly emotional events that are experienced many times in the realm of the imaginary before being enacted in real life. This analysis considers who is doing the imagining, what is and is not imagined and how these imaginings feed into the management and performance of relationships.

This imagined ritual must be managed in the context of family and friend relationships in order to be performed in the same way as it is imagined. Rituals can get transformed during the process of managing relationships if there is a disparity between the imaginings of different ritual participants. This analysis looks at who is doing the managing, who and what are being managed and what strategies of inclusion and exclusion are being utilised by the couples. Relational performances are then analysed in terms of which relationships are performed, how these relationships are displayed through the use of traditional wedding symbols, which relationships are excluded from the ritualised performances and how these relationships are hidden. Attention is paid to engagements with cultural symbols and what are considered traditional symbols and practices as they provide scripts or frameworks for relational performances as well as justifications for, and obstacles to, processes of inclusion and exclusion. Traditional symbols are often used or adapted to display relationships, and also have to be negotiated in situations of more complex relationality. In each aspect of the rituals, relationships are central to the production, reproduction and also rejection of traditional symbols.

The chapters of analysis follow the couples chronologically through the ritual process from the decision to marry or have a civil partnership, through the planning process to the ritual itself. The chapters are entitled: The Decision to Marry, Wedding Work and The Big Day. Splitting the chapters chronologically allows for an exploration of the ways in which the couples' narratives did not always remain constant, but shifted over time (in the case of the couples who were followed through the planning process) and also according to which aspect of the ritual they were referring to. Different aspects of the rituals were imagined, managed and then performed in different ways. For example, the decision to marry and associated engagement proposal rituals carried very different expectations and were managed and performed in very different ways to the planning process of the wedding and civil

partnership rituals. Some aspects of the ritual and the planning process were more likely to be narrated in certain ways. Within each chapter the three themes discussed above; imagining, managing and performing are explored. Despite the obvious implicit comparison within this research between the experiences of same-sex and heterosexual couples, a conscious decision has been made not to use sexuality to structure the analysis. The experiences of both same-sex and heterosexual couples are compared, but also considered together so as to explore how heteronormative scripts shape the experiences of both types of couple. Heterosexuality is thus seen as a social, as well as a sexual, category.

The Decision to Marry chapter looks at the couples' reasons for wanting to marry or have a civil partnership as well as how these decisions are imagined, managed and performed, who has the power to decide and how these engagements are relationally imagined, managed and performed. The Wedding Work chapter is about the planning of the wedding or civil partnership and focuses on how the planning of the ritual is imagined, managed and performed in terms of how responsibility and power are distributed, who is included and excluded, and how these divisions of labour are managed, justified and performed. The Big Day chapter considers the couples' experiences of the wedding and civil partnership days themselves and the different symbols that they included, such as clothing, the choice of venue and speeches, and what these say about the nature of weddings and civil partnerships as relational events. It focuses on how these different symbols are imagined by the participants, relationally managed and performed during the rituals.

The findings of this research do not support Giddens' (1992) idea that reflexivity fills the gap left by tradition and family conventions in the construction of contemporary wedding and civil partnership rituals. Instead, this analysis problematises a) the idea that wedding rituals are increasingly individualised and dis-embedded, and b) the assumed relationship between individualisation and reflexivity. This thesis adds

complexity to this debate by proposing that there are different ways of doing coupledness that are explored more fully in the discussion chapter. The following typology of strategies that the couples draw upon in their rituals is outlined: unreflexive (strategies of tradition), individual (self-reflexivity) and relational (reflexive coupledness and connected reflexivity). These strategies aim to extend the concept of reflexivity in considering it as relational as well as individual in nature, and also challenges the all-pervasive nature of reflexivity (as Heaphy (2008) does in his consideration of socio-cultural constraints on gay and lesbian reflexivities) by considering how they are structured according to sexuality, gender and class, as some are more open to reflexive action than others. This will enable a more in-depth understanding of how couples construct wedding and civil partnership rituals, surrounded as they are by gendered and heteronormative 'traditions' in reflexive and unreflexive ways, and while situated in webs of relationships.

Chapter 3: The Decision to Marry

Introduction

The decision to marry, or in its ritualised form: 'the proposal', was the first part of the wedding narrative that the couples shared with me. This chapter reflects on the couples' narratives regarding how they decided to marry or have a civil partnership, why they decided to do this, and also how these decisions were imagined, managed and then performed. The chapter addresses these three themes in turn to explore not only the proposal rituals that others, such as Schweingruber et al. (2004) have investigated, but also the couples' expectations of marriage and civil partnership and how these expectations were managed in the construction of the decision to marry ritual (if one was performed).

Marriage was found to act as a meaning-constitutive tradition not only for the heterosexual couples but also the younger same-sex couples. For most of these couples marriage was the assumed next step of their relationship. However, the older same-sex couples were more reflexive about their decision and the practical and legal benefits that civil partnership offered. These couples made their decision to marry through mutual discussion and negotiation, whereas all of the younger same-sex couples and heterosexual couples enacted ritualised proposals. This is not the complete story, however, as most of these couples had made the decision to marry before this proposal took place, in what I have called the 'two-tier proposal'. As has been suggested here, marriage as a meaning-constitutive tradition interacted with sexuality and age, and also gender in terms of the proposal scripts as performed by the heterosexual couples. Relationality was also important to consider in understanding how the decision to marry was imagined, managed and also performed, such as the way in which couples contextualised their decision in relation to others. Class was

not found to be a significant indicator of differences in the couples' experiences in terms of the decision to marry, but it does feature in the following two chapters in terms of how the wedding work was divided and how the big day was constructed.

Imagining the Decision to Marry

The realm of the imaginary played a large role in the decision to marry for many of the couples in this study. However, the ways in which this decision was imagined varied between different couples and different individuals. This section considers similarities and differences between what was being imagined, how it was imagined as well as who was doing the imagining. These imaginings encompassed cultural norms interwoven with personal hopes and desires, and the implicit and explicit expectations of others. In outlining the importance of the concept of 'imaginary' for her field of personal life, Smart (2007a:49) argued that "our personal musings, desires, thoughts and emotions about and around relationships are not entirely individual because they are formed in social and historical contexts; many others have much the same feelings as our own". It was certainly the case that there were many similarities in the ways in which thoughts about marriage and civil partnership were imagined amongst the participants. The main differences arose between males and females in both the heterosexual and same-sex couples, with many imaginings being feminised, and generational differences between the same-sex couples. The younger same-sex couples and heterosexual couples shared imaginings that related to notions of heteronormativity and the heterosexual imaginary, which are explored in this section. Oswald and Suter (2004) make a convincing argument that wedding research ignores the heterosexual context in emphasising gender and this analysis tries to foreground this context, while also recognising the heteronormative context within which many of the same-sex couples are situated. However, these

cultural norms were embedded within relational contexts specific to each couple and indeed each individual. Relational contexts are vital to an understanding of how the decision to marry is imagined by all of the couples and different ways in which family members and friends were implicated in these imaginings will be explored later on in this section.

For many of the heterosexual couples, marriage was so ingrained into their imagined future that they had not really entertained the idea that they might not marry. For these couples, marriage was still the recognised form of a legitimate relationship. Thus the decision to marry centred more around finding the person that they wanted to marry and deciding when this ritual should occur. For example, Elizabeth, a doctor in her mid-twenties said:

But I suppose, you know, we always grew up thinking that if we found the right person we would get married to them- like it's never been- I suppose some people grow up these days thinking 'I don't see the point of marriage' or 'why should we get married?' But I suppose that has always been something we'd had in the back of our minds so even though our religious views changed over the years I guess that didn't.

For her, once she and Andrew, a researcher in his late twenties, were "sure about each other... it seemed like the logical thing to do".

Therefore, for this couple, marriage can be seen to act as a meaning-constitutive tradition (Gross, 2005) that they had been socialised into.

Emily, a marketing manager in her late twenties also demonstrated how embedded the institution of marriage was in her imagined future:

But for me it was important that- just that Ed would ask me and wanted to marry me. I was- I wasn't quite at the stage, but I wouldn't be far away from getting upset. It's like- why? What's wrong with me? Are you waiting for someone better to come along if you haven't asked?

Here Emily talked about the potential mismatch between her and Ed's, a marketing manager in his early thirties, imaginings, but was concerned about him not wanting to marry her rather than the possibility that he may not share her desire to marry at all. Hockey et al. (2007) talked

about the complexities involved in accounting for the practices of heterosexuality and how it is difficult to unpack heterosexual imaginings because they are so implicitly embedded and unreflexively enacted. They demonstrate how hegemonic heterosexuality, “heterosexuality conceived of as ‘natural’, universal and internally undifferentiated”, may be more visible in its failings (ibid: 10). In expressing the possibility that Ed may not propose, Emily highlighted how naturally marriage, embedded within the institution of heterosexuality, acted as a framework for her relationship. Elsewhere in the majority of the heterosexual couples’ narratives, the assumption that they would form a heterosexual couple and marry was more implicit. The narratives focused on how this decision was enacted through ritualised proposals (which will be explored later in the chapter) rather than on why they wanted to enter the institution of marriage. In fact, when asked why they want to marry there were long pauses and many couples found it difficult to articulate the motivations behind their decision. For example, Daniel and Sophie, HR advisors in their late twenties, said:

Daniel: It's a funny thing really isn't it? I'd always thought I'd get married. I didn't really (pause)

Sophie: Yeah- I've always wanted to get married and (pause) I don't know.

Daniel: There's no sort of (pause). I don't think there's any put-you-finger-on reason. I think (pause)

Sophie: There's not really anything (pause). I mean I suppose you don't have to get married, but it's just nice to have that kind of- well the day- and also the commitment I guess.

What was clear in these interviews was that I was asking the couples to reflect on something that was so deeply embedded as a cultural norm that it was difficult to articulate. These narratives invoke Bourdieu's (1984) concept of habitus in which implicit principles defy “articulation not because they were necessarily taken unconsciously but rather because they required no further questioning” (Risseuw, 2005:166). It

could be argued that there are limits to the ways in which the decision to marry can be imagined, particularly in terms of why marriage is part of an assumed future, or something to aspire to in a relationship. As Sophie hinted, imaginings tend to centre on the wedding ritual itself rather than the institution of marriage or the heterosexual context within which this institution is situated. These imaginings are particularly gendered, with around half of the heterosexual females articulating that the idea of a wedding featured in their decision to marry. Holly, a doctor in her early thirties, expressed this notion:

Katie: So why was it important for you to get married?

Holly: Erm (long pause) I think I'm quite traditional in that respect. I mean I didn't have any doubts about the future of our relationship or the commitment or anything, but I wanted to have that traditional symbol and sharing the same name and so forth, and the wedding (laughs). That was probably the main thing I wanted- the wedding.

The feminised imaginings around what this wedding would involve, often drawing on childhood dreams, will be explored in chapter 5 (The Big Day), but here it is important to understand how imaginings of the wedding ritual were implicated in the decision to marry for these women. Going back to the concept of heterosexuality, Ingraham (2007) stressed how these types of wedding imaginings serve to naturalise the institution of heterosexuality, which she termed the 'heterosexual imaginary', and can help to account for their presence in accounts of why participants want to marry. For half of the heterosexual couples the decision to marry was perceived to be more important to one member of the couple than the other as revealed in the language that they used. In all of these cases the female member of the couple talked about often very detailed life plans, which involved marriage as one aspect along the way to an imagined future, particularly involving children. Their male partners often seemed to be passive recipients of these plans as they sometimes referred to these plans as belonging to their partner. For

example, George, a caterer in his late forties explained the importance of marriage to Amelia, a researcher in her early thirties:

George: Well I think I felt that it was something you wanted really, so I thought it was kind of a selfless act, because to be honest I was quite happy with the arrangement as it was.

Amelia: Yeah I know.

George: So I suppose I did it for Amelia.

Marriage as a cultural norm appeared to be stronger amongst the heterosexual women, as are imaginings surrounding the wedding itself, which will be discussed in The Big Day chapter. These hardly sound like pure relationships as envisioned by Giddens (1992), defined as a relationship maintained for its own sake and where both partners are equal. Rather, there is evidence that marriage is still functioning as a tradition, albeit in the meaning-constitutive sense, and that there is some differences in the expectations of male and female partners. These gendered imaginings support the findings of other research into heterosexual weddings such as Humble et al. (2008). However, as these studies tend to focus on wedding work rather than the decision to marry, it is interesting to get more of a sense of discrepancies and differences in the imaginings of male and female partners which may impact upon the management and performance of the rituals, especially as these studies tend to focus only on women. No similar trend of differences in the imaginings of different partners was found between the same-sex couples, perhaps supporting the idea that they are the vanguards of a post-traditional order as argued by Giddens (1992). However, as is evident from the findings discussed below, many of these couples aspired to marry and shared many of the imaginings of the heterosexual couples.

Having focused on the experiences of the heterosexual participants, it could be assumed that the imaginings of the same-sex couples would be more pragmatic, as civil partnerships and with them legal rights, have

only existed since December 2005. However, here there was a very clear generational divide between the study participants. For the older couples (ranging from late thirties to early sixties) in the sample, the decision to have a civil partnership focused around practical issues of legal rights. Imaginings were sparked off by the introduction of the Civil Partnership Act 2004 and the decision was not really perceived as a decision; it would be irresponsible not to have a civil partnership because of these practical benefits. Alison, a healthcare worker in her late thirties, thought about having a civil partnership with her partner of ten years Kathy, a healthcare worker in her early forties, while the Civil Partnership Act was in the early stages of discussion and their thoughts focused around an imagined future:

Because if one of us died we would have to pay inheritance tax on our own house, so that was partly it and also because your mum is a strict Catholic we thought if you ever ended up, God forbid, in a coma or something and your mum wanted to keep you alive, which isn't what you wanted, that I would have no rights over that so...

Securing financial arrangements and the protection of partners against any claims of authority in the case of serious illness or death were common themes in the narratives of these older same-sex couples. However, as Shipman and Smart (2007) point out, the fact that these issues were central to this decision and the ways in which civil partnership (or non-legal ceremonies in the case of their research) were imagined, does not mean that emotion was not also a central component. Smart (2007a) talks about difficulties in knowing whether love can be identified if it is not explicitly articulated, but the presence of love was implicit in these stories. For example, Nick, a local government officer in his mid-forties who had been with his partner Arthur, a civil servant in his early fifties, for thirteen years said:

The initial decision was a more practical one than a romantic one because I suppose at the time we didn't really see it as necessarily a romantic thing to do. It was just recognising the benefits of the system, but as time went on I think we got more into how

important it was and how special we could actually make it. But the initial decision was purely a practical one.

These practical issues were centrally important because they were suddenly available to couples, some of whom had been together for many decades. They have experienced times to varying degrees when same-sex relationships were highly stigmatised with no legal protection. Neil, an accountant in his mid-forties, explained his emphasis on the practical benefits of entering into a civil partnership with his partner of ten years Jeff, a commercial manager in his early fifties:

Because I've lost two partners who have died I understand- perhaps I understand more than other people [...] when Fred died I went to register the death and they said to me 'what was your relationship?' And I said 'partner' and they said 'that doesn't exist' [...] That was a horrid thing to go through and then to be told that the only category I fitted into was to be present at death. And now with this civil partnership I was thinking yeah- right- now you're going to have to have another box whether you like it or not.

In contrast, the narratives of the younger same-sex couples (mid-twenties to mid-thirties) had far more in common with the heterosexual couples. Most formed their relationships after the introduction of the Civil Partnership Act 2004, so the decision to marry was not initiated by the change in legislation and also took place earlier on in their relationships. The term 'marriage' is used here as all of these younger couples used this terminology in referring to what is legally termed a 'civil partnership'. The decision to marry was naturalised in heteronormative language and expectations. Zoe, an admin worker in her mid-twenties, explains her decision to marry her partner of eighteen months Lauren, also an admin worker in her mid-twenties:

I think once you know, you know in here (hand to heart) and you know in there (gestures to Lauren's heart) so we both know, and then it's like well why wait? People say wait a bit, what's the rush? Well it's like we're not rushing. For us we're just doing what our (pause) it's a natural progression and the next step after you're in a relationship, after you live together, is to get married.

Claims of 'ordinariness' and 'marriage' are echoed in Smart, Heaphy and Einarsdottir's (2011) study of same-sex marriage with couples under the age of thirty-five. This embedding of experiences within a heterosexual framework can be better understood if heterosexuality is viewed as a social, rather than just a sexual, category (Hockey et al., 2007). It could be said to act as a meaning-constitutive tradition (Gross, 2005) that transcends boundaries of sexual orientation for these couples who have grown up in a context of relatively equal sexual citizenship compared with the older couples in the sample. It is therefore understandable that they shared many of the expectations and aspirations of their heterosexual contemporaries. The ways in which these couples negotiated the heterosexist terrain of planning and performing their weddings and married life in relational contexts will be explored in later chapters.

So far this analysis has focused on situating the couples' imaginings in relation to wider cultural discourses and unpacking some complexities around gender, sexuality and age. In the analysis that follows, the ways in which these imaginings are relationally situated will be explored further. While the decision to marry concerns the relationship between two individuals that will be joined in marriage or civil partnership, it was unusual for the narratives not to refer to the importance of others. This chapter first considered the case of Elizabeth and Andrew, who grew up thinking that they would marry in the future. However, Elizabeth pointed out that this may not be the case for everyone and contextualised their thoughts around marriage by saying that "both sets of our parents are fundamentalist Christians" and that her "first thought was also to keep our parents happy". The imaginings of their parents were thus implicated in the ways in which they themselves have imagined marriage and in their decision to marry each other. This highlights the importance of an intersubjective account of practices which foregrounds the "concrete interpersonal networks of interdependency, obligation and constraint through which

intersubjective negotiation and accountability flow" (Bottero, 2010:5). This does not detract from the idea that the decision to marry may be part of a much broader cultural discourse rooted in hegemonic heterosexuality and notions of habitus, but highlights how this discourses and practices seep into imaginings about marriage through interpersonal relationships. Elizabeth and Andrew were fairly unusual amongst the sample in that they talked explicitly about parental expectations grounded in religion in relation to their decision to marry. However, many of the other couples also situated their decision in relation to others.

There are a number of different ways in which the couples situated their imaginings. Some couples contextualised their decisions in relation to the decisions of others. For example, Molly, an exams officer in her mid-twenties, aligned her decision to marry her partner Kat, a musician in her early-thirties, with the decisions of heterosexual couples. When asked why civil partnership was important for them she said, "I think probably for the same reason as straight couples get married; from the commitment perspective and having all of your friends and family together in one place". Here Molly made a claim about the nature of their relationship, which was naturalised in relation to an imagined idea of why heterosexual couples enter into marriage. Nick also made claims about his relationship with Arthur through his decision to marry, but more specifically in relation to his family and friends. Despite him emphasising the practical reasons behind their decision to have a civil partnership as mentioned earlier, his personal imaginings included a desire to transform his relationship with Arthur in the eyes of his family and friends. He talked a lot about what the chance to have a civil partnership meant to him:

Nick: I think on my part it was a need, need sounds a strong word, but I think it was a need to have acceptance and recognition of friends and family that our relationship was equally valid and as good as their marriage relationships. It was a chance to say well we can do as good as you, which is probably very telling about my

whole attitude to the whole thing is that I had been to so many friends and families weddings over the years and generally at each one been pretty depressed and miserable thinking I can never do this [...] My sister is obviously married so I had always felt that I was letting my parents down in some way. I don't hate myself for being gay, quite the opposite, but I recognise that there will be a certain disappointment from my parents that I am not going to produce grandchildren and all of those sort of slightly cliché things.

Heteronormativity was experienced here within a specific family context. Hockey et al. (2007:23) explain heteronormativity as "how the normative status of heterosexuality is institutionalised and legitimated through institutions such as the family and through discourse, rendering other sexualities abnormal and deviant". Failing to live up to these norms, of marriage and producing grandchildren for his parents, were experienced as failures of Nick's role within the family. Here civil partnership was imagined as a way of legitimising not only his relationship with Arthur, but also his own identity in the context of his family. Shipman and Smart (2007) and Smart (2007b) also emphasise the importance of family recognition for the same-sex couples planning non-legal commitment ceremonies that they interviewed. This was a very common theme in the narratives of the same-sex couples, particularly those who did not feel that their relationship has much recognition from family members. However, some of the heterosexual couples also sought legitimacy for their relationship in the eyes of family members. For example, as Andy, a consultant in his early forties and marrying for the third time, explained: "there are people in my family who wouldn't consider us seriously even if we've been living together for 25 years. People like Fran, who is my sister-in-law, wouldn't consider our relationship to be at all serious if we weren't married". Here personal imaginings became interwoven with the perceived imaginings of others to inform decision-making about a coupled relationship.

The relational context within which the couple was situated affected their imaginings, particularly in deciding when to marry. For example, Emily, a marketing manager in her late twenties, and Ed, a marketing

manager in his early thirties, talked about how lots of their friends had recently married:

Emily: The fact that half the people are getting married makes it more acceptable. I, we probably wouldn't have ever been the first people to get married.

Ed: No.

Emily: Other people get married and you think oh that's a nice thing to do.

Here the decision was not just about them as a couple, but also about them in relation to their wider circle of friends and peers. They added to this the idea that the length of time they had been together (6 years) and their age (late twenties) legitimised their decision to marry both to themselves and to others. They also talked about the expectations of others more explicitly and their role in the perpetuation of marriage expectations:

Ed: Well the problem we had was that so many of our friends were getting married and we had nine weddings last year. And you know every time, we do it to friends now when people have been going out for a long time and they go away for the weekend the pressure is ridiculous and their comments...erm.

Marriage was relationally experienced and perpetuated as a norm within their friendship group. This could be an example of what Bottero (2010:16) is referring to when she says that; "the mutual obligation and influence that agents bring to bear upon each other, can all be explored as integrated features of the collective accomplishment of practices". Imaginings surrounding the decision to marry can be collectively produced and reproduced through relational networks.

A few couples also talked about the relational context of their decision to marry in terms of the wedding or civil partnership acting as a way of solidifying these connections. Matt, a purchasing director and his partner Josef, a brand manager, both in their early forties, situated their civil partnership in the context of having recently returned to live in the

UK after years of living in different parts of the world. Their civil partnership was embedded within this place that they are making their permanent home, and they were keen to bring all of their friends from all over the world to celebrate their relationship, showcase London and to meet each other. The way in which Smart (2007a) utilised the term 'embeddedness' in her conceptualisation of personal life can be drawn upon to help understand this example. Embeddedness and relationality appear next to each other in a diagram of overlapping core concepts as Smart argued that they are mutually invested in each other. Smart (2007:45) uses the concept of embeddedness to "reflect the tenacity of these bonds and links, sometimes even to the extent that family members and close kin or friends can feel as if they were part of one". Thus in this case it can be seen that the way in which relationality was being imagined (with imaginary being another of Smart's core concepts) was central to Matt and Josef's decision to have a civil partnership and part of a process of embedding within a certain place and also within this global network of friends.

In terms of different ways in which friends and family members featured in imaginings of marriage and civil partnership, three themes can be identified. Some couples sought legitimacy from others through the decision to marry, some couples situated their decision in relation to the decisions made by others and others saw the decision as a way of further embedding themselves within wider relationships. These situated accounts of how the decision to marry was imagined begin to shed some light on how implicit gendered and generational expectations, habitus or the meaning-constitutive tradition of heteronormative marriage are implicated in, and embedded within, relationships. These relationships provide the context for imaginings of these broader cultural discourses. This question of "how reflexive identifications and collective behaviour relate to more implicit, dispositional processes" that Bottero (2010:7, emphasis in original) poses will be explored further in the discussion chapter.

Managing the Decision to Marry

Having considered the ways in which the decision to marry was imagined by different participants, in relation both to cultural norms and situated within relationships, this section moves on to explore how these imaginings were managed. Management involves the coming together of different imaginings along with practical considerations, constraints and opportunities. The couples varied in the amount of management that they undertook in relation to their decision to marry, which depended upon the alignment between their individual imaginings, and the alignment between their imaginings and those of their family members and friends. The relational context was implicated in the management of the decision to marry as the arena within which these negotiations took place. These relationships were often reflexively managed, but there was not a straightforward relationship between embeddedness and reflexivity as suggested by Giddens (1992) in which reflexive possibilities are opened up for dis-embedded individuals. Instead, reflexivity was found embedded within these relationships, both at the level of the couple and more broadly, and at the level of the individual. This analysis will focus on how the decision to marry was managed at these different levels by considering how the different imaginings of each individual were managed in coming to a joint decision to marry, and how couples reflexively managed both their social conditions and their situated relationality.

One key way in which the majority of couples in the sample managed their decision to marry was through the use of what I have called the two-tier proposal. The second tier, the ritualised proposal, which was enacted by all of the couples with the exception of most of the older same-sex couples, will be discussed in the final section of the chapter. Here the first tier is explored to gain an understanding of how the

decision to marry came to be performed in the way that was. This two-tier proposal was not immediately evident in the narratives of the couples for whom the decision to marry was enacted through a ritualised proposal. It was only through questioning whether marriage had been discussed prior to this performative proposal that more complex accounts emerged. This is because the first stage of the proposal took place through mutual discussion in private and was not usually part of the public narrative of the engagement.

Management of the decision to marry was more evident in the narratives of the heterosexual couples, perhaps because there was greater disparity between the imaginings of the male and female partners. Where the imaginings of each member of the couple were similar less management was required in order to display or perform the decision to marry in the ways in which it had been imagined. Management strategies of the heterosexual couples are explored first before turning to the experiences of the same-sex couples. The previous section highlighted the example of George in considering the gendered nature of some of the ways in which marriage was imagined. He explains that marriage had not been something that formed part of his imagined future, so it was not surprising that his partner Amelia took the lead on discussions around marriage, which took place over the period of a couple of years:

George: I would say you probably instigated it... if that's the word.

Amelia: I'm sure that's not entirely unusual, but yeah. But you did go out and buy the ring and surprised me didn't you?

George: yeah. I thought I would try and make it romantic.

Here a barrier to fulfilling her imaginings of marriage resulted in Amelia challenging George's expectations, sparking off a period of negotiation regarding the future form of their relationship. This starts to add complexity to the idea that engagement proposals are highly gendered

rituals in which the men in heterosexual relationships have the power to determine if and when the proposal takes place.

As seen in the previous example, many of the proposals were instigated by the female partner in heterosexual relationships and discussed in depth. This fits with some of the feminised imaginings explored in the previous section of the chapter. In their study of the engagement proposal amongst heterosexual couples, Schweingruber et al. (2004:154) also found that "each of the couples in the study had earlier reached a decision to marry". The ritualised proposal then acted to formalise the decision and create an engagement narrative for public consumption. This could be likened to Giddens' (2002) shell institutions in which the facade (in this case the highly gendered ritualised proposal) remains even though the content has changed. However, these negotiations did not seem to be the enacting of reflexive possibilities by individuals engaged in a pure relationship (Giddens, 1992). These narratives were not the story of two equals, but of negotiations and power relations set in the context of heterosexualised and gendered norms. This reflexive management was constrained by the normative traditional script surrounding the decision to marry: the proposal.

Holly, who was mentioned in the previous section in relation to her feminised and heterosexualised imaginings, talks candidly about the way in which she managed the decision to marry her partner Kieran:

Katie: had you spoken about marriage much before?

Holly: well yes because I always knew that he was not going to be forward in wanting to get married so I would have to persuade him. So we had talked about it a lot and I had also been going on about it a bit and he had kind of agreed [...]. I kind of persuaded him that we could do it and it wouldn't be too big- it would be fairly low key so he just kind of relented in the end. So yes, it was a bit of a mutual decision.

Katie: do you think you would have ever proposed to him?

Holly: I did think about it the previous leap year. I did think about it, but no I don't think I would have. I think even though he is not very romantic he is slightly traditional and I don't think he would have liked being proposed to. You've got to persuade him that he's doing things on his own terms.

This strong desire to enter a 'proper' traditional married relationship ironically led Holly to consider a non-traditional route by proposing herself. However, she was constrained by gendered norms and expectations, and also the perceived gendered norms and expectations of her boyfriend Kieran. Thus she ended up orchestrating an appropriately gendered 'proposal', which will feature in the final section of this chapter where the performance of the decision to marry becomes the focus. The way in which Schweingruber et al. (2004) draw on dramaturgical concepts of frontstage and backstage performances to highlight how preparations that may interfere with the display of relationships are concealed is useful here in understanding how this two-tier proposal works. The ways in which the proposal is gendered will be picked up on in the final section of the chapter where the enactment of the second tier of the proposal is explored, such as the ways in which gendered roles were performed by some same-sex couples in the pursuit of tradition.

For the same-sex couples, again there were generational differences in the management of the decision to marry that relate to differences identified in the ways in which this decision is imagined. It makes little sense to discuss the notion of a two-tier proposal in relation to the older same-sex couples when the majority did not enact any kind of ritualised proposal at all. They explicitly discussed the decision to marry, with these discussions centring on practical issues, and made the decision to marry through this discussion and negotiation. This group were particularly reflexive about the ways in which they could manage their financial and legal security through the decision to marry. They had long-standing relationships and previous experiences which highlighted the importance of this legal contract, such as Neil's loss of two previous

partners during which he had no legal rights which was mentioned in the previous section. One lesbian couple of twenty years standing managed their anxieties about these issues by helping to campaign for the legalisation of same-sex marriage. Julie, an artist in her late fifties, explained that it was only when her partner Mary, a retiree in her early sixties, was diagnosed with cancer that it “kind of really brought it home to us”. For many these situated experiences facilitated more reflexive awareness of the importance of managing these practical and legal aspects of their relationship. In contrast, the younger same-sex couples and heterosexual couples were generally much less concerned with, and even aware of, these financial and legal implications, which did not feature strongly in their negotiations.

The younger same-sex participants sometimes, but not always, discussed their decision to marry before performing a formal proposal. A ritualised proposal of some kind featured in every couple’s narrative in much the same way as the heterosexual couples. These will be explored in the next section of the chapter. However, an interesting difference is that there was less talk of negotiation and management around the enactment of this decision. James, a graphic designer in his early thirties, actively avoided engaging in discussions about marriage with his partner Ryan, a commercial executive in his late twenties:

James: I was always skirting around it because I wanted to surprise him rather than it being like a done thing, which upset you a couple of times (laughs)

Katie: Did you try to bring it up in conversation and then...? (to Ryan)

James: Yeah

Ryan: Yeah I said something like “do you ever think that we will get married?” And he didn’t really particularly answer and I said, “you know that’s the sort of conversation that splits people up”

James: (laughs)

Katie: Oh dear

James: Not known to him that I'd already gone out and bought a ring and I was already planning to propose to him, but I didn't want to give anything away.

James rejected the mutual discussion about marriage that Ryan initiates, that was characteristic of the way in which this decision was managed by the older same-sex couples, in favour of surprising Ryan with an elaborate proposal. Perhaps this has something to do with these individuals being less likely to be constrained by gendered norms or older forms of masculinity. They do not need to engage in management strategies of persuasion to encourage the other partner to propose. It may be useful here to think of gendered social relations as situated within specific relational contexts, and where gender is not a barrier to initiating a proposal for same-sex couples in the same way that it is for heterosexual couples. There was no retrospective questioning of whom within the couple proposed.

The remainder of this section focuses on the situated nature of the management process and also how these relational contexts become the focus for management strategies. Relational management of the decision to marry involved the inclusion of others in the management process and also management of the decision by family and friends. Looking firstly at the inclusion of others, there were some clear differences in the ways in which couples managed this inclusion. Some of the young heterosexual men asked their partner's parents for permission to marry their daughter, thus including them in the decision-making process. Otnes and Pleck (2003) argue that this tradition of asking the bride's father for permission to marry her is dying out with the impact of feminism. However, they also note that it may be "reinterpreted as a bow to 'tradition' or 'respect for parents'" (ibid:71). This was how this inclusion was explained by the men who did partake in this traditional part of the proposal. Daniel, for example, described how he had made the deliberate decision to ask Sophie's mum for her permission to propose:

Katie: So why was it important to you to ask Sophie's mum?

Daniel: Well Sophie's parents are split anyway and I don't know, I suppose I always thought I'd probably ask, I don't know, asking someone's parents is quite a traditional thing anyway, but I think it's also a respect thing. Sophie's mum had brought you up from such a young age and I thought...obviously if she'd said "no" I probably still would have proposed, but I didn't think she would, and also it was just more the fact that I thought it was quite respectful- not in an old-fashioned sort of like ownership of her daughter sort of thing- but more of a sort of respect thing. It was important and Sophie's dad, although Sophie's dad is around to the point that we've met him a few times and you have contact with him, and he is in contact- he's going to give Sophie away at the wedding- it didn't feel appropriate to ask him rather than Sophie's mum. Sophie's mum felt more appropriate so...

Sophie: But he doesn't know we- you asked Sophie's- my mum

Daniel: Yeah- he doesn't know that. He should never find out.

Here the traditional symbol was adapted to suit the family context and justified in relation to tradition and respect rather than ownership of Sophie. Daniel explained why he had asked Sophie's mum rather than her dad, but the fact that they were both adamant that Sophie's dad should never find out demonstrates the gendered nature of this traditional symbol, even though it was only enacted by a minority of the participants. Ed was another young heterosexual who asked Emily's father for his permission before proposing to Emily. However, while this act was perceived as traditional by Ed, it also required an appropriate response from Emily's father. When asked how Emily's father had responded Ed said:

Ed: he was quite surprised and very happy to be asked, but said he wasn't expecting it

Emily: he didn't ask my mum's dad

The surprise at being asked may demonstrate the increasing separation of this symbolic act from the traditional 'proposal' as Otnes and Pleck (2003) argue, along with the fact that the couples who did enact this

part of the traditional script were in the minority, albeit that they were the younger couples.

This does not represent this decision becoming dis-embedded from relational contexts, however, because many of the heterosexual and same-sex couples still included family and sometimes friends in the knowledge that this decision was imminent. These couples adapted this traditional relic to suit their more contemporary lifestyles in terms of letting their friends and family in on the 'secret' before they had actually proposed, rather than asking them for permission. For example, Ollie, an accountant in his late twenties told friends and family before he proposed to Nathan, a finance director in his early forties, on holiday:

Ollie: I told his parents and some friends that I was going to do that.

Katie: So what did they think?

Ollie: They were really pleased. His mum couldn't wait. She was almost like, because she knew about two weeks before because we'd stayed with his parents at Christmas, and I sort of said to his mum then "I'm thinking about doing this- what do you think?" And she was so excited and really happy, and then I spoke to her about three times between Christmas and when we went on holiday in the middle of January and she could barely almost control herself. She was so excited she wanted me to get on and ask him now so she could talk about it!

For Ollie and many of the other participants telling others about plans to propose was more an act of inclusion and a source of support and reassurance. The older same-sex couples did not enact ritualised proposals and instead decided to have a civil partnership on the basis of mutual discussion, as described earlier. For these couples, and a minority of the heterosexual and younger same-sex couples, inclusion of others in this decision occurred once it had been made. The ways in which the decision to marry was performed to family and friends will be considered in the next section of the chapter after the proposal performances themselves have been discussed.

The decision to marry was managed in a variety of ways by the couples. Most of the couples made a mutual decision to marry before this decision was either shared directly with others as in the case of the other same-sex couples, or enacted in a more formal way according to a traditional script which was performed by all of the heterosexual and all of the younger same-sex couples, in most cases forming part of a two-tier proposal. Attention now turns to these ritualised performances in the final section of this chapter.

Performing the Decision to Marry

This section focuses on the performance of the ritualised proposal enacted by the heterosexual and predominantly younger same-sex couples and also the ways in which it is displayed to others afterwards. The proposal ritual acts to formalise the managed decision publicly in a form that is meaningful to others. The ways in which these proposal performances are gendered and heterosexualised will also be considered. The extent to which these performances are embedded in these wider social conditions are evident when they fail to live up to gendered and heterosexualised imaginings. Again relationality is emphasised as these performances are situated within relational settings.

There is much reference in the wedding literature to the persistence and commodification of traditional gendered symbols. Geller (2001:91), for example describes a formulaic proposal script which features a diamond ring, presented always by the man to the woman who then “feigns shock followed by delirious happiness”. This script, to which Otnes and Pleck (2003) add the ingredient of a special time and/or place, shaped the ways in which the decision to marry was performance by the heterosexual and younger same-sex couples. These central components

and the meanings attributed to them will now be explored before considering what happened when performances failed to live up to the script.

The heterosexual performances were all gendered in that the male partner proposed to the female partner, albeit as the second part of a two-tier proposal in which the decision to marry had already been made and was often instigated by the female partner. It was thus the appropriately gendered performance of the ritualised proposal that was important rather than the actual decision to marry being carried out by the male partner. In one case the female partner orchestrated an appropriately gendered proposal as her partner seemed reluctant. Holly, mentioned earlier as wanting to marry but constrained by the gendered script, found a ring that she liked while she and her partner Kieran were away for the weekend at a special place and then:

For the next twenty-four hours I just pestered him until he agreed to propose (laughs) and I kept saying 'when can I wear it? When can I wear it?' And we went out for dinner and didn't want to leave it in the hotel room so I wore it on the right hand just to keep it safe. I kept saying over dinner 'when can I move it? When can I move it?' And eventually he relented after dinner and asked me to marry him.

Unsurprisingly, stage-managed proposals did not feature in any of the same-sex couples' narratives. This was perhaps due to the lack of gendered expectations in terms of who should do the proposing. Schweingruber et al. (2004) explored proposal performances amongst heterosexual couples, and argue that it is important to understand why same-sex couples choose to perform engagement proposals given that they require a man and a woman. However, only one same-sex couple raised this question regarding the issue of who would do the proposing and this was a couple, Nick and Arthur, who had made their decision through mutual discussion. They reflected upon this issue of gender after Nick said that given the elaborate civil partnership ceremony that

they had, it would have been nice to make the decision “more memorable than it was”. Arthur pointed out that how would they know who should propose? Yet none of the younger same-sex couples, who all enacted a ritualised proposal, mentioned this issue of gender. The proposal performances were naturalised and narrated as though they could not have been any other way and the other parts of the script mentioned shaped the performances of both the heterosexual and younger same-sex couples.

For many couples the performative symbol of going down on one knee to propose marriage was so embedded a social expectation that it was synonymous with the act of becoming 'engaged'. Zoe is in a same-sex relationship with Lauren, and she demonstrated this when she said; “you kind of do talk about it, you do talk about making the big commitment, but nothing's ever set in stone until literally one person goes down on bended knee and proposes”. Ollie did just this when he proposed to his partner of 5 years, Nathan, on holiday after having told family and friends what he was planning to do. He said: “Well we had been out for a meal in the hotel and we were both a bit drunk actually. We just went back to the hotel room and suddenly I dropped down on one knee and sort of said 'would you like to marry me?'” Here Ollie also adopts the heteronormative language of marriage as well as the symbol of going down on one knee.

Along with going down on one knee, the engagement ring also had a starring role in many of the couples' proposal narratives. Robert, a postgraduate student in his early thirties, got his carers to help hide his grandfather's ring on him when they helped him to bed, and then pulled it out when Mike, a photographer out of work due to a disability and in his early thirties, came in. The ring itself was enough to signify that a proposal was taking place as Mike saw the ring and was “over the moon”. However, this role was flexible as it did not always appear during the proposal itself, but was sometimes chosen together

afterwards. For Jakob, the symbol of the ring was a central component of the proposal ritual:

Jakob: Well I bought a ring that was like a stand-in ring in the sense that I had no idea what Natalie was gonna like so I thought I'll buy a really cheap, simple one and we'll just...Natalie can keep it or whatever and then we'll go and buy a proper one later together"

Even though they went out and bought a ring together afterwards, it was still important for Jakob, an IT contractor in his mid-thirties, to have a ring to symbolise the engagement during the proposal itself.

The importance of tradition was more visible when the performance of the proposal failed to live up to the imaginings of those in receipt of the proposal, particularly the heterosexual women. A few of these women complained that their partner did not go down on one knee when they proposed, for example, which demonstrated the importance of the imagined proposal and how it was used to evaluate the performed version. Claire, a housewife in her early fifties, explained how she reacted when Tim, a warehouseman in his early thirties, presented her with a ring but with no explanation or performative proposal. She said "I did rip him for a while after. When you see, you know, romantic proposals on the tele I say 'see- that's how it's supposed to be done'". Otnes and Pleck's (2003) point that women are often left disappointed if the proposal is performed in a profane manner was highlighted by Claire who emphasised that fact that she had been ironing when Tim presented the engagement ring, which she did not feel was appropriate. Schweingruber et al. (2004) note how the performative expectations of the man and the backstage management and evaluative role of the women means that both are constrained by the traditional proposal model.

The family and friends of the couples were also implicated in the evaluation of the proposal, despite not usually being present at the time

of the performance. The couples' proposal narratives generally sounded well-rehearsed, with the proposal story expected to become a public story to be told when people asked 'how did you propose?' The importance of the public engagement story was highlighted by Emily and Ed:

Ed: I didn't get down on one knee. It was a bit wet, which I regret now because everyone does ask and you have to say no.

Emily: We could tell people you did.

Family and friends were important as the audience for these public stories of engagement, and Emily said that she was very pleased that Ed had a ring when he proposed so that she had it "straight away to flash in front of people's faces". For the few couples that did perform the proposal in front of family, friends or the wider public, these people were part of this performance and were expected to respond appropriately. James, for example, described how "the whole restaurant cheered" when he proposed to Ryan. In one case the presence of others influenced the performance itself. George presented Amelia with an engagement ring in the form of a Christmas gift in a family setting so that it would be "intimate, but at the same time shared" and "less conventional than getting down on one knee". However, his father encouraged him to go down on one knee so that he could capture the event in a more publicly recognisable form on camera. Schweingruber et al. (2004) argue that the proposal is a performance for family and friends as much as the individual in receipt of the proposal and that the traditional script is enacted to display the decision to marry that most couples have made beforehand to this audience.

The performance of this proposal by the couple to family and friends was one way in which the ritual was relationally embedded, but the performances of these friends and family in response to the decision to marry are also important to consider. Negative responses from particularly family members to the decision to marry, which were

encountered more by the same-sex couples in the study, encouraged reflexive management on the part of the couple. For example, Lauren and Zoe, who naturalised their decision to marry in heteronormative language as described earlier, faced negative responses from some family members:

Zoe: It takes them a while to get used to it, whereas we're just doing what feels natural and what feels normal like any other person, and they're a bit like 'whoa, what are you doing?!'...

Lauren: My mum's side of the family's the same at the moment. They're taking a lot longer to get used to the fact that we're even a couple let alone getting married.

These relationships and the lack of validation had to be managed throughout the planning process and on the big day itself, as will be discussed in the respective chapters.

For some of these couples this decision was not only shared with family and/or friends but through this process of sharing the meaning of the decision took on new meaning and significance due to the reaction of others. This was the case for David, a counsellor, and Gavin, a funeral celebrant, both in their early fifties. David explained:

For me it started out as being largely a practical thing...The idea of it being an expression of something kind of grew more after the idea was decided on, particularly when we started telling other people about it where this was this astonishing reaction. People were just delighted weren't they?

The response of family and friends highlighted the disparity in their respective imaginings and led David and Gavin to reflect on the significance of this decision and how it was socially embedded in being of importance to people other than just the two of them.

Performances of the decision to marry by the heterosexual and younger same-sex couples were informed by traditional scripts. Even amongst the older same-sex couples who did not perform the decision to marry

in the same way, the traditional proposal script still featured in some of their narratives. David, for example, said: "I didn't go down on one knee or anything. There was no engagement ring". The heteronormative proposal script shaped the imagined decision to marry even though it was not performed. The proposal acted as a meaning-constitutive tradition through which the decision to marry could be meaningfully displayed to family and friends, demonstrated by the importance of the narration of these performances. Due to the implementation of the Civil Partnership Act 2004 having instigated the decision to marry for the majority of the older same-sex couples, it may be that proposal performances become more common amongst this group in the future.

Conclusion

The couples' narratives around the decision to marry were differentiated at the intersection of sexual orientation and age. The older (late thirties to early sixties) same-sex couples imagined, managed and performed this decision in different ways to the heterosexual and younger (early twenties to mid-thirties) same-sex couples. For these heterosexual and younger same-sex couples marriage was an embedded cultural norm and could be described as a meaning-constitutive tradition (Gross, 2005). The older same-sex couples were more concerned with practical and legal issues, perhaps related to the fact they were in longer-term relationships and had lived through times of much more unequal sexual citizenship. However, for all of the couples their personal imaginings became interwoven with the perceived imaginings of others and then managed accordingly. In this way they could be seen to be collectively accomplished as Bottero (2010) suggests. A two-tier proposal in which the decision to marry was made through mutual discussion and then formalised through a proposal ritual was widespread, particularly amongst the heterosexual couples. This performed proposal formed the public story of the decision to marry that was displayed to family and

friends. Many of the same-sex couples found that the responses from family members and friends did not always meet their expectations and that these relationships required additional management through the wedding work process as will be discussed in the following chapter.

Chapter 4: Wedding Work

Introduction

'Wedding work' is a term used by many (such as Humble et al., 2008) to refer to the work involved in planning a wedding. Here I focus primarily on the roles that different participants take on and how they are imagined, managed and performed during this planning process. Again the chapter is structured according to these three themes. While this chapter is concerned with the process and the doing of the wedding work, the following chapter (The Big Day) focuses on the choices that are made during this process and the content of these plans.

This chapter considers the two aspects of the planning process that have dominated heterosexual wedding research. The first is the commercial industry that surrounds the wedding ritual and the second is the division of wedding work labour between the two partners. However, here the focus is not on the commercial wedding industry itself, but rather how it is encountered by different couples and used as a space within which roles are negotiated, challenged and reinforced.

This analysis builds upon previous debates by extending the focus to include heterosexual men and same-sex couples who have been largely ignored by previous research relating to the planning of commitment rituals. This concentration on the experiences of heterosexual women in the literature has also reinforced the idea that wedding work is women's work so this analysis aims to add complexity to this debate. This will be done not only by extending the parameters of who is included in the analysis, but also by considering how experiences differ by age, class and sexuality and the interactions between them, as well as the dominant focus on gender. Existing research tends to emphasise gender without paying attention to how gender is negotiated in

heterosexualised contexts (Oswald and Suter, 2004). Gross (2005:287) points out the importance of examining issues of "geography, ethnicity, religion, class and generation" because these distinctions mark variation in both the strength and meaning of traditional expectations. In addition, the relational nature of wedding work will be considered: i.e. the involvements and influences of family and friends of the couple in the planning process. It is argued that the roles and identities of the participants are shaped by and constructed in the context of familial and friend relationships.

Mirroring the layout of the previous chapter, the ways in which wedding work is imagined by the participants will be the focus of the first section, before moving on to explore the ways in which wedding work is both managed and performed respectively.

Imagining Wedding Work

Compared with the decision to marry and the ritual itself, wedding work does not feature strongly in the imaginings of the participants in general. However, some of the female participants had not only imagined what their wedding may be like, but also what and who would be involved in the planning process. Even amongst the majority of couples who had not spent much time imagining what and who the wedding work would involve, there are some underlying assumptions and expectations that can be drawn out of these narratives.

What is clear is that these imaginings are similarly gendered to imaginings around the decision to marry, but also that these gendered imaginings intersect with important differences related to issues of class, sexuality, place and age. Amongst this sample wedding work is largely imagined to be women's work, but there are distinctions and differences within the sample and it is especially important to highlight

the role of relationality at the imagined level in the perpetuation of this idea.

In order to explore this further, the following analysis considers first the division of wedding work roles and responsibilities as imagined by the two individuals making up the couple, including both what this planning will involve and who is doing the planning. It will then move on to consider the importance of specific relational contexts in shaping imaginings related to wedding work using the example of narratives surrounding the financial cost of weddings.

Turning first to the ways in which the wedding work roles were imagined by the different couples and individuals, the assumption that wedding work was women's work was a strong theme, particularly, although not exclusively, amongst the heterosexual couples. Some of the heterosexual women talked about having imagined planning their wedding before the decision to marry was made and these imaginings involved the central role that they would play in this process. Holly was mentioned in the previous chapter regarding her particularly strong feminised imaginings around the decision to marry. Following on from that, she talked about the importance of wedding work for her:

The planning- that's what I was really really looking forward to. All the choosing of everything and deciding how to go about it and how to make it personal to me.

The way in which Holly talks about the planning of her wedding assumes that she will take on the main, or only, role in this process. Natalie, another heterosexual participant and a garden designer in her mid-thirties, reflected back on the wedding work process:

I thought I would love it. I thought I'd be one of these women who loved it so much they wanted to set up as a wedding coordinator afterwards, but I didn't. I very firmly would not want to do that again because it's so much to think about.

Natalie's quotation here emphasises the mismatch between the way in which she imagined the wedding work and the reality that it involved. In addition, the assumption that wedding work is women's work is embedded in this narrative and contextualised in relation to the imagined experiences of other heterosexual women. It was through the failure of the wedding work to live up to her expectations that this feminised assumption about the nature of wedding work was articulated.

Almost all of the heterosexual women took the lead in answering questions about wedding work in the interviews, with the men often only speaking about the plans once prompted by the researcher. In terms of the case study couples, the female participants were far more likely to be the ones who contacted me between interviews with updates about the plans (although this may also be linked to my identity as a female researcher which is reflected upon in the Methodology chapter). A few times the prominent role of the female partner in this section of the interview was explicitly articulated, and thus reinforced, by their partner. For example, when I asked Jade, a postgraduate student in her late-twenties, and Aaron, a journalist in his late-twenties, how they went about the planning of their wedding this was the response:

Aaron: That's definitely a question for you! (laughs)

Jade: I bet everyone says that don't they?

Not only did Aaron designate this as Jade's domain, but Jade also naturalises this response in relation to the imagined experiences of others in a similar way to Natalie.

However, a few of the couples did express both their frustration with this stereotype and their intention to challenge it. Jennifer, a corporate systems specialist in her early thirties, and Andy, a consultant in his

early forties, were most vocal about their dissatisfaction with this stereotype. For Andy this was due to his past experience of being excluded from wedding plans in his previous two marriages, and Jennifer through her engagement with the mainstream wedding industry which she felt perpetuated these gendered practices:

Jennifer: When Andy told me he had literally nothing to do with his ex, with Margaret and you getting married- I couldn't get over that. No real involvement at all? I can't imagine...why wouldn't...? I was concerned that Andy would think that there would be another Margaret wedding where I suddenly organised it all and delivered it.

Andy: I think if I had that thought ever in my head and I didn't know you well enough to know it wouldn't be that, then I wouldn't have asked you because I wouldn't want to go through that again.

Jennifer attributed the difference in their wedding work experience to having a "more collaborative relationship", thus linking their ritualised experiences to the everyday life of their relationship and noting a convergence in the roles they took on.

In terms of implicating the wedding industry in the perpetuation of the idea that wedding work is women's work, Jennifer reflected on how she received a stash of wedding magazines from her friend which "brought me out in a complete panic attack" and she talked about how "it was just like a whole magazine full of things I had never dreamed of". This led her to adopt the strategy of "systematic avoidance of brides' magazines" and to seek alternative resources. Jennifer was particularly critical of the gendered stereotypes she perceived in these magazines (and which were also reinforced during conversations with friends and family) which suggested that "the groom should just say yes and bugger off- oh! I'm so horrified at that notion every time someone brings it up. Why? Why?" The ways in which the wedding industry idealises 'traditional' gendered scripts has been much discussed and researched through the use of discourse analysis, and Illouz (1997), for example, talks about the romantic utopia as a pervasive discourse that reproduces ideas of

masculinity and femininity by papering over the mismatch between the genderless ideal and the persistence of gender differences. The repackaging of tradition by commercial magazines (Currie, 1993) which perpetuates gendered roles and the heterosexual imaginary (Ingraham, 2007) would suggest that these discourses are sustained in what Giddens (1992) refers to as the post-traditional order. However, these accounts do not generally consider the ways in which couples and individuals perceive and engage with these resources. Jennifer expressed a strong view not representative of the sample, but many other participants were also critical of the underlying assumptions and portrayal of wedding work in commercially produced resources.

Some heterosexual men and most same-sex couples in the sample talked about how they felt under-represented in these resources, targeted as they are at heterosexual women. Charles, an accountant in his early thirties in a heterosexual relationship, said that “the one token groom page they put into each of the magazines didn’t really give me much inspiration or ideas”. This exclusion also affects same-sex couples. For Zoe, who talked about her decision to marry her partner Lauren within a heterosexual framework of language and expectations as mentioned in the previous chapter, the wedding work resources available did not support her claim to ordinariness. Of wedding magazines she said:

They have things like stories of so and so’s wedding- invariably heterosexual couples and their day and how it went and how it feels after they got back from the honeymoon and any tips for new newlyweds and things like that. And it’s a bit like there’s nothing actually that I can relate to in them.

The heterosexualised nature of these wedding resources was not reflected upon by any of the heterosexual couples, in contrast to a proliferation of articulations about gendered assumptions and expectations. Wedding work may be largely feminised, but even amongst most of those couples who enacted a strict division of labour,

this fact was recognised, discussed and often the subject of humour. This is not to say that gendered conceptualisations of wedding work are not important discourses to explore, quite the contrary. Rather, an exclusive focus on this issue masks other underlying discursive assumptions and expectations that are not so reflexively articulated. In relation to the decision to marry, Hockey et al.'s (2007) observations about the embedded and unreflexive nature of heterosexual practices were drawn upon and are relevant here in exploring the silences surrounding heterosexuality, and also class and whiteness. None of the participants reflected on the dominance of white models in wedding magazines, which has been documented elsewhere (see for example Boden, 2001) and while this study is not specifically focused on exploring issues of ethnicity, it is important to remember that all of the participants in the study were white and this could be something to take up in future research.

Class was also something not explicitly discussed by any of the participants, but it certainly shaped some of their imaginings around wedding work. The ways in which the division of wedding work labour was divided along class lines is explored later in the chapter, as well as in the following discussion of narratives around the cost of the wedding or civil partnership. The focus here is on what they reveal about the various classed and heterosexualised imaginings about wedding work and also the importance of the relational context within which each couple was situated.

The ways in which couples talked about how much they were spending or had spent on their wedding/civil partnership and how this was framed in relation to the experiences of others was revealing in terms of the implicit assumptions and expectations about how much wedding work would cost and who would cover this expense. Almost all of the couples were similar in that they had spent more than they had initially anticipated, but the amounts varied significantly. The average spend

across all of the couples was £10,400. This is significantly less than the £17,370 that the average heterosexual British couple are said to spend on their nuptials (British Social Attitudes, 2008), with no reliable estimates found for civil partnership spending. There was a significant difference between the amount spent by heterosexual couples and same-sex couples, with same-sex couples spending £4,500 less than the heterosexual couples on average. This gap grows to over £6,000 if the amount spent by heterosexual couples is compared to the amount spent by the female same-sex couples, who tended to be younger with less disposable income than the male couples in the sample. While these differences are significant, what is interesting in terms of this study is how these figures are discussed, contextualised and justified by the couples.

Many of the couples confessed that they did not know how much to budget. Daniel explained that he and Sophie, HR advisors in their late twenties, “looked at what things would cost and then went around and tried to find out where we were going to get the money from, or who to get the money from.” This was a common theme, particularly with the heterosexual couples, who altered their imaginings to fit the perceived cost of a wedding. Some, such as Natalie, a garden designer in her mid-thirties, “looked at the ones in wedding magazines, about what is an average budget” to use as a template. Even for those with more limited finances their spending was often talked about in relation to imagined costs of other weddings. Dylan, an information technology worker in his early thirties, and his partner Abigail, a project officer in her late twenties, spent £4000 which Dylan said required them to sell “everything we owned” to finance, but said that although it felt like a lot at the time “we watched wedding TV and you see people that spend £25,000”. Their imaginings were affected by their personal financial circumstances as well as mediated perceptions of others, which they used to contextualise their spending.

Others aligned their spending with those in their relational networks. Emily, a marketing manager in her late twenties, for example, said that “basically we saw that everybody else’s seemed to cost £25,000 and they had 120 people so we knew it had to be a bit extra.” As they did with their decision to marry, Emily and Ed positioned themselves within their relational network of friends who had all decided to marry at a similar time and spend a similar amount of money, which reflected their privileged class position and affected how they imagined what they would spend.

Some couples did not set budgetary boundaries to their imaginings, but for different reasons. A comparison of the experiences of Robert, a postgraduate student in his early thirties, and Mike, a photographer out of work due to a disability, with that of Nathan, a finance director in his early forties, and Ollie, an accountant in his late twenties, illustrates some of the ways in which financial circumstances can enable or constrain wedding work imaginings. Nathan explained that while they did not waste money, they “didn’t stick to a particular budget” and their focus was on the quality of the goods and services that they were purchasing as they had put aside Nathan’s company share options. In stark contrast, Mike challenged the idea that “the pink pound is one of the highest amounts of disposable income that people have [because] when you are two disabled guys with the only income you’ve got is benefits, you can’t afford to spend.” Mike and Robert’s engagements with the wedding and civil partnership industries to source information about how to organise their day excluded them from imagining their ritual in the ways portrayed because they did not have the financial means to realise these mediated portrayals. This meant that more effort needed to be put into imagining how the wedding work could be financed rather than being able to imagine what they wanted their big day to consist of, focused as they were on how they would pay for “petrol for the car otherwise we won’t get there.”

In terms of who financed the day, the two couples mentioned above paid for it themselves but many others had financial help from their families. For many of the heterosexual couples there was an assumption that, in particular, the bride's parents would contribute financially. This was a strong theme amongst the younger middle-class heterosexual couples with the contribution of family members not featuring in the imaginings of the older heterosexual couples nor the same-sex couples. Molly, an exams officer in her mid-twenties, who is in a same-sex relationship with Kat, a musician in her early thirties, explained that their parents were paying for about forty per cent of their wedding "which is very nice and completely unexpected I have to say". In complete contrast, Daniel said that he and Sophie, HR advisors in their late twenties, were "having to put our hand in our pocket which we weren't one hundred per cent expecting", despite being given £12,000 mostly from Sophie's parents. These different imaginings relate to the couple's positioning in relation to traditional heterosexual frameworks in which the wedding costs are paid by the parents of the bride, and also their specific financial and relational circumstances. Even when these circumstances did not allow for this tradition to be enacted, such as in the case of Abigail, a project officer in her late twenties, whose father was made redundant just before she got engaged to Dylan, an information technology worker in his early thirties, she still had the expectation that he would have paid if he had been in a position to do so.

Imagined wedding work cannot be understood without considering the heterosexualised and gendered framework through which it is experienced. However, as was shown in relation to the ways in which the financial aspects of the wedding/civil partnership were imagined, the specific personal circumstances and relational contexts of the couples affects the ways in which wedding work is imagined and can be imagined. The following section will explore wedding work further by considering the management of the division of wedding work labour between partners.

Managing Wedding Work

Much of the previous discussion about the ways in which wedding work is imagined was framed in relation to ideas about gender, particularly for the heterosexual couples. This thesis now turns to consider management of this work, specifically in relation to the ways in which planning roles are managed. This was something that was of core concern in most of the interviews, particularly with the case study couples who were undertaking wedding work at the time of the first and second interviews. Of concern were both the management of this work between the individuals within the couple and the management of the involvement of others. Humble et al. (2008) consider the management and display of gendered work and also the gender assessments made by the partners, friends and relatives that feed into the management of wedding work. This section uses Humble et al.'s (2008) three ideal types (traditional couples, egalitarian couples and transitional couples) in order to represent how couples manage wedding work. From this analysis, depth and complexity can be added to this typology methodologically, having followed couples through this process in addition to conducting retrospective interviews as Humble et al. (2008) did. It can also contribute substantively, in considering its relevance for the same-sex couples in the sample, as well as theoretically in conducting an analysis that looks at the intersection between sexuality, class and gender, for example. This sample is more diverse (in terms of age, class and sexuality) than the sample used by Humble et al. (2008) and Humble (2009) and therefore some of these differences can be further explored.

The table below (figure 2) illustrates the division of the heterosexual and same-sex couples in this sample according to Humble et al.'s (2008)

ideal types that best represents the way in which they managed their wedding work.

Figure 2: Table of participants characterised according to Humble et al.'s typology

Type	Traditional	Transitional	Egalitarian	Total
Heterosexual couples	5	7	2	14
Same-sex couples	0	6	7	13
Total	5	13	9	27

The table demonstrates a clear difference in the management of wedding work roles on the grounds of sexuality. None of the same-sex couples were most aligned with the traditional couple ideal type, whereas over one third of the heterosexual couples were. At the other end of the scale, over half of the same-sex couples were mostly egalitarian, whereas only two of the heterosexual couples were. At first glance this illustration of clear-cut differences seems to support Giddens' (1992) assertions that same-sex couples are the vanguards of the emerging pure and equal relationships. However, the reality is more complex as the following analysis will identify. It should be noted that the research couples shared some characteristics with the three ideal types, as shown in the above table, but that the divisions were often not clear-cut. Despite this, the typology provides a useful basis to help understand the ways in which wedding work is managed.

Humble et al.'s (2008) 'traditional' couples were characterised as those for whom wedding work was naturally gendered, with both partners in agreement that wedding work is women's work. Five heterosexual couples in the sample fitted broadly into this category in terms of their

lack of reflexivity around the gendered roles that each partner took on. There was very little discussion around the management of wedding work in the interviews with these couples and it was difficult to get them to discuss their respective roles in any depth. This lack of reflexive management is implicit in the definition of a traditional couple that Humble et al. (2008) describe as there is no questioning of the male and female roles and therefore no need for these to be managed. What may be significant is that none of these couples were case study couples, so perhaps there would have been more evidence of role management if I had interviewed them during the process as opposed to gaining only their retrospective accounts. However, what is interesting is that almost all of the couples classed as traditional were working class in terms of their occupations compared with the more middle class heterosexual couples. The differences between these more traditional couples and the case study couples may also be related to class as all of the heterosexual case study couples were middle class by their occupation.

This more 'traditional' approach to managing the wedding work was displayed both in the way in which wedding work was talked about and also the way in which involvement during the interview was managed. For example, Brian, a builder in his mid forties, asked if he was needed at the beginning of the interview because he had assumed that it did not have anything to do with him, although he was more than happy to participate. When asked how they went about the planning of the wedding Brian said: "Well I will tell you how I did it. I just left it all to Jenna and I paid for what I had to. Marvellous- have I finished now?"

There was a clear difference between the wedding work experiences of some of the heterosexual couples and all of the same-sex couples due to the gendered division of the heterosexual couples' wedding work. However, some of the same-sex couples did manage the involvement of others in the wedding work in gendered ways. Humble et al. (2008) add to the 'traditional couples' ideal type that if additional help is required

that is also conducted along traditionally gendered lines. Interestingly, most of the male same-sex couples involved female friends or relatives centrally in the wedding work, with one being given the title 'head of glamorous touches'. It could be argued that this involvement highlights and reinforces the gendered nature of wedding work and that these couples could be considered somewhat traditional in the way in which they managed their wedding work, using Humble et al.'s (2008) definition. Robert, a postgraduate student in his early thirties, and Mike, a photographer in his early thirties who was out of work due to a disability, asked a female friend to act as their wedding planner as they were unsure of what wedding work involved or where to start. However, this arrangement did not come to fruition and Mike reflected that this would mean that the wedding work would be done differently:

We have still got to organise things like flowers and bits for the actual day, but the day before will be fine. We are blokes. It's like Christmas- we do our shopping Christmas eve.

Rather than challenge the stereotype of wedding work as women's work, here Mike reinforces this notion in the way in which he frames their masculinised wedding work as distinctive from a feminised version.

The heterosexual couples mentioned as being aligned with Humble et al.'s (2008) traditional couples ideal type also extended their gendered wedding work to others outside of the couple. Female friends and family were called upon to assist the bride with the plans. As these gendered discourses around wedding work were normative and largely unreflexive it was only when they failed that these discourses became more evident, as noted by Hockey et al. (2007) in their analysis of heterosexual practices. An example of this is the way in which Dylan and Abigail managed their wedding work. While Dylan admitted that "I didn't do a great deal of the planning I must say. In fact I don't think I did anything", he was "frustrated by the lack of support Abigail got from

friends. I was at the point of ringing people up" and described the bridesmaids as "along for the ride more than anything".

In contrast, Humble et al.'s (2008) 'egalitarian couples' rejected the gendered ideology surrounding wedding work and took on broadly equal planning roles. Only two of the heterosexual couples in my sample could be said to fit in the category of 'egalitarian couples', whereas seven of the same-sex couples were egalitarian in the sense of an equal division of labour. In this sense these couples could be considered the vanguards of Giddens' (1992) pure relationship and this has been documented in relation to the more everyday division of household labour by researchers such as Dunne (1999), who found that lesbian couples negotiated equal divisions of labour which was aided by the absence of gendered scripts. In contrast to the couples with more 'traditional' characteristics, more of these egalitarian couples were middle class. This highlights the importance of considering how some people's lives can be more detraditionalised than others and challenges the universality of the reflexive modernisation thesis as applied to wedding work.

The same-sex 'egalitarian' couples consisted of both male and female couples who had been together over ten years on average before their civil partnership. It may be that this affected the ways in which their ritual narratives were presented and their relationships experienced as they were speaking from a position of being embedded long-term within that relationship. Across the whole sample, the same-sex couples had been in a relationship for seven years on average when they had their civil partnerships, compared with just under five years for the heterosexual couples. Perhaps this also helps to account for the disparity in the number of couples with egalitarian characteristics, although each of the two heterosexual couples mentioned here had only been together three years before marrying.

The two heterosexual couples did face pressure from the wedding industry and particularly family members to conform to the 'traditional couple' model, as mentioned in Humble et al.'s (2008) typology. Jennifer and Andy rejected the more traditional gendered model of wedding work and reflected upon experiences with the wedding industry and family and friends who tried to reinforce the traditional model. Andy said that because they were getting grilled a bit by family and friends they wanted to "wind people up and see what their reaction was to say 'I don't know, Andy's organising that bit'- just to see what people's reaction is". They were managing the way in which their wedding work roles were displayed to others in order to play up to the reactions they had faced.

The expectations of others in terms of the division of wedding work labour between partners did not feature much in the narratives of the same-sex couples in this group. This is likely to be because the traditional model is based on sex differences. However, there were pressures felt by some of the couples in relation to the way in which the wedding work was carried out and what the wedding work involved, often in reference to precisely the lack of a traditional model to fall back on. Kayleigh, a youth justice worker in her late twenties, and Leanne, a social worker in her late thirties, reflected on their experience:

Kayleigh: My dad kept going 'who's going to read the cards?' I said 'dad, no one is reading the cards'. 'What do you mean no one's reading the cards?' From the people that don't turn up, the cards. I'm like 'dad- stop going on about the cards!' Because there were all these questions weren't there? So it was like who's going to arrange this because I think traditionally the men would arrange to do this part and the women would arrange this. And the mothers and women get together and do this and that's what I've always seen and perceived as a younger person when I was a bridesmaid and things.

Leanne: I think it was maybe confusing for other people, so like your family who didn't have another frame of reference for it, so they were wondering about some of those things...which is where

we almost slipped into it and we'd find ourselves debating about seating plans and those sorts of things and those sorts of roles.

Consideration of the broader relationships within which they are embedded demonstrates how the imaginings of others often need to be managed even in the absence of a clear gendered division of labour between same-sex couples.

Turning finally to 'transitional couples', couples with these characteristics made up the majority of Humble et al.'s (2008) sample, although when Humble (2009) applied the same typology to couples where at least one partner had been previously married, couples with these characteristics were in the minority. This category refers to couples exhibiting a mismatch between ideology and practice (Humble et al., 2008). They could be placed at different points along a continuum between traditional and egalitarian couples, largely sharing egalitarian values, but enacting traditional practices. Seven of the heterosexual couples in the sample shared characteristics described by Humble et al. (2008), as did six of the same-sex couples. The case study couples were over-represented in this group as were the younger female same-sex couples. The heterosexual couples were mostly middle-class, with the same-sex couples representing more of a mix of working-class and middle-class individuals.

For these couples one partner played a larger role in the wedding work and took on more responsibility. Emily, a marketing manager in her late twenties, for example, described herself as the "overall owner of the plan". Some of the couples justified the dominance of one partner as this did not necessarily fit with their ideal narrative of the process. For example, amongst the heterosexual couples some of the women justified their (almost always) larger role in relation to the amount of spare time they had due to a less demanding job. This needs to be placed in the much broader context of the gendered labour market in which women are still more likely to have lower paid and lower status

jobs (Smyth, 2005). There is no room to explore this further here, but clearly this context contributes to the perpetuation of gendered roles. However, the dominant planner amongst the same-sex couples was often the one who had talked about having a particularly busy job so perhaps this has more to do with being seen as a valid justification for the heterosexual couples without resorting to describing their relationship in traditional terms.

An exploration of the ways in which this wedding work was managed demonstrates how both partners can be implicated in the construction of this gendered narrative, which Humble et al. (2008) allude to, but do not fully explore. For example, Lynn, a part-time healthcare worker in her early forties, and John, a book keeper in his early fifties, used humour to narrate their division of wedding work labour:

John: It's been great- she has done all the work.

Lynn: (laughs) and he's paying.

John: And I've nodded and said 'yes that's nice' and I paid for it. It's perfect division of responsibilities.

While Lynn did take on more of the wedding work, this did not accurately describe their experience and it is interesting that they play up to these gendered stereotypes. Lynn did note John "is a lot more involved than I think perhaps men traditionally were...I know we joked about me organising it and him just turning up, but... he would probably help more and I don't want him to because I'm a bit controlling". Lynn had overall responsibility for the wedding work and managed John's involvement by having her own planning folder decorated with a picture of a young, white bride in a white wedding dress that John was not allowed to look in. Lynn justified this in the interview by saying that it has details about her wedding dress inside it. John was also excluded from part of the interview by being sent to

another room when Lynn wanted to show me the folder and talk about her dress shopping experiences.

John was not the only heterosexual man to be excluded from parts of the wedding work. Patrick, a teacher in his mid thirties, talked about how he had lots of experience planning events at school, but his partner Amanda, a musician in her early thirties, would not let him near the planning of their wedding. He said "the second I try and do it you're like 'rah!' So I'm just like right ok- territorial!" This was also reflected in Amanda's dominance during the interviews and at one point Patrick asked if he could read out the order of service to me instead of Amanda as he felt excluded. In fact, at the end of three interviews that Patrick and Amanda participated in I asked them (as I asked all of the case study couples) what impact, if any, taking part in the research had on their experiences of getting married. Patrick reflected that he felt more involved in the process through taking part in the research because the interviews were one of the few times when they sat down together and talked about the wedding. The differences in Patrick and Amanda's role expectations were demonstrated in the management of these roles. These differences also highlight difficulties in the categorisation of types of couple in the typology as Amanda was more traditional in terms of her imagined role in the wedding work than Patrick.

Interestingly, the three younger female same-sex couples were all in this group and one partner tended to take the lead, inspired by interactions with the wedding industry. Molly said that "one person does need to take the lead with that kind of thing" and that she did "the bulk of the research and narrowed it down to three or four viable options and then we sat down and made the final decision together." This was complicated, however, by Kat stating that the wedding was Molly's vision that she was happy to go along with, but that there were certain parts of the wedding work (the music and the food) that she wanted to be involved in, but wasn't interested in "all the other fiddly stuff." There

were some tensions around whether Molly involved Kat in a token way as Kat felt that her opinion was sometimes asked for but “overruled anyway.”

Other research that has considered the gendered nature of wedding work (such as Humble et al., 2008) can portray a one-dimensional view of power relations between heterosexual partners in emphasising the ways in which the majority of women desire an equal division of wedding work labour and often go out of their way to encourage their partners to participate, or try to maintain the illusion of equality despite carrying out most of the work themselves (ibid). However, from the examples of both heterosexual and same-sex couples above, the importance of considering the ways in which partners can be excluded from wedding work or certain parts of it as well as the ways in which women in particular can be compelled to take on the primary role can be better understood.

Wedding work involves complex power relations and often power struggles between partners, which are not adequately captured in Humble et al.’s (2008) typology of couples into traditional, egalitarian and transitional groupings. These types are somewhat useful in that they mention the fit within each one between gender ideology and the way in which gender is displayed, but reducing the typology to types of couple has its limitations. Some of the participants could be categorised differently at different times through the wedding work process or related to different aspects of the wedding work. For example, many of the male same-sex couples reinforced the idea that wedding work is women’s work through the significant involvement of female friends or family members, even if their own roles were egalitarian. In addition, the case study couples were far more likely to share characteristics of the ‘transitional couple’ type, perhaps because of interviewing them during rather than after the process when conflicts and power relations were playing themselves out.

I also question the extent to which the couples labelled as 'transitional' are on some kind of journey towards becoming 'egalitarian' couples as Humble (2008) suggests. This presents a picture of a continuum between tradition and equality which is too simplistic to represent the experiences of the couples in this study, in which wedding work acts at the intersection of gender, sexuality, class, age and relationally negotiated ideologies. These must all be taken into account to really understand the patterns of wedding work enacted by couples and the strategies used by themselves and those around them to pursue wedding work in a particular way. The following section will look at wedding work from a different angle in exploring how it is performed, giving weight to the relational contexts and different individual circumstances of the participants.

Performing Wedding Work

This section will explore wedding work from an alternative perspective by exploring the ways in which couples perform wedding work. Humble et al.'s (2008) typology goes some way in helping to understand the different ways in which the division of wedding work labour is managed, but it may be that a focus on the performance of wedding work can add depth to this understanding. A focus on specific strategies; individual, coupled and relational, enables the participants to be categorised differently at different times, in relation to various aspects of the planning and in ways that emphasise and take their specific relational contexts into account. The analysis identified three different ways of approaching the performance of wedding work by the couples (who often adopted more than one approach). Individual performances were common, particularly amongst the heterosexual couples, whereas the same-sex participants were more likely to execute a coupled performance. Relational performances were also identified, in which the

wedding work was more widely distributed amongst family and/or friends.

Looking firstly at more individual strategies, this refers to participants performing and narrating the wedding work as two distinct and separate individuals. Examples of this approach include dividing up the wedding work and performing separate activities, often along gendered lines in the case of the heterosexual couples. Jakob, an IT contractor in his mid-thirties, for instance, described how he and Natalie, a garden designer in her mid-thirties, “stuck to our pre-assigned gender roles a little bit because I was fretting about music and cheese and Natalie was fretting about flowers and dress”. This individual approach extended to joint decision making, which often reflected a divergence of imaginings regarding what the big day should consist of (these imaginings are explored further in the next chapter). The partners pursued their own individual interests through negotiation and thus demonstrated characteristics of Giddens’ (1992) pure relationship. At times this indeed was a fairly democratic process in line with Giddens’ (1992) vision, such as when Jade, a postgraduate student in her late twenties, and Aaron, a journalist in his late twenties, were deciding on the evening entertainment for their wedding:

Jade: I wanted a ceilidh and Aaron was horrified at the idea.

Aaron: Yeah, I don’t really like dancing about.

Jade: So then we had to write on a piece of paper how much percentage we wanted for each and then the winner was the disco.

At other times there was real conflict between the individuals. Almost all of the heterosexual couples (and certainly all of the heterosexual case study couples) had either minor conflicts during the interviews themselves or talked about conflicts they had experienced during the wedding work process. Patrick and Amanda were one such couple, as hinted at earlier in talking about Patrick’s exclusion from large parts of

the wedding work. When asked whether the planning process has been at all stressful they answered:

Amanda: It's not stressful apart from the arguments I have to have with him, particularly about the guest list when I'm like 'each person is £60. Think about it- do you like them?'

Patrick: Have I said a single thing about your guests?

Amanda: No...because I pruned mine down. I've got forty on my guest list. You had sixty.

Patrick: You have a very tight circle of friends.

Patrick and Amanda are not only negotiating here as individuals, but as individuals with their own separate relational networks of friends and family. There were implicit and explicit power relations related to the gendered assumptions around who should be involved in wedding work (as mentioned earlier in relation to this couple) that are not adequately theorised in the notion of a pure relationship.

This is one aspect in which there is a clear divergence between the heterosexual and same-sex couples. While in general the heterosexual couples exhibited more conflict and generally approached wedding work as two individuals (although there were exceptions, one of which will be discussed below), the same-sex couples were far more likely to display a joint approach. Giddens' (1992) emphasis is on the individuals within these pure relationships and how they act reflexively in constructing their own biographies while situating themselves within a relationship with an equal partner. It was certainly the case that these couples were very reflexive, but they would be more accurately described as reflexive couples rather than reflexive individuals. For example, one of the differences noted was the language used by these more egalitarian couples compared with other couples in that they were more likely to use 'we' rather than 'I'. The interviews were of a different style in that the couples told more of a joint narrative rather than two distinct

individual narratives. Julie, who was mentioned as a campaigner for the legalisation of civil partnerships in the previous chapter, spoke about how this was typical of her and Mary, a retiree in her early sixties, as a couple when asked about whether they had any disagreements or conflict during the planning process. Julie, an artist in her late fifties, said: "No I can't think of anything really. That is not untypical for us. We tend to think the same way so it would be very unusual for us to have wildly different opinions about something". Some couples spoke about their identity as a couple rather than their individual identities. For example, when explaining the way in which he and his partner Matt, a purchasing director in his early forties, ran their wedding work as a professional project, Josef, a brand manager in his early forties, said "it's just showing people an aspect of how we live our lives and who we are more than anything."

Despite this approach being more characteristic of the same-sex couples, Jennifer and Andy depicted this joint approach pictorially by being the only couple (out of a total of eight who participated in the photo project) to include wedding work as the subject of two out of the four photographs they took. Each couple were asked to describe the photographs and why they were chosen, and this caption is reproduced in full below. Jennifer is reflexive in her use of a photograph of their dining room table, which became the wedding work 'office', to explain how they went about this process.

Figure 3: Photograph 1- Jennifer and Andy



This is a picture of how our dining room table looked for about 3 months before the wedding. As you know, we made a lot of things for the wedding, and the process was really enlightening and lovely. It was hard going and a little stressful at times but we're both so very glad that we did it. On the day it was so satisfying to see all our hard work pay off, but more importantly, we spent a lot of time together working as a *team* on these projects. We already knew we worked well together and how that dynamic worked for us, but it meant an

awful lot to know that we crafted the wedding in the same way that we do everything - together. I think we learned a little bit more about each other in the process - Andy discovered I am way more crafty than I ever let on, and he's more of a perfectionist than he likes to let on too. He's handier with a scalpel than I guessed, and I know swearwords he'd never heard before - in multiple languages! That prompted a bit more teamwork, but I'm very glad that I only needed to make 4 of those bouquets and not another which I suspect may have pushed us both over the edge!

Jennifer not only describes the making of various elements to be displayed on the big day, but also how the process of making these items together both reflected and constructed them as a couple. However, she does gloss over how she spent a significant amount more time on the wedding work than Andy and did all of the online

researching before they made joint decisions, more characteristic of a transitional couple than an egalitarian one according to Humble et al.'s (2008) typology. A characterisation more along the lines of strategies than types of couple allows for a more flexible and accurate depiction of the complexities involved in analysing wedding work practices.

It is also important to consider the ways in which wedding work is performed in more widely relational ways beyond the couple. There is a growing focus, to move beyond the couple to explore other relationships such as those between friends and also to look at how couple relationships are not as 'pure' as depicted (Jamieson, Morgan, Crow and Allen, 2006), such as in Smart's (2007a) work. Here the focus moves to the performances of those other than the partners within the couple relationship and also strategies that individuals and couples use to re-embed themselves in alternative support networks in cases of absent or more complex relationality.

For some of the couples, it does not make sense to talk about the division of wedding work labour between the partners within the couple without also talking about the ways in which wedding work was not only influenced by, but also performed by, their family and friends. Eleanor, a research officer in her early thirties, said that "my mum and dad did an enormous amount of it" and her partner Charles, a financial services manager in his early thirties, explained that "we would say the kind of thing that we wanted and then your dad would go off and do some research." Friends often played a larger role than family for the same-sex couples which is consistent with previous research about the relative involvement of family and friends in heterosexual versus same-sex relationships, for example Weston's (1991) concept of 'families of choice' to describe the increased involvement of friends in the lives of gay men and lesbian women. However, this varied within the sample and a pattern can be noted along the lines of age. The older same-sex couples were more likely to involve their friends in the planning process

(as well as the ritual itself which will be discussed in the next chapter) and the younger same-sex couples (particularly the female same-sex couples) were more likely to involve both friends and family, albeit of the female variety (as described in the managing section). For example, Molly, who is in a same-sex relationship with Kat, said “your mum found our cake, found our chair covers, my mum helped with choosing the caterer and the DJ.”

For some couples, wedding work was also relationally embedded through previous wedding work experience and having attended the weddings and civil partnerships of others. Nathan, a finance director in his early forties, in a same-sex relationship with Ollie, an accountant in his late twenties, talked about the experience of having “masterminded” the civil partnership of some close friends which not only gave him ideas about what the day could include, but also ideas about how to go about planning it and contacts he could draw upon. He created a virtual planning committee, which never met but through which different friends took the lead in planning different aspects of the event. In contrast, the majority of the same-sex couples had not been to a civil partnership before and so for them wedding work involved investigation of what this involved and how to go about it. Robert and Mike, whose experience of financing their civil partnership was compared to that of Nathan and Ollie earlier in the chapter, had not been to a civil partnership and did not have the same relational support that Nathan and Ollie had. Much of their wedding work was undertaken on the day of their civil partnership. They bought a cake and flowers on the way to the ceremony and “sat in the car outside the hall making buttonholes” as familial support did not materialise on the day. The experiences of these two couples were thus shaped not only by financial, but also relational resources upon which they could draw.

Humble et al. (2008) and Humble (2009) do include some analysis of the relational contexts within which the couples in their samples are

situated, but in this analysis attention is also drawn to what happens when this support is absent, or in cases of more complex relationality. Many of the participants had deceased or divorced parents, which affected how and where they performed the wedding work. Lynn, who was marrying for the second time, talked about the freedom she felt being able to organise her wedding however she pleased. However, she also said that because her mother is no longer alive and all of her friends have either been married a long time, and not interested in weddings, or divorced, and even less interested, she lacked support. Lynn was proactive in seeking out alternative support in the form of an online wedding forum targeted at heterosexual women, although her partner John also participated. She said:

It's kind of like a mother and baby club- that's my analogy...it's a good modern invention which means that I can go on there and I can talk all day, if I'm not at work, to other people about weddings. I don't have to bore anyone else senseless with it...it's a very good supportive community in a lot of ways.

These online forums were popular amongst the heterosexual women (and also frequented by some of the younger female same-sex couples). The online support that Jennifer received was so important to her that she took a photo of her laptop to include in the photo project. In the caption to accompany the photograph below, Jennifer reflects on the differences between her offline and online experiences of wedding work:

Figure 4: Photograph 2- Jennifer and Andy



This photo is an attempt for me to illustrate the internet! Most of the wedding came from the internet in one way or another – and more importantly, a lot of practical support that we didn't have from friends and family came from there too. I think that the

whole process of planning the wedding taught us both quite a lot about ourselves that Andy pretty much knew already but was news to me; in trying to plan a wedding that was “us” we needed to work out what that was. I, personally, had no idea – I’d never thought about it. It turns out I’m not very traditional, don’t much like doing things because that’s what everyone else does, and I’m some sort of crafting fiend! We discovered the people that we thought were supportive and our friends weren’t always as they seemed, and I made some really lovely new friends via the wedding forums – Particularly the unconventional brides section of You and Your Wedding. The Weird Brides even threw me a hen do where I had the most fabulous time with all these women I’d never met before in person but knew so much about – and had made all that effort (in one case travelling to London from Edinburgh!) for me – yet my “own” hen do I had to organise myself (after being let down and told nothing was sorted the day before) was not about me at all, but about the others who I had ended up feeling pressured to invite – some of whom then never came. My new internet chums were a cheering squad giving me the confidence to be me/us, and not who other people thought I was/we were. I think I owe them (and Ariel Meadow Stallings, author of offbeat bride) a huge debt of gratitude, as this sense of self and confidence in doing what **I** want rather than what is expected has

made a huge difference to my life ongoing (how dramatic!!!). We are also grateful that we didn't go down the white dress, non-pirate, all bought route, which though was never a natural option for us did briefly make an appearance in the list of suggestions at the start. We are both glad we didn't do that – it just wasn't/isn't us!

The lack of support received from her family and friends, and the ways in which they reinforced gendered and traditional ideas about who should perform the wedding work and what the wedding should involve, rather than either conforming to these expectations or distancing herself from the input of other people led her to re-embed herself online with like-minded women. In fact, Jennifer was particularly energised about being “able to get excited at a real person, rather than random girls on the internet who I have just met” during our interviews “because people just go ‘huh! Hmm...oh no’ and it’s quite difficult to get excited.”

In cases of more complex relationality, using the example here of divorced parents, some of the couples talked about difficulties of how to display these relationships on the invitations as this made a statement about whose wedding it was and who was involved in the performing of the wedding work. Sophie and Daniel were very concerned about this as Sophie explained:

Well it was really difficult with my parents being divorced because we weren't sure whether to put my mum and dad invite you, but then my dad's not paying anything towards it...so my mum kinda went 'well why should he be on it because he's not paying?' So I was like right ok. Then I said 'well why don't we put Sophie and Daniel invite?' Then my mum said 'are you paying?'

This was complicated by Sophie's mum's financial investment in the wedding and the power relationship that this constructed, along with the tradition of the bride's parents names being on the invitation which framed their discussion. Castrén and Maillochon (2009) argue that family ties can constrain as well as enable the choices made by the couple, which they argue is overlooked by a focus on material aspects of

the day. Walliss (2002) found that this familial involvement in the wedding work was more likely if the couple's parents were paying for the wedding. That can be seen here in terms of control over how the wedding work is displayed to others, with the financial investment used to justify this decision.

A consideration of the performance of wedding work, by individuals, couples and wider relational groupings allows more insight into the practice of wedding work that the couples engaged in. Some couples were more likely to perform their wedding work using particular strategies, such as the same-sex couples being more likely to take a joint approach, but overall couples tended to utilise different strategies according to the situation, particularly in terms of the ways in which family and/or friends took on performance roles, had their involvement displayed or influenced the ways in which, and spaces within which, the wedding work was performed.

Conclusion

A fuller picture of contemporary wedding work can be built up by focusing not only on the ways in which the division of wedding work labour is managed, but also on the gendered and heterosexualised frameworks and relational contexts which affect the ways in which wedding work can be imagined. In addition, investigation of the different approaches to the performance of wedding work adds to this analysis. Humble et al.'s (2008) typology has been shown to be useful in starting to think about the different models of wedding work management, but they fail to move beyond categorisation to an explanation of why different couples end up in these different categories. My analysis has gone some way in starting to develop ideas about the ways in which this division of labour relates particularly to

class and sexuality. However, Humble et al.'s (2008) typology is inadequate because by categorising into types of couple it is then restrictive in terms of capturing the blurring between these boundaries. It also gives insufficient weight to the importance of the relational context within which the couples find themselves. Therefore, this analysis has shown that a typology of strategies that couples deploy at different times and in different ways through which to explore how couples imagine, manage and perform wedding work offers a more suitable alternative. A framework of traditional, individual and relational strategies will be outlined in the discussion chapter to build upon the themes identified and discussed in the final section of this chapter.

Chapter 5: The Big Day

Introduction

Each couple's wedding or civil partnership, however it was imagined, managed and performed, represented a significant event invested with emotion. In this sense the big day can be seen as a fateful moment in the way that Giddens' (1992) describes, where significant times of transition in people's lives lead to heightened reflexivity. It is thus an arena in which relational boundaries are drawn through processes of inclusion and exclusion and in which Gillis (1999) argues couples construct their own identities.

Others have explored the meaning and significance of particular symbols that heterosexual couples display on their wedding day (see, for example, Charsley, 1992; Otnes and Pleck, 2003; Jellison, 2008). Of interest in this chapter is not what is displayed on the big day however, but rather how these symbols and practices are chosen, why they are chosen and how they are carried out. Again these issues will be explored through the themes of imagining, managing and performing, with emphasis on the importance of relationality to the construction of the big day. Family relationships are focused on due to their centrality in the couples' narratives, particularly in terms of how these relationships and their display on the big day were managed.

First the opportunities and constraints for imagining the big day will be explored to look at the different ways in which 'tradition' frames the imaginings of all of the couples and how it is unreflexively and reflexively adopted and even pursued. The expectations of others are important here because they affected the ways in which the big day was imagined. Sexuality was also significant, not because of large variations in big day imaginings, but because the expectations of others were

more likely to be at odds with those of the same-sex couples. Age was important in the case of the same-sex couples as the older couples were more likely to reject the traditional imaginings that were embraced by the younger couples.

The management of the big day focuses on processes of inclusion and exclusion that the couples engaged with in order to draw the relational boundaries required in the choosing of guests and the roles that these guests would play on the big day. Although all of the participants engaged in this form of management to some extent, these processes were dependent on the specific relational contexts within which the participants were situated. The same-sex couples, in particular, faced situations of family exclusion and had to draw upon management strategies to deal with these relational issues. Occasionally, fear of this situation led couples to exclude others even from the knowledge that the civil partnership had taken place in order to preserve relationships that may otherwise have been threatened.

Big day performances were narrated with feeling and invested emotion in comparison to the decision to marry and wedding work narratives. Participants switched constantly between talking about their own personal reflections and emotions on the day and the display of relationality, both past and present. This section of the chapter thus explores the various ways in which big day performances are relationally embedded.

Imagining the Big Day

Imaginings surrounding the wedding or civil partnership ritual and accompanying celebrations were described at length by many of the participants. The advantage of conducting multiple interviews, over the planning period and afterwards, with the case study participants, was

that these imaginings could be traced over time, along with the ways in which they were subsequently managed and performed.

As described in the literature review, late modernity is said to lack traditional frameworks, which means that traditional practices must be justified as choices amongst a variety of other options (Giddens, 2002). However, these ideas were written to apply to the everyday lives of late modern individuals and the concept of tradition has arguably more relevance in relation to ritual events. Those who question the extent to which contemporary society has been detraditionalised describe a shift away from the external constraints that tradition represented to an internal framework that continues to shape action. This is represented by Gross' (2005) concept of meaning-constitutive tradition. It is precisely in the realm of the imaginary that tradition thrived for the couples, and particularly in relation to the ways in which the rituals themselves were imagined. A fixed definition of the symbols constituting a traditional wedding is rejected in favour of an investigation into the ways in which the couples utilised the term 'tradition' and its place in their imagined ritual.

For many of the couples, particularly, though not exclusively, the heterosexual couples, tradition was aspirational. There was much talk of wanting a 'proper' wedding. John, a book-keeper in his early fifties, and Lynn, a part-time healthcare worker in her early forties, were one such example:

John: I want it to be like a real-life wedding. I don't want any of this tomfoolery stuff. It's got to be a proper wedding.

Lynn: Yeah. So in a way there are certain traditions that in your head make you feel like it's a proper wedding, if you have them.

Similarly, Lauren and Zoe, admin workers in their early twenties, sought tradition out by reading wedding magazines for advice and compared

different checklists to ensure that nothing was left out accidentally.

Lauren said:

I don't think we're really leaving anything out. We might be adding a few things. I can't think of anything we're missing out. We haven't got pageboys or flower girls or anything, but purely because all the kids have grown up.

Giddens would perhaps argue that this reflexive pursuit of tradition is not in fact traditional at all, as tradition has become a choice rather than the only possible form of action. However, in these instances tradition represented legitimacy. Lynn was anxious that this wedding was done 'properly' as her first wedding was held in a register office and did not feel as a wedding should, and Lauren felt that tradition would legitimise her wedding in the eyes of her family who she said thought it was going to be a 'circus'. Thus explaining away the continued presence of traditional practice or symbolism as a choice made in the context of a multiplicity of options does not adequately justify either the volume of references to tradition within most of the couples' narratives, or the emotion invested in these imaginings. Referring back to Thompson's (1996) four aspects of tradition (hermeneutic, normative, legitimation and identity), he argues that, in terms of identity, traditions provide symbolic materials for collective as well as individual identities. This can help explain the relational investment in the reproduction of traditional practices because tradition not only acts in a meaning-constitutive or hermeneutic way, as a framework of understanding, but also provides a way of displaying and legitimising collective identities.

The centrality of the specific relational circumstances to the importance placed upon tradition in the two examples above is something that has not been fully explored in critiques of detraditionalisation. However, Smart (2007a:84) notes this "sense of duty or a sense of doing 'the proper thing'" in family narratives within her own research. These relational imaginings are explored later in this section.

Not only did tradition feature heavily in the imagined weddings of most of the participants and was actively pursued by many, what is more significant is how difficult it was to imagine a wedding without tradition. Daniel described how he explained to Sophie, both HR advisors in their late twenties, that:

I woke up one day and went 'I can't imagine you wearing a dress walking down an aisle in the middle of a hotel.' And then I said 'actually, maybe we should go for a church wedding' and we decided to switch to a church one.

It was impossible for Daniel to imagine what his wedding would be like without the traditional setting of the church, in which Sophie's dress (which she was keeping a secret from him, but which he had clearly imagined) would be displayed. When questioned during a subsequent interview, Daniel reflected that for him tradition was "invisibly important". He said:

We didn't really necessarily think about it, but because of the way we've been brought up and the external influences and things like that, that's what tradition is almost a part of. It wouldn't feel like a wedding without it.

Here traditional wedding practices could be seen as embedded to the extent that they were unreflexively adopted, and only subject to further explanation and justification when reflexivity was encouraged in the interview setting through questioning of these practices. Lynn again highlighted the importance of tradition in her imagined wedding when John suggested they cut their wedding cake before the sit-down meal:

I can't cope with cutting the cake before we do everything because that would just be wrong- it's telling me it's wrong. I can't do it because my brain won't accept it. It's like when I went and abseiled. When you first abseil and you try and walk backwards off the cliff. Everything in your whole body is screaming at you: 'No! Don't do it!' It's like abseiling into an abyss.

This strong reaction against a threat to part of the wedding not being done 'properly' demonstrates the strength of 'implicit principles' within the imagined wedding, in which decisions "defy articulation not because they were necessarily taken unconsciously, but rather because they required no further questioning" (Risseuw, 2005: 166). It was only the suggestion of an alternative that prompted Lynn to explain not necessarily the importance, but rather the embeddedness of tradition in her habitus. Tradition was so important for Lynn that she got tearful when she talked about looking like a 'proper' bride when trying on a wedding dress. She said she "turned round and looked in the mirror and I cried because- well it's going to make me fill up now." There was an emotional power behind certain traditional symbols for Lynn and also others, particularly other female participants.

Female imaginings were especially vivid, having often been constructed since childhood. Natalie, a garden designer in her mid-thirties, depicted the importance of her imagined wedding in the photograph project:

Figure 5: Photograph 3- Natalie and Jakob



I have always loved horses and couldn't imagine any other way of arriving at my wedding than in a carriage pulled by a pair of greys. It became a bit of a bone of contention during the planning, as Jakob was very against it, due to the cost and because he perceived it as extravagant, a bit grand and even pretentious. To my shame I went to my father with the rather manipulative 'Since I was a little girl I've always seen myself arriving at my wedding by horse and carriage, but Jakob says it's too expensive'. Of course he offered to pay for it, and then the two of them ganged up on me to tease me about the whole thing. A number of our friends knew about the argument, and took sides themselves. It all became a bit of a sideshow. On the day, both my Dad and Jakob both confessed how pleasant it was, and said how much they surprised themselves by enjoying the carriage, and that it felt appropriate. It is now one of those things we laugh about, and I still maintain that riding in that carriage was one of my favourite parts of the wedding.

The strength of this imagined wedding was evidenced in how Natalie went about ensuring that it was realised. Some of the same-sex female participants, especially the younger ones, also spoke of childhood gendered imaginings. Zoe, for example, said:

You dream of your wedding. You pretend with your friends when you're little in the playground. And obviously being young you don't realise who you are or what you are at that age. It's only when you're older and you think I still want that. How can I do that now?

She did not want to give up on her childhood dreams just because of her sexuality. These imaginings were not confined to heterosexual relationships as the heterosexual imaginary is also relevant in considering the experiences of same-sex couples.

For many of the same-sex couples there was a discourse of choice in initial interviews around what they could organise for their big day. Leanne, a social worker in her late thirties, for example, said that she and Kayleigh, a youth justice worker in her late twenties, "enjoyed the fact that there weren't any expectations. There was no tradition attached to civil partnership as such." Lauren and Zoe also spoke of how they were freer than heterosexual couples to imagine less traditional weddings. This supports McQueeney's (2003) argument that same-sex commitment ceremonies are reflexive spaces in which individual identities can be articulated. However, when interviewed after they were married Lauren said that she realised on reflection how tradition had shaped the way in which they imagined and performed their wedding:

Looking back at things I think we had more traditions than we realised. I think they just became the norm and you don't think of them as tradition- that's just the way that weddings work... Like obviously we gave rings, we stayed apart, I was at the end of the aisle and you came down the aisle. You had a maid of honour and I had a best man.

Similarly, Kat, a musician in her early thirties, and Molly, an exams officer in her mid-twenties, reflected on the importance of tradition in their wedding after the event. Molly said that "it's quite interesting when you're almost given a licence to be almost completely non-traditional how many you would still choose to do." This discourse of

choice cannot be adequately described as faux reflexivity, which Atkinson (2010) argues masks how there are limits to what can be imagined which are not perceived by individuals. It was not that many of these couples' imaginings were limited to the traditional, but that tradition had a weight or legitimacy in spite of an awareness of other possibilities. Lewin (1998) noted in her interviews with same-sex couples that despite being very creative and reflexive, choices were often naturalised in relation to a vague notion of tradition.

Tradition was indeed embedded within the imaginings of many of the same-sex couples in the sample. Matt, a purchasing director in his early forties, talked about wearing "a morning suit because that was very elegant, appropriate and it was something that you wore at weddings. So for me there is no question about not wearing a morning suit. It didn't even occur to me." Here Matt presented tradition not as a reflexive choice, but rather as deeply rooted in his imagined wedding. It was only in discussion with his partner Josef, a brand manager in his early forties, that some of these imaginings were questioned as "Josef's counter-argument was we're not following tradition... And Josef said there is no set tradition for a civil partnership- we can make it what we want, and I didn't really see that." Reflexivity was thus facilitated by differences in the imaginings of participants.

Interestingly, some of the same-sex couples referred to tradition even when deciding not to follow it. For example, Kayleigh and Leanne were determined that they wanted to wear clothes that they would feel comfortable in, but also that they did not want to "have that whole kind of male and female gender thing going on in terms of how we looked" (Leanne). However, this decision was not a simple one, particularly for Kayleigh who said:

I wouldn't have been comfortable in a dress. I kept saying that didn't I? 'I'm not going to wear a dress.' But then there was something about well maybe I should because it's probably the only

time I will, but then it's like but I don't want to. It's weird. It's funny how you have to choose not to wear a dress instead of choosing to wear trousers.

Tradition thus framed the ways in which the big day was imagined even if traditional symbols were not performed on the day itself. David, a counsellor in his early fifties, puts this eloquently in his explanation of the role of tradition in his and Gavin's, a funeral celebrant in his early fifties, civil partnership:

Tradition was always there as a kind of ghost if you like- a point of reference. It wasn't something that we were necessarily going to follow or something that we would consciously choose- 'oh we are not going to do that'. But it was in reference to a tradition even if we were choosing not to do something. Like we are not going to have a cake, but we are going to have pudding. You could say that all relates to a tradition without following it.

The place of tradition within the imaginings of these and many other of the research participants supports Ingraham's (2007:199) argument that "we may even find ourselves challenged to marry without an elaborate white wedding" due to the heterosexual imaginary having naturalised the institution of heterosexuality. Seen in this meaning-constitutive framework, tradition was both a source of aspiration and also a constraint in terms of the ways in which weddings were imagined for many of the couples. This importance of an abstract notion of tradition, even if not articulated as such, shaped the imaginings of the majority of couples, regardless of age, sexual orientation or class.

Charsley's (1992) concept of marooning, where traditions become cut off from the context in which they were created and thus take on new meanings even though the practices remain, may help explain the appropriation of these traditional symbols in a late modern world. When Emily, a marketing manager in her late twenties, and Ed, a marketing manager in his early thirties, reflected on the importance of tradition in their wedding Emily said that:

For me it's quite important. But is it important because it is traditional or is it important because it's nice if you see what I mean? So I want to walk down the aisle on my dad's arm but probably not necessarily because it is traditional, just because it's a nice thing to do. I want to wear a white dress because they're amazing dresses and you never get a chance to wear them at other times.

She stated that the traditional symbols themselves are important to her, but not necessarily the meaning behind them. Otnes and Pleck (2003) also note how brides justify the continued practice of being given away by their fathers by severing the symbol from the perceived meaning as a ritual of subordination. But rather than emphasising how tradition must now be justified as Giddens (1991) does, Charsley (1992) notes that despite reinterpretation, ritualised wedding traditions are still unreflexively adopted. By this he means that traditional symbols have become detached, or marooned, from their original meaning, but are still displayed without much question.

The working class heterosexual couples were less likely to speak of tradition as such because there was less reflexivity around alternatives. It was thus more difficult to facilitate discussion around the importance of tradition in their weddings. Here, the invisibility of tradition allowed these participants to "speak from a naturalised universal position" without needing to justify their imaginings or practices (Hockey et al., 2007:5). However, even for the middle class couples tradition formed part of their imagined day and the context within which decisions had to be made.

The younger same-sex couples were more likely to use the heterosexualised language of 'wedding' and 'marriage' than the older couples, as mentioned in the Decision to Marry chapter. Molly, for example said:

I know a lot of activists and stuff would say 'well why do you want to mirror a straight wedding?' But then the flipside to that, as we said at the beginning, we see it as a wedding, you know? Why do we need to make this big statement and be different?

The use of this language and the traditional symbols were in this case a claim to the ordinariness of their ritual. Some of the older couples, however, were keen to reject this language as it did not fit with their imagined day, although this is not to say that tradition did not feature in these narratives as seen above. Neil, an accountant in his mid-forties, explained how "every time someone was saying 'wedding' I would say 'it's not a wedding' and I think that's why we came up with 'the event.'" Alternative language in which to frame the ritual was developed in response to the imaginings of others.

The imaginings or perceived imaginings of family and friends were also of concern to most of the couples and these perceptions fed into their own imaginings about the big day. The same-sex couples in particular were concerned about the expectations of others. Gavin explained how not only did their decision to marry take on new meaning through the responses of others to their decision (as mentioned in The Decision to Marry chapter), but the imagined ritual itself also changed over time in relation to this reaction from family and friends:

I started off calling it a civil partnership, but then you got into all of the things with other people asking 'what are you going to call it?' And it was like let's call it the wedding and it seemed like that's what it is: it's a wedding. It might not be quite in law, but emotionally it was a wedding and that's how we referred to it, and that's how everybody else treated it. As soon as we mentioned it everybody, especially the girls, were so enthusiastic because it was a wedding.

Without as much recognition from their families that this was a wedding, Ryan, a commercial executive in his later twenties, and James, a graphic designer in his early thirties, decided that following a heterosexual

wedding model would help others recognise that their wedding was legitimate:

James: People like my dad were a bit confused. He'd never really sort of thought about us ever getting married....He doesn't care that I'm gay or anything like that and he's welcomed Ryan into the family and all that, but he was very confused on 'oh so how does it work then? What do you do?' and things like that. So keeping it quite normal, not normal but like how a straight wedding would be

Ryan: Following the same pattern makes it easier

James: Easier for people to understand

This confusion was difficult for Ryan and James because their marriage felt like the obvious and natural next step and Ryan said that sexuality "comes far in the background" when thinking about culture and customs. Their imaginings were challenged due to the disparity with those of their friends and family members who did not recognise immediately that this was a wedding. By displaying these heterosexual wedding symbols Ryan and James attempted to realign their expectations. Similarly, Zoe said that she and Lauren "kept to what people recognised" and Lauren explained that "I think it was better because it made them realise that there's nothing wrong with it and it's just like a normal wedding. Because everyone was a bit like 'well what happens at a gay wedding?'" They saw this as an affront to their ordinariness as a couple wanting to marry which led to tensions with family members who thought it was going to be a "freak show" (Zoe).

For the heterosexual couples, imagining what others may be expecting was more common in situations where the couple were rejecting certain traditions and were concerned about what others would think. Jennifer, a corporate systems specialist in her early thirties, expressed that she had been:

Worrying about what other people would think because what we ended up doing was a bit different and wondering what other

people would think of that, because other people have said 'oh' and made sucking teeth and saying 'I can't imagine that- that would be horrible', when in fact if we hadn't said anything to anybody about any of it they would have just turned up and gone 'oh this is lovely', which is what they did on the day.

Her reflexivity around the symbols of the day also involved the expectations of others, which did not alter the plans as such but made her question her own imaginings and should thus be contextualised within this relational context.

There were a multitude of different imaginings about the big day that the couples, particularly the female participants, articulated. What was striking was the centrality of a vague notion of tradition in these imaginings that meant even those same-sex couples who were rejecting traditional symbolism did so in the context of the 'heterosexual imaginary' (Ingraham, 2007). Tradition was emotionally and relationally embedded for many of the participants and thus not a straightforward choice even when couples reflexively articulated these imaginings. Tradition can thus be understood as meaning-constitutive for the majority of the research participants.

Managing the Big Day

Following on from a discussion of the relational nature of some of the couples' imagined weddings, this section on management takes up this theme to explore how relationality on, and in the lead up to, the big day is managed. The inclusion and exclusion of the feelings of others and of people themselves was a theme that ran throughout the interviews and highlighted the need for an understanding of these processes in an analysis of commitment rituals. This analysis considers the relative importance placed on both familial and friendship relationships in exploring the politics of inclusion whereby the feelings of others are

managed in relation to traditional relational roles, gendered expectations and who should be present on the big day. It also reflects on the politics and processes of exclusion and the additional managerial requirements of complex relationality.

It was often the perceived expectations or the feelings of others that led to the adoption of traditional symbols through management of the big day on the part of the participants. One specific example is the allocation of traditional roles on the big day. Many of the participants were conscious of how much these roles would mean to others, which influenced their decision making. Kat, for example, talked about her father giving her away at her wedding to Molly:

I think it's more because my dad was really chuffed about that and my best mate, when I asked her to be bridesmaid, was like sobbing and stuff so I was like 'oh- alright then.' I wasn't that bothered but obviously it means a lot to them and I think that's important.

Similarly, Jade, a postgraduate student in her late twenties, was concerned about managing the possible interpretations of others if she did not have her father give her away on the big day:

Being given away as well- that's a big one. I wasn't going to do that because I thought 'I'm not my dad's property' ... and we'd been living together forever so I was like 'no I'm not going to be given away, that's lame'. But then I felt that people might read into it that I had a bad relationship with my dad and obviously, well not obviously, but I don't so I thought I don't want him to feel left out or for people to think 'oh- don't they get on?' , so I changed my mind at the last moment.

Roles were then adopted or created to take into account their significance for those taking them on and those to whom they were displayed. Jade recognised that while she associated this act of being given away as a symbol of patriarchy, the tradition has largely been marooned (Charsley, 1992) from this original context and symbols can have different meanings for different audiences, as Lewin (1998)

demonstrates in her study of same-sex commitment ceremonies. These examples start to question Gillis' (1999:52) notion that "today's marriage rituals are less about creating social relations than about constructing personal identities." Overall, there was much concern about the feelings of others, particularly family members but also friends. Ollie, an accountant in his late twenties, explained that his and Nathan's, a finance director in his early forties, big day was "a celebration of our relationship, but also a celebration of all of our friends and family that were there as well. It was about all of us rather than just specifically us."

These relational roles required additional management when their enactment was impossible. Sadly Sophie's father died just a few weeks before her wedding to Daniel, which caused them to be more reflexive about the traditional role that he would have taken on. Daniel said:

I think the tradition thing has actually probably in some ways actually become more of a thing because of your dad. Actually we've realised that some of the things we are doing, like the traditional things, we actually can't do, without realising it. The father of the bride's speech, the father giving away, things like that and stuff that we've almost taken for granted, almost the expected parts, the real quite ingrained parts of tradition aren't happening. So that makes me feel quite sad.

This situation required management as to whether this role would still be enacted and who by:

Daniel: Then we're very conscious that because your dad can't do them we're then almost going the other way, aren't we, in some ways by saying well actually we don't want anyone else to do it either, because we don't want to replace him in the service?

What was important here was not necessarily the role as such but the performance of certain relational bonds specific to the participants. Where these roles could not be performed in a straightforward manner, such as Sophie's father not being present to walk her down the aisle and

do a speech, there was more reflexive articulation regarding the function and purpose of these roles for those involved.

In addition to the roles taken on by others, these relationships sometimes also required management regarding the roles and identities of the couples themselves on the big day. One such example was the management of the way in which gendered identities were displayed on the big day. Lauren and Zoe decided to present this gender management in one of their photographs:

Figure 6: Photograph 4- Lauren and Zoe



This photo is of the both of us taken by our photographer in the grounds of the venue on the day. It shows both of us in the outfits we chose to get married in, me in a dress and Lauren in a suit. The dress was initially hired from a lady who worked in the business of wedding dresses from home; it was love at first sight. Lauren's suit, however, was handmade by a local tailor to our specification. We went for a blue colour scheme so her suit was of a dark navy with a subtle pinstripe. We looked for a suit to buy in every available shop locally but could find nothing that met Lauren's requirements; a suit that lacked the fashionable "girly" edge, cut longer in the jacket than usual and yet tailored in at the waist to show that she was a woman. The shirt was a

tricky one for us, eventually forcing us to turn to the boys section in Debenhams. The matching baby blue dupion silk cravat and waistcoat were found on a website and ordered in a boy's medium size. Despite this, the overall image is of us both comfortably formal for our special occasion and feeling our best.

We chose this photo because it illustrates both our struggles and successes in our search to source our outfits, an integral part to a wedding. We wanted to look smart and traditional, but also be comfortable. On occasion we felt the pressure on us to look a certain way, to wear certain gender defining clothes, but it was important for us to be happy too and we were pleased with the result.

This pressure that they alluded to was a dominant narrative in all of Lauren and Zoe's three interviews, required constant management and even threatened the relationship between Lauren and her mother.

Despite having very short hair and not having worn a dress since early childhood, Lauren's mother expected her to grow her hair and look more feminine on the day. The wedding ritual represented a significant moment with certain gendered expectations that were not present in everyday life. Lauren then had to manage her mother's expectations alongside her own, which for her was a difficult process:

Lauren: It's upsetting and hurtful when she says stuff like that, like it's hard for her to be at my wedding looking at me in a suit and short hair, because to her that means I'm a bloke.

Zoe: You know, the question's even been asked: 'do you want to be a boy?'

Lauren had the suit altered so that it was more fitted to try and "get a happy medium between what I wanted and what she would like, without compromising our day." This demonstrates how "gender may have to be embraced, reinforced, modified or rejected in the course of doing gender work" (Morgan, 1996:94). This was especially the case for the female same-sex couples whose experiences relate to institutionalised heterosexuality, which can frame all sexualities (Hockey et al., 2007), and in which the clothing worn by a woman on her wedding day holds particular significance. However, more than that it implicates the

gender assessments made by others in this process of doing gender. Gender can thus be more usefully viewed as a lived social relation in the Bourdieusian sense than more “Butlerian accounts in which gender is understood primarily as a location within discursive structures” (McNay, 2004:180). Lauren and Zoe’s experience supports Bottero’s (2010) extension of Bourdieu’s ideas to include the importance of relationality because it was within the context of family comments that they had to negotiate their gendered performances.

The familial nature of weddings is emphasised by Castrén and Maillochon (2009). They investigate how wedding guests are chosen and argue that family ties constrain as well as enable these choices. Pressure was indeed felt amongst my own participants to invite extended family, particularly by the younger heterosexual couples who were more likely to be in receipt of parental wedding funding. Many couples felt that they were forced to invite certain family members that their parents expected them to invite. Abigail, a project officer in her late twenties, talked about being told that she had to invite her father’s side of the family even though they are not close. She said, “I think most of them didn’t come anyway, but it was, I suppose, to save face and not cause family problems.” Family politics had to be carefully managed because the exclusion of certain family members was seen to reflect not only on the couple, but also on their parents. In doing this they were drawing relational boundaries of who was considered part of their family and who was not. Thus the inclusion or otherwise of certain family members can be considered more of a collective practice in these instances, in the way that Bottero (2010) describes, in which individuals are embedded in relational contexts of mutual obligation and influence.

Others utilised particular relational strategies, such as Amelia, a researcher in her early thirties, who made the decision to exclude some people to avoid the inclusion of others:

Once you decide to start inviting extended family deciding where to draw the line is quite difficult and I'm not particularly close to any of my extended family. It sounds horrible but I wasn't bothered if they were there or not. I would probably rather have invited some of my close friends to be at the ceremony, but for political reasons I couldn't invite them and not invite my extended family.

This perceived hierarchy in which family members should take precedence over friends was common amongst the heterosexual couples, who were more likely to prioritise family and include their wider circle of friends in the evening celebrations.

By contrast some of the same-sex couples had little or no involvement from family members. Again there was an age differentiation in place, with the older couples more likely to construct a ceremony around friends and sometimes excluding family members completely and the younger same-sex couples more likely to involve and prioritise family members. This was not always possible, however, as Ryan, who is in his late twenties, explained when he said that his parents had excommunicated him from the family. However, his extended family found out about his wedding to James through Facebook, and were able to attend. So in this way the big day acted as a catalyst for renewed relationality, in addition to the severing of familial ties that Lewin (1998) notes in her research.

The importance of friendship for gay men and lesbian women has been documented and the often family-like nature of these relationships signified by the term 'families of choice' (Weston, 1991). This simple categorisation, however, masks the complexities surrounding the inclusion and exclusion of family members by the same-sex couples in this study. These narratives suggest that shifting social attitudes mean that family members will increasingly be involved in same-sex weddings, as hinted at by their greater inclusion in the ceremonies of the younger couples.

Matt and Josef were an example of an older and longer-established same-sex couple who constructed their big day around their global network of friends with whom they aligned themselves, rather than talking about their place within family networks. Close friends in a variety of geographical locations participated in the wedding work and made speeches on the day. But an argument that they simply prioritised friends over family would ignore other subtle factors that came into play. Matt talked about the lack of involvement from his family:

My niece came, so my sister's daughter and her partner. My brothers- no, nor my sister. They were invited and I asked them to come and wanted them to be here, but realistically I think they would have been intimidated by the whole event. They live in Birmingham, they don't travel very much and my lifestyle is different to their lifestyle. I think they were genuinely very pleased for us but I think they just couldn't overcome that little bit of shyness, a little bit of worrying about the group of people, a little bit of them thinking perhaps they are not quite on the same career path, not fitting in...We would have paid for accommodation and all of that stuff, but they just couldn't bring themselves to do that.

Matt hinted at class differences between himself and his siblings in addition to his sexuality as being the barrier to their inclusion. The emphasis was on creating an event that their international friends would be impressed by rather than something constructed to make their families feel comfortable. These familial ties were maintained, however, with Josef noting how, "we sent them a copy of the DVD and they watched it and showed it to their neighbours and were very, very proud." This relational management was thus complex and both sexuality and class need to be taken into account in understanding the self-exclusion of Matt's siblings from their civil partnership.

Some of the same-sex couples went to great lengths to preserve their family relationships. This was noted in situations of fragile relationality, in which the big day was seen as a potential threat to these relationships. Mike, a photographer out of work due to a disability and

in his early thirties, spoke of how he would like his grandparents to be able to come:

I would love them to, but they don't even know that I am gay or anything so it is kept like that. My grandparents come from an age where my gran went to finishing school and is very prim and proper and slightly religious background so they wouldn't see it as a good thing at all. But I am also the favourite grandson so I don't want to do anything to upset them or anything, so unfortunately they will never know.

Therefore Mike sought to preserve his good relationship with his grandparents by excluding them from even the knowledge of his wedding to Robert. He spared himself the imagined rejection through secrecy. This was certainly not the only incidence of its kind. Neil demonstrated the reflexive risk management of preserving connectedness through exclusion when he said:

The other problem is everybody's happy at the moment. The children are happy, they come and stay. They give me a hug when we meet and they're very chatty and they always ask you how I am, and the same with your parents. They always ask how I am. And sometimes it's just...I said to Jeff, you know, this could be the one thing that they might not agree with and it seems such a shame when everybody's...you know, happy about it. And it hasn't made any difference to us at all has it?

He was referring to the strategic decision not to invite or even tell his partner Jeff's children or either of their own parents about their civil partnership. This impacted on the nature of their ritual, which they kept very small and discreet. Thus the lack of familial involvement in the big day was not always about the decreased importance of these relationships or the prioritising of friends over family. Sometimes, in cases of more complex or difficult relationality, these relationships were too precious and vulnerable to expose to a fateful moment which it was felt might be profoundly threatening to them.

It should also be noted that many of the same-sex couples referred to additional management that they had to undertake due to legal exclusion based on their sexuality, and also homophobic experiences. One aspect of this was religious exclusion which was highlighted by Mary, a retiree in her early sixties, and Julie, an artist in her late fifties, who struggled when a heterosexual couple who were not members of their Quaker Meeting House married there whereas they were unable to. They were very creative in how they incorporated spiritual symbols into their celebrations, but felt that "it's not very equal because if you're heterosexual you've got a choice- you can have the religious ceremony or the non-religious ceremony, whereas we don't have an option" (Mary). Jessica, a student in her late twenties, and Nicola, a painter decorator in her mid-thirties, also felt excluded from the option of religious venues but for financial reasons. They could not afford to have their wedding outside of a register office due to the additional costs of the registrar coming to the venue and the venue hire. Jessica said:

If it was up to us we probably would have had about a hundred people, one hundred and twenty people easy, but that's the biggest registry office room in the county and it holds forty-five, which is pants.

This financial exclusion was felt more keenly because they did not have the option of marrying in church, which would have accommodated all of their family and friends and within their budget.

Another aspect of this additional management required by same-sex couples related to the ways in which many of the couples managed experienced and also possible homophobia. This was mentioned particularly by the couples who had their civil partnerships soon after the legislation was introduced and before the Equality Act (Sexual Orientation) Regulations came into force in 2007 after which time it became illegal for licenced venues to discriminate on the grounds of sexual orientation (Department for Communities and Local Government,

2007). Nick, a local government officer in his mid-forties, for example, phoned a venue about holding his civil partnership there with Arthur, a civil servant in his early fifties, and was told that the owner of this venue “did not want that sort of thing in his house”. He said:

I was just absolutely devastated because it was so unexpected. Mentally I was geared up thinking this is going to be great, I'm really happy we have found the venue, and to suddenly be faced with this wall of homophobia I just broke down in tears on the phone.

Nick did not imagine that this would be an issue now that the civil partnership legislation had been introduced and he managed this by highlighting his experience in the local press and also speaking about the continued struggle for equality in his speech on the big day. For others, such as Mary and Julie, the potential of homophobia was part of their imagined experience and something they managed through their choice of venue. They chose a venue owned by a same-sex couple and Julie said:

We had to think about that more than straight couples would have to because we didn't want a place where we would have to deal with their feelings of (pause) I guess it was early days particularly (pause) and we're in a very rural community here. We're not in a big urban centre where people probably have slightly broader attitudes.

Their perceptions were embedded in a sense of place as well as sexual orientation and affected the spaces in which they conducted wedding work and performed the big day itself. These barriers to inclusion, discussed here in relation to the management of where the civil partnership would be conducted should have been partially overcome with the introduction of the Equality Act (Sexual Orientation) Regulations 2007 in terms of civil venues, although many of the same-sex couples were still fearful of potential homophobia after this date. Plans to implement section 202 of the Equality Act 2010 should also enable same-sex couples to hold their ceremonies in religious premises (Government Equalities Office, 2011). However, this is will optional for

every faith group so what this will mean in practice will only become clear in the following few years.

In the management of the big day it is clear that relational negotiations, whether enacted or imagined, had a large influence on who was included in the big day and also the roles performed. Differences in the experiences of the heterosexual and same-sex couples related more to the often homophobic reactions, or imagined reactions, of, in particular, family members, but it was clear from the management strategies employed that these relationships were important to all of the couples. Same-sex couples also had to manage potential and experienced homophobia in the management of the space in which their ceremony could take place, particularly those who were amongst the first in the country to have a civil partnership. The following section will explore the ways in which the big day was performed and will again focus on the display of relationality on the day.

Performing the Big Day

The ways in which the couples narrated their performances on the big day, which was structured in the interview setting around the sharing of their photos, videos and other mementos, highlighted how embedded these performances were in both present and past relationality. In order to explore this further this section looks firstly at the centrality of emotion in these narratives before considering the ways in which performances were embedded in certain displays of gender and sexuality. It then explores the importance of the ways in which others performed on the day and finally the display of past, new and complex relationality will be discussed.

When reflecting upon the big day itself there was a theme of experiencing heightened emotion running through the narratives. There

was much talk of the roller-coaster of emotions that were felt during different parts of the day. Aaron, a journalist in his late twenties, for example, described his feelings in this way:

For me it was like nervous beforehand and then euphoria and 'this is brilliant- what an amazing moment' and then oh now pause for an hour and a half while we take photos, at which point the euphoria starts to fade. And then the 'oh my god I've got to make a speech' thing starts to come into your mind.

The main emotions spoken of by the participants throughout the sample were positive ones of happiness and joy. However, Hochschild (2003) stresses the socially constructed nature of emotions in terms of how they are bound up with feeling rules and managed through emotion work. She argues that wedding rituals have emotional scripts which help participants know what they should be feeling, particularly the bride who is aware that this should be the happiest day of her life. There were certainly emotional expectations that some of the couples spoke about. Molly and also Nick mentioned heterosexual feeling rules that they were unsure their same-sex rituals would live up to. Molly had expected to have to undertake emotion work and "fake it a little bit" and Nick never thought he could experience the emotional clichés of heterosexual weddings. However, they then both spoke of how positive their experiences had been. Nick said:

All the clichés that people say about straight weddings are true. Because I never thought that I would experience that sort of thing, but the high that you are on, the emotional high and the physical high, is just so true. It literally took us two days I think to actually come down.

Molly spoke of the "complete euphoria" that she felt and how she had gone "round to everybody that was a couple but not married- 'you've got to do this. Everyone has got to do it because it's so brilliant.'" These experiences were naturalised in relation to those that heterosexual

couples were perceived to experience and their socially constructed nature downplayed.

A few participants did talk about less positive emotions, however. Mike, for example, reflected on how he felt during his civil partnership:

I found that quite overwhelming because everybody wanted to talk to us all at the same time and there were people there that I didn't know. Because the only person there that I knew that was my side was Stan. Nobody else on my side could turn up.

Mike was significantly let down by family and friends being unable to attend at the last minute, which no amount of emotion work could overcome. Thus, despite the participants having talked about their individual emotional experiences, others were implicated in constructing and witnessing these emotional performances. In fact, I was present at Robert and Mike's civil partnership ceremony and therefore part of this construction. Mike commented on how they were unable to attend when thanking everyone for coming during his speech. However, their absence was also more apparent and tangible because of the empty chairs during the meal and the hastily arranged cake that the landlady offered to make during the reception as Mike's mother was supposed to be making one. The ways in which emotion was narrated by the participants supports Smart's (2007a:84) argument that "narratives of emotion are not simply an expression of internally generated, idiosyncratic feelings, they are scripted in a relational context and the emotion expresses a normative stance which is often shared by other members of the family." The importance of this relational context in the performances of the couple on the big day will be explored throughout the remainder of this chapter, considering firstly gendered and heteronormative performances before focusing on the ways in which past, new and complex relationality are performed in the couples' rituals.

One significant aspect of these emotion-laden performances was how they often rendered gender and sexualities visible and invisible in various ways. The performance of the imagined ritual, embedded as discussed within, or at least in relation to, traditional gendered and heterosexualised scripts, displayed certain kinds of gendered and sexualised identities. The heterosexual couples were more likely to enact traditionally gendered roles, such as the male-dominated speeches and the roles of best man and bridesmaids, than the same-sex couples. Many of these traditions were changed accordingly, however, such as in the case of Ryan and James who adapted the name of their female attendants to match their own identities in calling them 'groomsmen'. Thus the tradition remained intact and suitably gendered with only the language changed. Others, particularly the older same-sex couples, played around with these gendered roles in more substantial ways. When the traditional roles were enacted, there was more flexibility and informality around who performed the role and their gender, such as Matt and Josef who opened the floor to any guests that would like to say or sing something after the meal which resulted in ten impromptu performances from both family and friends, male and female.

In some cases gender was made more or less visible in the narratives of the couples. One particular example is a comparison of the significance accorded to the adaptation of traditional speech making roles by two heterosexual couples. The first couple, Eleanor, a research officer in her early thirties, and Charles, an accountant in his early thirties, talked through their big day chronologically and mentioned the speeches that happened during the sit-down meal:

Katie: So who did a speech?

Charles: The usual.

Eleanor: Just the usual and I did a bit of a blurb...

Charles: Yeah so we had your dad, me, the best man.

Eleanor: And I just did a bit of thanking people in case Charles got bored of thanking people.

What Eleanor said in front of the guests was completely glossed over and not seen to count as a speech, but rather an extension of Charles' speech (although Charles did not acknowledge it at all). In contrast, Elizabeth, a doctor in her mid-twenties, and Andrew, a researcher in his late twenties, made a point of emphasising their challenge to the tradition of male-dominated speeches, so much so that they included a photograph of their joint speech for the photo project:

Figure 7: Photograph 5- Elizabeth and Andrew



Photograph of us both giving our joint speech, illustrating that we wanted to do it together rather than it be a male-dominated thing.

Here similar practices took on very different meanings for the participants involved, which related to the ways in which they imagined the big day and how it was to be presented to others. Elizabeth and Andrew were keen to challenge the beliefs of their families and wider community and were remarkably reflexive about the “beliefs or values that we wanted to represent, such as wanting to be environmentally friendly and wanting to emphasise marriage being outward looking.” In contrast, Eleanor and Charles had a very traditional imagined wedding and displaying the performance of the speeches in an appropriately gendered way preserved this image. This practice was thus interpreted according to the traditional framework embedded within their imaginings.

Similarly, homosexual identities and symbolism were also rendered more or less visible through strategic performances by the same-sex couples and their guests. For example, Nick and Arthur talked about the ways in which they incorporated some gay symbolism in their wedding:

Nick: The flowers that we’ve got are deliberate. Those are green carnations, which was the gay symbol for Oscar Wilde.

Arthur: And the cake had similar symbolism. My brother made the cake and decorated it to our scheme. It had rainbow ribbons around it and then pink triangles picked out, because of the pink triangle and the Holocaust, and then two green carnations on the top. So it looked very simple and most people didn’t pick up on the symbolism, but the gay people there did.

Nick and Arthur represented their sexuality in subtle ways that were displayed for a particular audience and therefore partially visible and partially hidden. The sexual identities of the guests themselves were also hidden on occasion. As Oswald and Suter (2004) found in their

study of the heteronormative performances required of guests at weddings, there were also a small number of instances of the need to conform to a heterosexual identity in this study. This was not something that was explicitly explored within the research or indeed something that could only be ascertained from interviews with the couples themselves, therefore this may be a broader theme as Oswald and Suter (2004) suggest. Claire, a housewife in her early fifties, reflected on a conversation she had with her godmother and one of her friends at the wedding. Claire's godmother questioned her friend Bob about whether he was married and he told her that they had recently split up:

The reason I was gobsmacked- Bob's gay. So in one sense he had told her the truth because he had come home and found his bloke in bed with his toy-boy, but he had the respect for her to make out it was a woman.

The heteronormative framework within which the wedding was embedded may have made it more difficult for alternative sexual identities to be performed.

The performances of the guests were also important in helping to construct the big day in the way that it had been imagined and managed by the couple and enacting certain traditions that were expected of them by many couples. The throwing of confetti was one such example. Most of the heterosexual couples had confetti thrown over them by their guests after the wedding ceremony and it was not something that they particularly remarked upon in the interviews unless prompted to do so. For example, Holly, a doctor in her early thirties, showed me her wedding photos and there was one of confetti being thrown in the air:

Katie: Were you expecting confetti?

Holly: Erm...we didn't buy any so it must have been the guests who bought their own. I hadn't really thought about it. I guess I kind of hoped there would be, again because it's another tradition isn't it?

It was not only the couple that had to construct a ritual in the context of meaning-constitutive traditions as discussed earlier, but the guests also had roles in conforming to the couples' and their own imaginings in performing these traditions. There was less expectation of confetti throwing amongst the same-sex couples, evidenced through the articulation of surprise at having been "ambushed" by people with confetti as described by David. The couple therefore had limited control over the traditions that guests performed or failed to perform. Sometimes these performances were especially meaningful to the same-sex couples and helped them feel validated in their decision to include others in their big day. For example, Nick talked about the response from his colleagues:

It was interesting that we were both treated to the same things that we would have been if we had been marrying a woman- so the collection at work and the presentation by my boss and things. It was very touching so when I was thanking them I made reference to the fact that they had done that for me, which they didn't have to do. They did treat me, and I've got to be careful how I say this, but treat me normally if you know what I mean.

It was important to Nick and many of the other same-sex participants, that his claim to ordinariness and equality in line with heterosexual couples was enacted through the performances of those around him. Big day performances can thus be seen as collective accomplishments in the way in which Bottero (2010) suggests practice should be framed.

Wedding practices can also be considered collective accomplishments in the sense that many of the couples spoke of their ritual as not only signifying the formalisation of them as a couple, but also them and their family and friends as a collective relational unit. Mary and Julie went as far as to include this in their ceremonial vows that were read out during the interview:

Julie: We've brought you all together to celebrate our commitment to each other, the sixteen years that have passed and our life ahead. We also want to celebrate our friendship with you all and acknowledge the importance of your love and our relationships.

Mary: Today we are here in the presence of people from so many parts of our journeys. You are the people who have been family for us.

The ceremony was about them displaying the importance of their relationships with their 'family of choice' (Weston, 1991), as well as with each other, which was a common theme amongst the older same-sex couples who had less contact with their biological family members generally. However, for Mary and Julie it was also a chance for Mary's mother to display acceptance of their relationship by attending their civil partnership, which was especially significant because she did not attend their non-legal commitment ceremony five years previously, and her presence was "a very important thing" (Julie). Mary and Julie's experience, shared also by many other couples in the sample, highlights Smart's (2007a:44) point that "couple relationships may not be as liquid, contingent or 'pure' as is often depicted". Performances on the big day were relationally embedded in past relationships, new relationships and complex on-going relationships as the remainder of the chapter will discuss.

The ritualised performances were embedded in past relationships, which many of the couples wanted to display on their big day. The inclusion of the memory of deceased parents in some way into the ritual was the most common in these narratives, particularly the female heterosexual participants perhaps because of expectations around the traditional roles that these family members would have taken on had they been alive. For example, the fact that Lynn's mother was buried in one specific churchyard influenced the decision to hold the wedding there. She then incorporated her mother's memory into the day by placing the corsage that she would have worn had she been there on her grave.

Natalie also represented her past relationality symbolically on her wedding day, which she depicted in the photo project.

Figure 8: Photograph 6- Natalie and Jakob



My mum's veil and my grandmother's wedding ring. This is a photo of the items I brought into the wedding in order to bring in a little bit of loved ones who are no longer with us. Wearing my mum's veil made it feel like she had a presence at the wedding, without doing anything too mawkish that would upset people. I had my grandmother's wedding ring as my wedding ring as a link with my family history. It fits perfectly.

She felt her mother's absence more keenly on this significant day and both Natalie and Lynn were affected by other symbols that reminded

them of their mothers during the day. Natalie's bouquet contained blackberries, which brought back a strong memory of blackberry picking with her mother, and Lynn saw a butterfly in the church which she felt represented her mother. Emotions regarding these absent people ran high due to the significance of the ritual to the participants and the imagined roles that these absent people would have performed. Therefore, the inclusion of their memory into the ritual performance was very meaningful to the individuals concerned. As Smart (2007a) notes, family relationships can live on after death and be symbolised in on-going relational practices, as was the case for these participants.

The creation of new relationships as well as the display of past relationality was a significant feature of the couples' narratives. Some of the participants were taking on new roles as step-parents, for example. The ways in which these new relationships were performed varied significantly and depended upon the specific relational context that the participants found themselves in and also helped to construct. For Neil there was no performance of his new role as step-father at all as he and his partner concealed their civil partnership from Jeff's children for fear that they would have no future relationship with the children if they did, as discussed earlier in the chapter. Similarly, while Jenna, a nursery nurse in her mid-twenties, and Brian's, a builder in his mid-forties, wedding was not secret, Brian's grown-up children did not attend and were even suspected of trying to cancel the registrar attending the wedding, which was only revealed once prompted about whether any of Brian's children were present. The children had rejected the formation of new relational bonds that the wedding represented. In complete contrast, John's new step-children put on a very public display of his new role on his big day:

John: Then I was supposed to do my speech but I got interrupted by Daisy (his new step-daughter) who gave me a little gift bag and inside was a pair of socks and a keyring that said 'number one dad' on it.

...

Lynn: All of a sudden you can see that he's opened the bag and it has stopped him and then the whole room- everyone was crying.

Lynn and John both had tears in their eyes when they narrated this part of their big day and it was clear how much this display of new relationality had meant to them. It was amazing how much the couples shared during the interviews, but it was interesting that some of the working class couples, such as Jenna and Brian, were more likely to gloss over more difficult relationships than middle-class couples such as Neil and Jeff. This is not to say that these relationships were experienced differently, but that they tended to be glossed over. For example, despite the near cancellation of her wedding, Jenna said that "it just ran really smoothly. You couldn't have asked it to go any better". Smart (2007a) argues that the darker side of relationships (except relationship breakdown) has been overlooked in research, but it may also be the case that relational conflict is more visible in the narratives of some couples than others. As has been demonstrated, the performance of these new social bonds depended upon a number of factors, but played a more central role than is given credit in Gillis' (1999) argument that the performance of personal identities has overtaken the formation of social bonds in wedding rituals.

The formation of social bonds extended to those between the families of the couples. Much importance was placed by some of these couples on this new relationality, especially those for whom this would represent one of the first meetings of the two families. Again challenging Gillis' (1999) argument, George, a caterer in his late forties, said that his wedding to Amelia also represented "a union of two families" rather than just being about them as a couple. Others had worried about how their parents would get on, such as Kayleigh who said that "our families are poles apart. My dad's a working class northern bloke and your stepfather is a businessman and well-to-do, so putting them in a room

together they are complete opposites". However, they "bonded over cricket" and "by the end of the night they were hugging each other." It was really important for Kayleigh and many other couples that bonds were strengthened not only between the partners but also between their family members and friends, but particularly parents if both sets were in attendance.

These familial performances were invested with particular emotion and stage management if there was a risk of relational conflict on the 'big day' itself. The younger couples with divorced parents were especially concerned about the display of relational unity and carefully managed not only who was attending the event, as discussed earlier in the chapter, but also how they would be performing during the ritual. Some couples managed the event so that the divorced parents would be spatially managed, so as to reduce the likelihood of conflict occurring. Emily, for example, managed her parents' performances in this way by having each set of parents host their own top table. The need for this was expressed when she talked about how insensitive Ed's father had been about this:

He kept going on as a joke about 'oh I'm not sure why your parents get two top tables. You obviously think you're more important'. And I just wanted to say 'okay- well you can have an affair and rip up your family if you want and then you can have two fucking top tables!'

Holly was also worried after her mother had to be persuaded to attend in the knowledge that Holly's father and new girlfriend would be there. However, Holly managed the wedding so that the family was reconstructed through having her parents but not her father's girlfriend in the photographs and also through her parents dancing together after the first dance. For this one day the family performed together as a unit, even though this did not reveal the more complex picture of these relationships. Similarly, Zoe had a difficult relationship with her sister which was exacerbated by her sister's unsupportive reaction to her

marriage to Lauren. She was determined, however, not to exclude her from the big day, particularly as both of their parents are deceased. After her attendance Zoe said "she's not the nicest of people so I got what I wanted important out of the way. If she wants to be a cow to me now then that's fine." The display of family ties and unity was important for the event itself and then normal relations could be resumed.

Individual performances and even individually experienced emotions were part of wider collective performances in which all ritual participants had roles to play in the appropriate display of relationality on the big day. The emotional importance of these roles became heightened in situations of more complex relationality and also when parents were deceased, which often led to them being symbolically incorporated into the rituals. The performances of others took on special significance for many of the same-sex couples, who looked to these performances to validate and live up to their expectations. In addition, the formation of new relationships, particularly between a couple's respective families, was significant and did not support the idea that wedding rituals are now all about the personal identities of the couple rather than the construction of wider social ties (Gillis, 1999).

Conclusion

The fateful moment (Giddens, 1992) that the big day represented for the couples had significance not only for their own relationship, but also their relationships with family and friends. Relational boundaries were drawn through processes of inclusion and exclusion and then made more or less visible by different couples depending on the specific relational context and wider factors such as gender and sexuality. However these past, present or future relationships were performed on the big day and (sometimes in subtle ways invisible to the majority of the guests), these relationships shaped the couples' imaginings and also

the ritual practices themselves. This was particularly the case for some of the same-sex couples, who experienced less family support in general than the heterosexual couples and adapted their big day to accommodate or protect these relationships. A vague notion of tradition was emotionally and relationally embedded in the imaginings of the majority of the couples, even those who rejected traditional practices and it was interesting to see how these relationships were then managed and performed in reference to a framework informed by these traditional imaginings. The similarities and differences in the narratives of the couples in the sample will be reflected upon along with those noted in the Decision to Marry and Wedding Work chapters when the three themes of imagining, managing and performing are drawn together in the following discussion chapter, and a typology of strategies is outlined to conceptualise some of these themes.

Chapter 6: Doing Coupledness: Reflexivity and Relationality

Introduction

The different aspects of the commitment rituals: The Decision to Marry, Wedding Work and The Big Day, have been explored through the three preceding chapters of analysis. The Decision to Marry chapter looked at the meanings of marriage and civil partnership for the couples and how they came to the decision to formalise their relationship in this way. The Wedding Work chapter then focused on the division of wedding work labour during the process of planning these rituals and the varied patterns noted in terms of the form that this division of labour took. Finally, The Big Day chapter considered the ways in which the rituals themselves were constructed and experienced by the couples and those around them. In this discussion chapter I will examine the significance of relationality and reflexivity in the thesis. The significance of webs of relationality to an understanding of how commitment rituals are imagined, managed and performed has been highlighted in each of the ritual aspects. This chapter will build upon this thread running throughout the analysis by drawing together, reflecting upon and discussing the three themes that have structured these chapters: imagining, managing and performing. In doing so the focus is on how relationality was imagined, managed and performed in contemporary wedding and civil partnership rituals, while the chapter also reflects upon the contribution of these themes to the understanding of the relational dimension of these rituals. The fateful moment (Giddens, 1992) that the wedding/civil partnership ritual represented for each couple had significance not only for their own relationship, but also their relationships with family members and friends.

This discussion chapter will also examine the significance of reflexivity

in how couples imagined, managed and performed their rituals. In doing so I will outline a typology that can be used to conceptualise personal life without rejecting insights from the reflexive modernisation thesis. By focusing on strategies I will also be able to expose differences within the sample, most notably according to sexuality, gender, age and class. This typology is based on strategies rather than couples because the same couple can employ different strategies at different times and in relation to different aspects of the ritual. Constructed in this way the typology is more flexible than others, such as Humble's et al.'s (2008) typology of couples, and aims to go some way in answering calls for new sociological language to capture the complexities of personal life (Plummer, 2003). Its aim is to challenge the idea that greater reflexivity involves the disembedding of individuals from their relational networks in building on ideas such as Smart's (2007a) connectedness thesis. The typology includes reflexive coupledness and relational reflexivity in which reflexivity can be seen as intersubjective. These relational strategies are considered alongside individual reflexivity and also unreflexive 'traditional' strategies, whereby meaning-constitutive traditions are enacted and often unreflexively adopted by couples and individuals. Tradition, as defined by Giddens (1994) and particularly by Thompson (1996), is still important in terms of providing a framework for making sense of commitment rituals and as a medium through which individual and collective identities can be displayed and legitimised.

Relationality in Contemporary Commitment Rituals

Relational Imaginings

The concept of imaginary, as used by Smart (2007a), is particularly useful to analyse the wedding and civil partnership rituals of the participants. A focus on the imaginary directs research attention to

implicit, particularly heterosexualised and gendered, assumptions and expectations in addition to what is explicitly articulated by participants. This is not a straightforward task, particularly as the interview method still relies on these imaginings being articulated in some form. But it allows for a more in-depth understanding of how these imagined decisions, roles and ritual events are reinforced, challenged and adapted through a comparison with how they are performed. It could also be argued that the imaginary is more difficult to research in a joint interview, as each individual is affected by the presence of their partner in their articulations. This idea is supported by my interview with Holly without her partner being present. Her imaginings were vivid and revealed particularly strong gendered expectations about wedding ritual practices as discussed in the analysis chapters. However, it was often the interaction between partners that resulted in the uncovering of implicit heterosexualised and gendered assumptions, especially if their imaginings differed or if performances had 'failed' in some way by not living up to these expectations. Thus the joint interviews enabled the place of the relational in these contemporary rituals to be explored.

A focus on how The Decision to Marry, Wedding Work and The Big Day were imagined by the couples enabled a greater understanding of the ways in which these imaginings were embedded in tradition and the imaginings of those around them. Imagining as a theme featured most strongly in the Decision to Marry and The Big Day chapters. In the Wedding Work chapter imaginings featured less in the narratives of the participants around this area. The reason for this was that financial circumstances were seen to constrain the possible imaginings of certain couples for whom the process of how they were going to fund the big day took precedence over imagining what it could involve. However, what the concept of the imaginary did was enable exploration of some of the underlying assumptions and expectations of the participants, especially in relation to the roles that different people would take on in this process.

In this study the use of the imaginary contributes to sociological debates around personal life in two ways. Firstly, it is in this theme that the reflexive modernisation thesis' application (especially the detraditionalisation thesis) to an understanding of contemporary wedding and civil partnership rituals faces certain challenges. This research highlights the unreflexive ways in which traditional practices were adopted by the couples in their commitment rituals. Tradition shaped the imaginings of all of the couples in some form and it was precisely in the realm of the imaginary that tradition thrived. The Big Day chapter, in particular, highlighted how difficult it is to imagine a wedding outside of tradition. Even those, mostly same-sex, couples who rejected many of the traditional symbols did so within the context of the 'heterosexual imaginary' (Ingraham, 2007), in which alternative imaginings are constrained. Tradition continues to play a role in framing the ways in which contemporary commitment rituals are imagined. It therefore lives on in a meaning-constitutive form (Gross, 2005) in these rituals.

This, however, was not consistent across the entire sample. In relation to the Decision to Marry chapter, for example, what was most striking was the significance of age in the imaginings of the same-sex couples. There was a clear generational divide between the younger same-sex couples (early twenties to mid-thirties) and the older same-sex couples (late thirties to early sixties). The younger couples had far more in common with the heterosexual couples in imagining their decision within a naturalised framework of heterosexualised language and expectations, whereas the older same-sex couples' imaginings were far more practical and political in nature. It may be that the significance of age has more to do with this particular cohort who have not experienced such equal rights of citizenship, which would be worth exploring further in future studies. From the outset of the analysis, therefore, distinctions based primarily on sexuality were untenable as the younger same-sex

couples often had more in common with the heterosexual couples. The idea of marriage as a meaning-constitutive tradition can apply to younger same-sex couples as well as heterosexual couples as they have experienced relatively equal rights of citizenship right from the beginning of their relationship, in comparison to the older same-sex couples. Similarly, the older same-sex couples were more likely to reject the traditional symbols embraced by the younger same-sex couples in relation to The Big Day. If same-sex couples are the vanguards of the pure relationship in which two equal partners are unconstrained by tradition, as Giddens (1992) suggests, then it would be expected that the younger same-sex couples would be equally as reflexive as, if not more so than, the older same-sex couples.

In all of the chapters, it was noted how difficult it was to unpack heterosexualised expectations in both the heterosexual and same-sex couples' narratives. However, exploration of the imaginings of the participants helps to make some of these unreflexive and embedded assumptions visible. An example of this is how, for most of the heterosexual and many of the younger same-sex couples, marriage was part of an assumed future. Imaginings centred on the wedding ritual itself rather than the institution of marriage or the heterosexualised nature of that institution. Tradition was particularly embedded in the imaginings of the working-class participants, with whom it was more difficult to facilitate discussion around the importance of tradition because there was less reflexivity regarding alternatives to traditional practice.

The significance of gender was discussed in all of the chapters, with female imaginings generally found to be more vivid. Female participants from the heterosexual couples more often than not took the lead in the interviews. Men, however, were also implicated in the construction of these gendered expectations, with most of the heterosexual males sharing the assumption that wedding work is

women's work, for example. Gendered imaginings were more common amongst the heterosexual couples, although gendered roles, for example, were often reinforced through the inclusion of female friends and family, particularly by the male same-sex couples, in the management of wedding work. The importance of the imaginings of others described here leads into the second contribution made by this theme.

The second contribution relates to the importance of relationality in an understanding of these imaginings. These were not entirely individualised imaginings as the perceived or articulated imaginings of family members and friends also featured in the narrated imaginings of the participants, as just described in relation to gendered imaginings. At times the imaginings of others reinforced the individual's or couple's imaginings because they were similar, but when these imaginings, or perceived imaginings, differed this often led participants to be more reflexive about their own expectations and assumptions. This relational nature of reflexivity will be taken up later in the chapter when the typology of strategies is outlined.

Imaginings were thus supra-individual as they were constructed in the context of social categories, such as sexuality, gender, class and age as mentioned in the previous section, and also related to specific relational contexts in which the participants were embedded, both in terms of their coupled relationship and relationships with family members and friends. The interaction between these factors is important to consider and something that Bottero (2010) highlights in posing the question of "how reflexive identifications and collective behaviour relate to more implicit, dispositional processes". These relationships provide the context for imaginings of these broader cultural discourses (such as the meaning-constitutive tradition of heteronormative marriage) and it could be argued that even individual imaginings are collectively accomplished.

It was often through the perceived imaginings of others that heteronormative cultural discourses seeped into the imaginings of the participants. It was also shown that factors such as sexuality are important to consider alongside relationality as they interact in these ritual practices. For example, the same-sex couples were especially concerned about the expectations of others regarding their big day and there were more likely to be differences between the actual or perceived imaginings of the couples and their family and friends. The concept of imagining is used in wedding research by Ingraham (2007), who discusses the heterosexual imaginary, but it is used to generalise about mostly women's imaginings as portrayed in a wedding industry saturated with films, TV programmes and magazines. A focus on relationally situated imaginings reveals more about how the participants engaged with white wedding discourse and constructed their own imaginings, informed as they were by these wider discourses.

Relational Management

Management, for the purposes of this research, refers to the space in between the imagined and performed rituals. It involves the coming together of the different imaginings of the ritual participants, which converge along with practical considerations, constraints and opportunities in the process of realising these imaginings. A focus on the management of the Decision to Marry, Wedding Work and The Big Day allowed for investigation of how the imaginings of the participants, as discussed above, were negotiated and handled by the couples and also their family members and friends.

This management by the couples was displayed during the case study interviews, in addition to being reflected upon by all of the participants. The joint interview approach was particularly useful in exploring how the participants 'did coupledness' through this process of management.

The investigation of the ways in which management featured in the three chapters of analysis also contributes to theoretical debates regarding the sociology of personal life, which will now be discussed.

While the theme of imaginary emphasised the continued importance of tradition in these rituals and the unreflexive ways in which tradition is adopted by many of the couples, the theme of management highlighted the unevenness of Giddens' (1991, 1992, 2002) vision of the post-traditional order, in which reflexive individuals are unconstrained by tradition. The interviews drew attention to the importance of (particularly) gender, sexuality, age and class in an analysis of ritual management. The management of the roles taken on by each partner in the couple will first be discussed before moving on to consider the ways in which family members and friends are involved in these ritual management processes.

The ways in which the couples managed their own relationship and the roles that each partner took on were a particular feature of both the Decision to Marry and the Wedding Work chapters. The Decision to Marry chapter described the two-tier proposal, in which couples jointly negotiated their decision before enacting it more formally in the form of a proposal, that was performed by predominately the heterosexual couples, and also some of the younger same-sex couples. The focus on management here adds to debates regarding the continued presence of these traditional performances by heterosexual couples in late modernity that appear in wedding literature. The first tier of the proposal was also highlighted, albeit in different terms, by Schweingruber et al. (2004) and challenges the idea that this is a male-dominated and instigated ritual. In fact most of the heterosexual female participants instigated the decision that the proposal formalised. However, this management was more noticeable amongst the heterosexual couples because they were constrained, as a few of the heterosexual female participants articulated, by the gendered scripts

guiding the performance of the decision to marry that both they and their partner were constrained by. Thus the first tier of the proposal was required by the female participants who did not feel able to, or did not desire to, enact the performance of the proposal. Sexuality interacted with gender here as the younger same-sex couples who did engage with the traditional proposal script were not constrained by gender in terms of who was able to perform the role of the proposer. These examples of the ways in which the decision to marry was managed by the couples in this study highlights both the involvement of both partners in this decision, and also how embedded this management process is in traditional imaginings of how this decision should be performed.

Gender and sexuality as important factors in the analysis also intersected in the Wedding Work chapter, in which management of the division of wedding work labour was divided largely along these lines. In the heterosexual couples women undertook the majority of this work, whereas the same-sex couples were generally more egalitarian in their management of wedding work roles. This chapter considered how coupledness was done differently by couples, informed by Humble et al.'s (2008) typology of traditional, egalitarian and transitional couples. However, analysis of the ways in which this work is performed as well as managed challenges the usefulness of such a typology as will be discussed in the next section.

Studying the management of the decision to marry, wedding work and the big day contributes particularly to the significance of friends and family members in these rituals, which has been largely overlooked in previous research. The Big Day chapter in particular considered the processes of inclusion and exclusion that are central to this fateful moment in which relational boundaries must be drawn. Relational negotiations, whether these were imagined or enacted, influenced who attended the day, the roles that were performed and also the form that

the wedding or civil partnership took. A focus only on ritual performances on the big day would obscure these management processes that the couples undertook. For example, a few of the older same-sex couples had a very small event attended only by close friends, with most of their family members unaware that this day had even taken place. However, far from representing dis-embedding from these familial relationships and their replacement by 'families of choice' (Weston, 1991) the reality was complex. Family members were often excluded in these cases as the ritual was perceived to be a potential threat to the future of these relationships, and exclusion seen as a way to preserve them. Often family members excluded themselves from the same-sex couples' big days, or had already excluded themselves from their lives before the decision to marry was made. It is therefore important to consider participants' situated relationality alongside differences in sexual orientation between the couples.

Relational Performances

The performance of The Decision to Marry, Wedding Work and The Big Day refers to the enactment of the ritual practices by the couples and their family and friends. The term performance captured the ongoing and dynamic nature of these practices. It has been argued by Finch (2007) that the term display may be more suitable than performance in conceptualising how family practices are enacted. She highlights, as this study has also shown, that the doing of family that Morgan (1996) emphasised in his concept of 'family practices' needs to be supplemented by an understanding of how families also need to be displayed. However, despite arguing that the concept of display is broader than that of performance, they are not mutually exclusive. In this study it was useful to think about moments of display within the performances. Management and performances by various ritual participants were required in the display of the rituals. Performances

also stretched beyond aspects that were displayed to others. An example of this is in relation to some of the heterosexual female participants who performed the majority of the wedding work, but were more likely to involve their male partner in the parts of the wedding work that were displayed to others. In this way both terms can be usefully applied in this area of research.

Finch (2007) notes how these family displays are relationally accomplished and rely on recognition from the audience. This was seen particularly in the public narratives of the proposals in which family and friends were implicated in the evaluation of these narrated performances. It was also shown how the performances of others could transform the meaning of the rituals for the couples. This was seen, for example, in relation to both positive and negative responses from family members and friends to some of the same-sex couples' decision to have a civil partnership. Finch (2007) talks about degrees of intensity in the need for display, with less conventional families at the higher end of this scale. These families have a higher need for their relationships to be recognised as legitimate. This was demonstrated in this study in terms of how the performances of family and friends took on special significance for same-sex couples, many of whom looked to these performances to validate and live up to their imagined ritual. These couples often managed the ways in which their relationship was displayed by incorporating traditional symbols that others would recognise. However, this thesis has also noted that on occasion there was a need for same-sex couples to hide their relationships from certain audiences, particularly family members, in order to preserve family ties. The ways in which the rituals were performed and displayed were thus complex and differentiated especially in relation to gender, sexuality, age and also class. As was argued in *The Big Day*, however, performances, for example of new roles as step-parents, varied widely and often depended on the specific relational context within which the couple were situated.

The Wedding Work chapter also demonstrated the importance of considering the couples' relational contexts, such as their access to relational resources and how some of the heterosexual women sought out alternative support systems online if support was not forthcoming from their friends and family. This was something that was not adequately addressed in Humble et al.'s (2008) wedding work typology. Humble et al.'s (2008) typology of couples showed a difference between the heterosexual and same-sex couples when applied in this study, with the same-sex couples more likely to be classed as 'egalitarian' where both partners took on equal amounts of wedding work. This supports Giddens' (1992) idea that same-sex couples are the vanguards of pure relationships and also previous research on same-sex couples (such as Dunne, 1999). However, a focus on the ways in which this wedding work was performed and relationally embedded adds complexity to this distinction. An exploration of specific strategies: individual, coupled and relational, enabled the couples to be categorised differently at different times and in relation to various aspects of the planning process. These strategies will be discussed in more detail later in this chapter.

Relational performances and contexts were highlighted throughout the chapters of analysis as integral to the execution of the wedding and civil partnership rituals. In The Big Day chapter, for example, relationality was found to be central to the production, reproduction and rejection of traditional symbols. Traditional symbols, such as the bride's father giving her away, as discussed in the Big Day chapter, provided scripts or frameworks for relational performances, as well as justifications for and obstacles to processes of inclusion and exclusion. The importance of tradition as highlighted in all of the chapters of analysis, as well as the different strategies that were noted in the Wedding Work chapter as an alternative to Humble et al.'s (2008) typology of couples, has been

developed into a typology of strategies that will be outlined in the second part of this current chapter.

Consideration of how the different ritual aspects were imagined as well as managed and performed is important to gain a more in-depth understanding of how tradition can frame the way in which the big day is imagined, even if traditional symbols are not performed on the day itself. This section has highlighted the contributions that this research study has made. These include adding complexity to debates regarding the universalising process of detraditionalisation and the extensiveness of reflexivity as discussed in the literature review, and also recognition of the importance of exploring and giving credence to the role of wider relationality in contemporary wedding and civil partnership rituals. The second part of this discussion chapter builds upon these findings in putting forward a typology of strategies which brings these contributions together.

Doing Coupledness: A Typology of Strategies

The following section will now outline a typology of strategies developed from the narratives of the couples in this study. This typology builds on ideas outlined in the literature review of individual reflexivity, the continued relevance of tradition in contemporary society and the importance of wider relationships in imagining, managing and performing coupledness. It introduces two concepts (reflexive coupledness and relational reflexivity) to add depth to our understandings of reflexivity in relation to personal life. A typology of strategies is proposed rather than a typology of couples in order to more adequately represent the experiences of the participants in this study. These strategies aim to extend the concept of reflexivity in considering how it can be relational as well as individual in nature. Attention is paid to the ways in which reflexive possibilities can be

structured by gender, sexuality, class and generation. This will enable a more in-depth understanding of how couples construct wedding and civil partnership rituals, surrounded as they are by gendered and heteronormative traditions, in reflexive and unreflexive ways, and while situated in webs of relationships. This typology has also been developed for exploration and application in future research and theorising in aiming to address calls for new sociological language to capture the complexities of personal life (Plummer, 2003).

Morgan's (1996) term 'family practices' has been widely utilised in research and theorising in the field of personal life. It is used to refer to the ways in which families are actively produced through the 'doing' of family in everyday life. Morgan (1996) notes, however, that the term is not usually employed for one-off events. Therefore the term 'strategy' is used in this study to refer to how the couples approached and navigated their commitment ceremonies as opposed to everyday life. It should be noted, however, that the everyday interacted with the ritual through the imagining, managing and performing of past, present and future relationships. Future research could further investigate how ritualised family and friend relationships relate to the everyday to better understand these interactions.

While Morgan (1996:35) recognises that the term strategy invokes "the possibilities of new patterns developing which may provide opportunities as well as constraints", others disagree. Crow (1989) argues that there are strong arguments against studying strategies by theorists such as Foucault (1980), as the term strategy implies choice and neglects constraint. However, Crow (1989) does acknowledge that in some instances choice is less evident, especially in relation to the power of tradition, and strategies may not necessarily be purely the enactment of rational calculation. In an interview with Lamaison (1986), Bourdieu argues that strategy is not synonymous with choice and it is in this sense that the term is used in this analysis. For Bourdieu

(Lamaison, 1986) strategies of practical sense can be more or less automatic and thus do not have to be the product of genuine intention (Bourdieu, 1977). In this way strategy can encompass both reflexive and unreflexive action and be used as a way to capture the dynamic nature of the couples' experiences. The typology of strategies will now be outlined along with their contribution to the analysis, their relationship to each other and reflections on the pattern of use by the couples in this study regarding each strategy. The different strategies are not completely distinct and by focusing on strategies rather than types of couple they can be seen to be drawn upon by the same couple at different times. It was, however, more common for certain couples to draw upon certain strategies as will be discussed.

Individual Reflexive Strategies

Much has been written about the importance of individual reflexivity in late modernity as discussed in the literature review. While this thesis has contributed more to the place of relationality in contemporary wedding and civil partnership rituals, at times individual strategies were evidenced in the couples' narratives. As demonstrated in relation to the ritual itself, individual reflexive strategies were noted particularly in cases where there was a divergence in the imaginings of the two partners regarding what the big day should involve and who should attend. The partners pursued their own interests through negotiation and thus demonstrated characteristics of Giddens' (1992) pure relationship. However, although at times these negotiations were fairly democratic, at other times there was real conflict between the individuals which was sometimes played out in during the interviews as illustrated in the case of Patrick and Amanda mentioned in the Wedding Work chapter.

These individual reflexive strategies were most evident in relation to wedding work, particularly amongst the heterosexual couples. Many of these couples performed and narrated the wedding work as two distinct and separate individuals, with wedding work divided particularly along gendered lines. This gendered wedding work was often reflexively managed, with male partners sometimes being excluded from participating in wedding work. There were implicit and explicit power relations relating particularly to gendered assumptions around who should be involved in the wedding work, as discussed in chapter 4. These power relations are not adequately theorised in the notion of a pure relationship consisting of two reflexive and equal individuals. This is partly due to the relationships being embedded in traditional frameworks, as will be discussed later. Interestingly, the heterosexual couples generally enacted feminised wedding work, but were often reflexive and humorous about living up to this stereotype. This reflexivity, however, did not generally extend to heterosexuality, class or whiteness. As has been mentioned, the sample was exclusively white and future research could explore the issues raised in this thesis amongst other racial or ethnic groups. Individual reflexivity around gendered roles did not automatically lead to egalitarian practices, as Giddens (1992) suggests in conflating the two ideas, but rather the awareness of persistent inequalities (McNay, 1999).

While Gillis (1999:52) argues that “today’s marriage rituals are less about creating social relations than about constructing personal identities” this was not found to be the case for most of the couples. Those who did employ individual reflexive strategies to construct something that reflected their individual identities tended to be those with the financial and relational resources to do so, which reflects Heaphy’s (2008) challenge to the democratic view of reflexivity proposed in the reflexive modernisation thesis. Also, it is important to recognise how relational expectations intertwined with those of the couple and how relationally embedded such events continue to be for

both heterosexual and same-sex couples, as also shown in Smart and Shipman's (2004) study of non-legal same-sex ceremonies. For many of the couples this concept of individual reflexivity was not an adequate description of their approach to these rituals and therefore the strategies of reflexive coupledness and relational reflexivity are included in this typology. The concept of reflexivity is thus extended to better represent the experiences of the couples in this study.

Relational Reflexive Strategies: Reflexive Coupledness and Relational Reflexivity

This study highlights not only how relationality impacts on couples' decision-making and reflexivity around commitment rituals, but also how reflexivity is embedded within relationality. Reflexivity can be relational. It could be argued that relational reflexivity is already encompassed within the concept of individual reflexivity in terms of people reflecting on their own positions in relation to those of others. However, the embedded and connected nature of the couples in relational networks is not adequately explained by the notion of individual reflexivity. Arguments about connectedness and embeddedness are usually utilised to argue against the idea of an all-pervasive reflexivity, and arguments of reflexivity emphasising the disembedding of individuals from their relational contexts. However, I am using relational reflexivity to highlight how reflexivity is infiltrating wider relationships and also how reflexivity is relationally embedded. There is some similarity here with the way in which Lash (1993) uses the concept of aesthetic reflexivity to convey that reflexivity is situated not within the self, but in shared background practices. He thus uncouples reflexivity from individualisation in a way that is more compatible with Bottero (2010) and Smart's (2007a) ideas of the intersubjective, or relational, nature of practice.

Reflexivity is theorised here as inherently emotional as well as cognitive. People can be emotionally reflexive in that emotions are the subject of reflexivity and that emotions can lead to reflexivity. As well as these ways in which emotion can be envisaged as part of a reflexive process, reflexivity is thought of as "more than reflection and to include bodies, practices and emotions" (Holmes, 2010:140). Emotion is also relationally embedded as narratives of emotion are "scripted in a relational context and the emotion expresses a normative stance which is often shared by other members of the family" (Smart, 2007a:84).

Reflexive coupledness

Many of the couples, particularly the same-sex couples, sometimes engaged in what would be more accurately described as reflexive coupledness² than individual reflexivity. This is a different level of reflexivity in which the couple become a reflexive unit, rather than the coming together of two reflexive individuals as described by Giddens (1992) in his concept of pure relationship. One difference noted was use of language in the interviews with 'we' being utilised much more frequently than 'I' and narratives focusing on joint coupled identities rather than individual identities. Interviews with particularly the older same-sex couples consisted of a joint narrative rather than individual ones generally found amongst the other couples. However, this may have something to do with the fact that these couples tended to be in long-term relationships and perhaps the doing of coupledness can be characterised differently at different stages of relationships. In contrast to strategies of individual reflexivity, reflexive coupledness did involve more egalitarian strategies of decision-making and division of wedding

² Credit and thanks are due to Paul Sweetman for his suggestion of the term

work. For many of these couples reflexivity was habitual in the way in which Sweetman (2003) describes in this concept of 'reflexive habitus'.

Sometimes couples switched between individual reflexivity and reflexive coupledness in relation to different aspects of the ritual. One example of this was Jennifer, who was very reflexive about her own role as a bride and how she had developed as an individual through the planning of the wedding. But her and Andy also approached the wedding work as a couple and talked about the ritual reflecting their identity as a couple.

Amongst those practising reflexive coupledness there was less need for the management of their roles and responsibilities because of the ways in which the imaginings of the two partners tended to converge. However, this was not always the case in relation to the roles of family members and friends and sometimes reflexive coupledness was utilised as a strategy for dealing with relational conflict or exclusion. For example, some of the difficulties that Zoe and Lauren had with family acceptance of both their wedding and the design of the big day have been documented. Zoe reflected that with:

Family issues you need your other half if they are making life difficult, and I think we've both shown that we can do that and it brings us together the more they fight against us. A united front does win out. I think that's them getting used to the idea, especially the fact that we do come as a pair now.

A reflexive and strategic response to this conflict was to perform as a couple in communications with their families. Reflexive coupledness was often used as a strategy in which the couple presented themselves as a unit in dealing with situations of relational conflict. This is one way in which strategies can be seen to develop in response to the strategies of others.

Relational reflexivity

The term 'relational reflexivity' has been used to refer to the importance of being reflexive with regards to research relationships with participants and how these relationships are an ongoing construction (Hosking and Pluut, 2010). Littler (2005) also argues for an emphasis on the relationality of reflexivity, but again refers more to relationships between researchers and participants. Here, however, it is used to describe how relationality was implicated in the reflexive strategies of many of the couples in this study.

There is a growing focus, such as in Smart's (2007a) work, to look beyond the couple to explore other relationships such as those between friends. This strategy of relational reflexivity is about how even couple relationships, described here in terms of ritualised coupledness, may not be as 'pure' as depicted and rely on wider processes of relationality. Many of the couples spoke of their ritual as not only signifying the formalisation of them as a couple, but also the formalisation of them along with their family and friends as a collective relational unit. These collective accomplishments are emphasised by Bottero (2010) in her call for Bourdieusian dispositional accounts to take more account of reflexive action through an analysis of the intersubjective nature of practices.

Some of the couples in the sample involved family and friends more fully than others in the planning and performance of their wedding or civil partnership, with friends playing more of a role in the rituals of the same-sex couples. However, all of the couples made their decisions in a relational context. Even those few older same-sex couples that excluded most family and friends from the ritual framed their decision in reference to these relationships. Thus the importance of exploring how and why rituals are performed in the ways that they are is clear, as opposed to an exclusive focus on what is presented during the ritual

itself, which would not capture the importance of the relational in the same way. A focus on the ritualised outcome of the wedding or civil partnership itself would mask the complex and various ways in which couples, embedded in webs of connectedness, reproduce, re-invent and challenge traditional gendered and heterosexualised scripts.

These rituals put relationships into sharp focus as they demand processes of inclusion and exclusion in the reconstruction of relational boundaries. These processes can be reflexively managed, but are also deeply embedded (in some cases) in abstract notions of tradition (as will be discussed in the final section of this chapter) and a sense of obligation and respect towards these family members and friends. Relational reflexivity came particularly to the fore in cases of absent or more complex relationality that needed to be negotiated and managed before the ritual performance.

Strategies of Tradition

The concept of detraditionalisation does not capture the complexity of contemporary relationships in commitment rituals. Giddens (1991, 1992, 1994) allows for the possibility of the reflexive use of traditional symbols, but cannot account for the ways in which they are relationally embedded for many of these participants. Many same-sex couples, and particularly the younger ones, are not the vanguards of the post-traditional order as Giddens (1992) suggests, but are embedded in heteronormative cultural scripts.

Most of the couples did not view or interact with tradition in the sense of the term as described by Giddens (1994), as representing formulaic truth. Many couples talked about picking and mixing different traditions. However, tradition was not just a choice among choices as Bauman (1996) argues it has become. The white wedding discourse

(Ingraham, 1999) provided a framework, outside of which it was difficult to imagine what a wedding would look like for both the heterosexual and same-sex couples as discussed in The Big Day chapter. Gross' (2005) concept of meaning-constitutive tradition is relevant as traditional symbols dominated many of the participants' imaginings, as described in all three chapters of analysis.

Using the concept of imaginary to explore these rituals enabled an understanding of how gendered roles or traditional symbols, for example, can be unreflexively adopted. An understanding of tradition in its meaning-constitutive form offers an understanding of both continuity and change (Smart, 2007a). This can be seen in the way in which tradition is bound up in what is perceived to be the 'proper' way to marry by many of the participants. Thus traditional symbols were sometimes 'chosen', but this choice needs to be contextualised in relation to the power of traditional symbols to legitimise these ritualised choices to others. Conceiving of tradition as a choice among a variety of options, as Giddens (1991) suggests, does not adequately justify either the volume of references to tradition within the couples' narratives, nor the emotional investment in these traditional imaginings.

Tradition is described as a strategy by Laimaison (1986), in the Bourdieusian sense, where people employ more or less automatic strategies of practical sense rather than calculated consciousness. The term strategy retains a sense of active participation in the enactment of tradition, which better describes the experiences of many of the couples who chose traditional symbols. It was only after the event that some of these couples reflect on how "invisibly important" (Daniel) these choices were and how embedded they had been in their imaginings. Unreflexive strategies are therefore difficult to research and account for, but played a vital role in the construction of wedding and civil partnership rituals. Smart's (2007a) theme of the imaginary was particularly useful in this endeavour, as was Hockey et al.'s (2007) approach to the study of

heterosexualities in which the perceived failings of heterosexual identities by their participants were a way into an exploration of heteronormative ideologies. Similarly, many of the participants in this study talked about the failure of parts of the ritual to live up to their expectations. An example of this was in relation to the proposal performances which were evaluated especially by the heterosexual women as sometimes falling short of the traditional script. This emphasised the importance of tradition for these participants. Again this highlights the role of tradition in the construction of collective identities as Thompson (1996) suggests, not just for the individual performing the traditional practice, but also others that the ritual involves.

Strategies of tradition often interlinked with relational reflexivity. As discussed throughout the analysis, traditional symbols provided templates for relational performances as well as justifications for, or obstacles to, processes of inclusion and exclusion. Sometimes specific relational contexts meant that these traditional scripts could not be enacted in a straightforward manner and the couples thus had to be more reflexive about these traditional practices. On occasion the imaginings of others challenged the unreflexive traditional imaginings of the participants, leading them to reflect more on their own expectations in taking account of this relational challenge. Others had to construct strategies to deal with the importance of tradition to friends and family members and their difficulties in thinking outside of this framework. In these situations traditional symbols were often reflexively adopted by the couple as a strategy to recognise the unreflexive way in which tradition was embedded in the imaginings of others. Strategies of tradition thus entwined with more reflexive strategies in the collective accomplishment of the couples' commitment rituals.

Conclusion

This typology of strategies has demonstrated that in the process of imagining, managing and performing their rituals, couples do not only 'do coupledness', but they also 'do relationality' more broadly. Individuals can be reflexively embedded in relationships and being embedded does not necessarily mean that a more traditional ritual or relationship will result. These rituals were fateful moments in which tradition and relationality were particularly significant. Therefore, these concepts should be central to further exploration of these rituals. It may also be that the challenge levied at the reflexive modernisation thesis about the assumed relationship between individualisation and reflexivity and the idea that wedding and civil partnership rituals are increasingly dis-embedded from webs of relationality, may be relevant to other areas of personal life.

Various writers (Bottero, 2010; Shipman & Smart, 2007; Smart, 2007a; Smart & Shipman, 2004) have gone some way in recognising the importance of relationality to a critique of notions of detraditionalisation. Smart (2007a:28) argues that "personal life is a reflexive state, but it is not private and it is lived out in relation to one's class position, ethnicity, gender and so on". This research has built upon and developed these ideas by exploring contemporary wedding and civil partnership rituals and has demonstrated the centrality of wider webs of relationships to an understanding of the ways in which these rituals are imagined, managed and performed. It has also considered how this relational embeddedness is related to traditional heteronormative cultural discourses surrounding these rituals as well as social factors of gender, sexuality, age and class which interact with relationality in the collective accomplishment of wedding and civil partnership practices.

Conclusion

Introduction

This thesis has studied the ways in which relationality was imagined, managed and performed by the fifteen heterosexual and thirteen same-sex couples in the sample. These themes structured the analysis chapters in which the three aspects of the rituals were explored: The Decision to Marry, Wedding Work and The Big Day. These three themes were drawn together in the Discussion chapter to discuss the findings and contribution of each theme to the overall analysis. The focus was on the place of the relational in the narratives and also noting how the experiences of the couples were shaped by the factors of sexuality, gender, age and class. From these findings a typology of strategies was developed and outlined in the Discussion chapter in order to map some of these patterns in the couples' experiences. It was also used to draw attention to findings about the place of tradition and relationality that are not adequately addressed in existing sociological theory. In drawing this thesis to a conclusion, the contributions of this research will be outlined in the following section before its limitations and ensuing suggestions for future research are discussed.

The Contributions of this Research Study

This thesis has contributed to the field of personal life both substantively and theoretically. In addition, there are also UK policy implications that arise from the research. In terms of the substantive contribution, civil partnerships are a relatively new area of research and even heterosexual weddings lack empirical research as discussed in the literature review. This is the first piece of research of which the author is aware to look at wedding and civil partnership rituals together. The

relevance of research findings and theoretical ideas developed in relation to heterosexual couples could therefore be explored in relation to same-sex couples, such as in the case of Humble et al.'s (2008) typology, which was investigated in the Wedding Work chapter. In addition, having heterosexual couples in the sample allowed for a more empirically based comparison to be made on the basis of sexuality rather than contrasting same-sex experiences with an assumed heterosexual model of relationality and marriage. Diversity in the sample in terms of age, class, gender and relational context permitted an exploration of these factors and their links to sexuality, such as the importance of age in an understanding of the experiences of the same-sex couples. It also enabled examination of how these factors cut across and affected the experiences of all of the couples in the sample so that similarities as well as differences between the heterosexual and same-sex couples could be explored and considered.

This thesis has also contributed theoretically to our understanding of personal life as outlined in the Discussion chapter. In critiquing theories of reflexive modernity that gloss over the uneven pattern of transformations of intimacy, this thesis has explored these patterns in relation to the imagining, managing and performing of commitment rituals. The reflexive modernisation thesis, proposed particularly by Giddens and Beck, critiques of detraditionalisation and individualisation, such as Gross' (2005) concept of meaning-constitutive tradition, and Smart's (2007a) connectedness thesis, have been drawn upon to develop a typology of strategies. This typology challenges the extent to which detraditionalisation has occurred in contemporary commitment rituals by recognising the way in which tradition continues to shape the imaginings of most of the heterosexual and same-sex couples. It also contributes to the development of new concepts in the study of personal life that sociologists such as Plummer (2003) have called for through extension of the conceptualisation of reflexivity. Sweetman's (unpublished) concept of 'reflexive coupledness' has been developed in

this research to describe a different level of reflexivity in which the couple become a reflexive unit, rather than the coming together of two reflexive individuals as described by Giddens (1992) in his concept 'pure relationship'. In addition, the term 'relational reflexivity' has been used to describe how relationality was implicated in the reflexive strategies of many of the couples in this study and to demonstrate the importance of considering the significance of these wider relationships in this area of research.

This research study did not set out to evaluate the introduction of the Civil Partnership Act 2004. However, some of the findings have policy implications, particularly in this context of forthcoming legislative change. The interviews were conducted before the coalition government decided to introduce legislation to allow religious premises to hold civil partnerships on an opt-in basis (Government Equalities Office, 2011), which will come into effect on 5 December 2011, exactly six years after the implementation of the Civil Partnership Act 2004. However, it is being challenged in the House of Lords on 15 December 2011 (Butt, 2011). A few of the same-sex couples did talk about how they felt excluded by the fact that they could not hold their ceremony in a religious place, as mentioned in The Big Day chapter. If this legislation had been in place then the nature of their 'big days' could have been different and more aligned with their imagined rituals.

It was clear from this study that the Civil Partnership Act 2004 had made a real difference to the lives of the same-sex couples. It had practical and legal benefits that appealed particularly to the older couples who had experienced exclusion and financial inequality. It also gave these couples a way of celebrating their relationship along with family and friends, of a similar order to that already enjoyed by heterosexual couples. However, as noted in The Decision to Marry chapter, many couples recognised this legislation as a political compromise and some saw it as discriminatory because civil partnership is not seen to have the

same status as marriage. Many of the couples, particularly the younger ones, noted a disjuncture between their imaginings, which were based on a model of heterosexual marriage, and the reality available to them in the form of a civil partnership but not a marriage. This was managed through the use of the heterosexualised language of 'marriage' and 'wedding' that even most of the older couples slipped into during the interviews, even though they said they referred to their rituals as civil partnerships. Equal civil marriage was announced to be in the legislative planning stages by Lynne Featherstone (2011), a Home Office Minister, at the Liberal Democrat Party Conference in September 2011. This plan to introduce equal civil marriage by 2015 would be welcomed by the majority of the same-sex couples in this study based on their language use and desire for marriage over the perceived compromise of civil partnership. However, it would need to be clear what this will mean for those couples in existing civil partnerships, especially as some of the older couples in this study were more ambivalent about the idea of marriage. But some of this ambivalence was related to this exclusion from the institution of marriage. For example, Neil said:

That is the one thing that I insisted: it was not a wedding. I said to all my friends don't call it the wedding: it's not a wedding. And that might be something to do with the fact that you are told on TV, do you know what I mean- it's not a wedding. They brought out this civil partnership for same-sex couples but it's not a wedding, and I think I want to gear up to that as well.

It was within the context of exclusion that Neil rejected the heterosexualised language of 'wedding'. He did not want to pretend that his civil partnership was anything other than just that, because he felt excluded from using this language of 'wedding' by governmental discourse and media portrayal. A change in the political context may alter perceptions and give legitimacy to the use of such terminology.

This thesis has made important contributions to the field of personal life and the study of commitment rituals. Legislative changes have provided

the opportunity to study the legal formalisation of same-sex relationships. This will continue with the introduction of religious partnerships and perhaps also equal civil marriage. It is hoped that the theoretical contributions will be taken up in future research to study the potential for use of the typology in exploring, for example, everyday personal life and the relationship between everyday and ritualised relationships.

The Limitations of this Research Study and Suggestions for Future Research

Having outlined the contribution to research made by this thesis, its limitations will now be discussed and then ideas for future research that can address some of these limitations as well as policy developments will be examined. One of the limitations of this research, given its focus on relationality, is a methodological one. None of the family or friends of the couples were interviewed, which would have allowed for a different perspective on their involvement and their own imaginings of the ritual. The importance of relationality only emerged through the process of fieldwork. The initial focus on engagements with traditional symbols revealed the centrality of relationality in these processes. It became apparent that it was these imagined and experienced relationships that gave these symbols meaning, through the doing of coupledness and relationality, and that this was more significant than the symbols themselves. Future research in this area could explore these relationships further by interviewing family and friends and observing interactions during the process of wedding work and the ritual itself. However, in situations of more complex relationality, examples of which have been documented, this research would need to be sensitive so as not to exacerbate any conflict.

A further possible limitation of this research is that the partners were not interviewed separately so as to explore their personal imaginings in more depth. This is something that has been done by the largest study of civil partnerships so far entitled ‘“Just Like Marriage?” Young Couples’ Civil Partnerships’, which focuses on experiences of married life (Smart, Heaphy and Einarsdottir, 2011). The methodology combines couple interviews, as undertaken in this study, with individual interviews with each partner so as to explore both individual and coupled narratives and anything that each partner is not comfortable talking about in front of the other. This was not practical in terms of the timescale and resources available in this particular study, but is something that could be explored in future research, perhaps as part of a case study approach along with interviewing family members and friends. The joint interview approach of this thesis is not regarded here as a limitation as such, but rather it is suggested that individual interviews may also be useful in future research. The data from the joint interviews was very rich, and, as argued in the Discussion chapter, allowed relationality to be explored.

Another potential limitation of this research study in terms of its contribution to the study of relationships, is the exclusive focus on couples who were legally formalising their relationships. It could be argued that these couples are more likely to have attachments to tradition compared to those in cohabiting and non-cohabiting couple relationships, and those in polyamorous or other alternative relationships. However, it was this process of formalisation that was the focus of this research and therefore appropriate in this case. It is important, however, that this limitation be taken into account if the typology outlined in the Discussion chapter is utilised in future work as it was developed in relation to a particular type of relationship. It has also been developed from a study of ritualised coupledness and therefore may have limited application to married life and the everyday ways in which participants do coupledness. Some data was collected about life

after the ritual, but there was not space to discuss issues such as married status performances through name change and the imagined versus experienced nature of married life. Future research on wedding work could consider the relationship between the division of wedding work labour and the division of labour in everyday life, for example.

The sample itself was diverse in terms of age and included both middle and working class couples on the basis of occupation. The sample was not diverse, however, in relation to ethnicity as all of the participants were white, and the relevance of the findings may therefore be limited in this respect. This is especially relevant in this study because it has been argued that the individualisation thesis faces certain challenges in relation to the experiences of some ethnic-minority groups. For example, Smart and Shipman's (2004) study of transnational Indian, Pakistani and Irish families living in Britain demonstrated that relationality has particular significance for specific ethnic minority groups. In addition, Leeds-Hurwitz (2002) argues that intercultural weddings necessarily involve increased reflexivity because of the coming together of different imagined rituals that have to be negotiated. This is a fruitful area for future research and while issues of race and ethnicity have not been addressed in this study, the typology of strategies presented could be used as a starting point for further exploration and developed accordingly.

In relation to the potential policy contributions discussed above, there are important limitations to note. In relation to the introduction of equal civil marriage, only the views of couples who chose to have a civil partnership were included here. Same-sex couples or individuals who, for whatever reason, would not want to formalise their relationship in this way may have different views about the introduction of equal civil marriage. One couple who had rejected the idea of marriage was interviewed as part of this study, but this was a heterosexual couple wanting to have a civil partnership. However, their narrative has not

been included in the chapters of analysis because the focus was on the imagining, managing and performance of the ritual itself and their ritual cannot be legally enacted at this time. There is certainly scope for research to be carried out that follows from this interview, which was undertaken to consider alternative ways of formalising heterosexual relationships. This could perhaps involve international comparison with places such as New Zealand, where civil unions are available to both same-sex and heterosexual couples.

This is a time of legislative change regarding same-sex relationships and thus an opportune and exciting time to conduct research in this area. Plans to introduce equal civil marriage by 2015 were announced by the Equalities Minister, Lynne Featherstone, at the Liberal Democrat conference 2011 (Featherstone, 2011). This proposed legislation is more in line with the imaginings and language used by of the same-sex couples, especially the younger ones, in this study and it therefore provides future research opportunities. There is real potential for a longitudinal study that follows same-sex couples over the next five to ten years to map the impact of these legislative changes and which could, for example, feed into other research projects about adoption by same-sex couples and relationship breakdown. It could explore decisions around whether to wait until the new legislation comes into being (assuming that it will) to formalise their relationship, how those already in civil partnerships deal with the implications for their own relationships, and whether and how wider relationships with family and friends change with this new status.

Another interesting approach would be to study heterosexual couples marrying after the implementation of equal marriage legislation, to explore whether this has any impact on the heteronormative imaginings that were found to be prevalent in this research. The heterosexual couples in this study did not situate their experiences in relation to those of same-sex couples in the same way that the same-sex couples

did in respect of heterosexual couples, but this could change with the introduction of equal marriage. Taken as a whole, the limitations of this thesis in part reflect the lack of research in this particular area of personal life, which also means that there are considerable opportunities for future studies, especially given the shifting legislative terrain.

Conclusion

This thesis has found that the significance of wedding and civil partnership rituals as 'fateful moments' (Giddens, 1992) meant that tradition and relationality were particularly important in how these rituals were imagined, managed and performed by the couples. In this way the doing of relationality is important to consider as it is implicated in the ways in which coupledness is enacted and experienced during these rituals. Individuals can be reflexively embedded in relationships and being embedded does not necessarily mean that a more traditional ritual or relationship will result. Thus it was important to study the decision-making and meanings behind the ritual veneer that is displayed on The Big Day. Future research could take up these ideas by extending the focus on rituals to consider how the typology of strategies could be developed to consider everyday relationships. It could also be extended to address some of the limitations of this study by including participants from particular minority ethnic groups and the experiences of those who choose not to formalise their relationships in this way.

Appendices

Appendix 1: Retrospective interview checklist

Name:

Occupation:

Age:

Ethnicity:

Name:

Occupation:

Age:

Ethnicity:

Date of marriage/civil partnership:

Total length of relationship:

Background, relationship and the decision

- Can you tell me about how you got together?
- When did you decide to get married/have a civil partnership?
(Proposal? Ring (s)?)
- Why was it important for you to get married/have a civil partnership?
- Why at that particular time?

Planning

- Planning process- Can you tell me a bit about how you went about planning your wedding/civil partnership? (When started planning? Happy with the options available?)
- Planning- How did you overcome any differences that you had while you were planning your wedding/civil partnership (if there were any of course)?
- Media- Were your plans influenced by any wedding magazines, wedding/civil partnership fayres, films, tv programmes, books or other weddings/civil partnerships? (In what way?)
- Media- Did you feel any pressure to change your image or behaviour in the run up to the wedding/civil partnership? (In what way?)
- Others- How involved were your family and friends in the planning of your wedding/civil partnership? (Roles on the day? Pressure to do things a certain way?)
- Stag/hen/hag parties- Did you have a stag/hen/hag parties? Can you tell me a bit about them? (Where? Who organised? Who attended?)

The day itself- while looking at photos/video and other keepsakes (guestbook, invitations)

- Terminology- How do you refer to your ceremony (wedding, civil partnership or something else)? And the roles that you each had

(bride, groom, something else)? Do you think that these terms are a good description of the ceremony and the roles that you each took on? How do you refer to each other now (husband, wife or something else)?

- How would you describe your wedding day?
- Clothing- Describe the clothing that you both wore. (How did you decide what to wear? Where did you get them from?)
- Photography- Who took the photos? Which is your favourite photo? Why?
- Ceremony- Talk me through the ceremony (venue, rings, flowers, readings, vows, songs/hymns). (Did one or both of you walk down an aisle? Who with?)
- Reception- Talk me through what happened after the ceremony (venue, food, cake, decorations, favours, speeches and entertainment)
- The day itself- Talk me through how you were feeling on the day. (Were you emotional? What was the best bit of the day? The worst?)
- Gifts- Did you receive any gifts? (What were they? Did you have a gift list?)

Tradition

- Tradition- Can you tell me about the role that tradition played in your wedding/civil partnership (if it played one at all)? (Would you describe your wedding as traditional? Why, or why not?)
- Individuality- Can you tell me about anything different or unique that you planned for your wedding/civil partnership? (Was this an important aspect of your wedding/civil partnership? Why?)

Life before and since

- Honeymoon- Did you have a honeymoon? Tell me about it
- Name changes- Have either or both of you changed your name? (Was this an easy decision to make?)
- Life before- How would you describe your relationship before the wedding/civil partnership? (Did you each have your own roles? How did you divide up the domestic chores?)
- Life since- Has your relationship changed since the wedding/civil partnership? If so- In what way?
- Reflecting back on the day would you change anything? (Was it what you planned/imagined from the start?)
- Is there anything else that you would like to add before we finish

Appendix 2: Case study interview checklist

Name:
Occupation:

Age:
Ethnicity:

Name:
Occupation:

Age:
Ethnicity:

Length of relationship:
date:

Wedding/cp

Background, relationship and the decision

- Can you tell me about how you got together?
- When did you decide to get married/have a civil partnership? (Proposal? Ring (s)?)
- Why was it important for you to get married/have a civil partnership?
- Why at that particular time?

Planning

- Planning process- Can you tell me a bit about how you are going about planning your wedding/civil partnership? (When started planning? Happy with the options available?)
- Planning- Have you had any differences of opinion or arguments whilst planning your wedding/civil partnership? (Can you tell me a bit more about these differences and how, and if, you have overcome them?)
- Media- Have your plans been influenced by any wedding magazines, wedding/civil partnership fairs, films, tv programmes, books or other weddings/civil partnerships? (In what way?)
- Media- Have you felt any pressure to change your image or behaviour in the run up to the wedding/civil partnership? (In what way?)
- Others- How involved are your family and friends in the planning of your wedding/civil partnership? (Roles on the day? Pressure to do things a certain way?)
- Stag/hen/hag parties- Are you planning to have stag/hen/hag parties? Can you tell me a bit about what is being planned? (Where? Who organising? Who attending?)

The day itself

- Talk me through how you imagine, or have planned, the wedding/civil partnership day itself.
- Which part are you looking forward to most?

- Are there any parts that you are not looking forward to?

Tradition

- Tradition- Can you tell me about how important tradition is in your wedding/civil partnership planning (if it is playing one at all)? (Would you describe your wedding as traditional? Why, or why not?)
- Individuality- Can you tell me about anything different or unique that you are planning for your wedding/civil partnership? (Was this an important aspect of your wedding/civil partnership? Why?)

Life before and since

- Honeymoon- Are you planning a honeymoon? Tell me about it
- Name changes- Are one or both of you planning to change your name? (Was this an easy decision to make?)
- Life now- How would you describe your relationship now? (Do you each have your own roles? How do you divide up the domestic chores?)
- Life after- Do you think that your relationship will change after the wedding/civil partnership? If so- In what way?
- Is there anything else that you would like to add before we finish?

Appendix 3: Research information and interview consent form

Katie Bruce
Postgraduate Research Student
Division of Sociology and Social Policy
School of Social Sciences
University of Southampton
University Road
Highfield
SO17 1BJ
Tel: 07541 954424
Email: kreb103@soton.ac.uk

Research project title: Something Old, Something New, Something Borrowed and Something Blue: A Comparative Study of Weddings and Civil Partnerships.

The purpose of the research is to develop new insights into the impact of tradition, gender and sexuality on the planning and performing of a wedding/civil partnership. This will enable both a greater understanding of the function and role of weddings in a time of social change, and how civil partnerships are constructed by couples. The research will focus on the similarities and differences between weddings and civil partnerships, and how same-sex couples negotiate and adapt a ritual that traditionally has so many gendered norms. Interviews are being carried out with couples who have had a wedding or civil partnership within the last 3 years. In addition, couples who are currently planning a wedding or civil partnership will be followed through the process. All interviews will be completely confidential and anonymous.

I, _____, agree to participate in the research, Something Old, Something New, Something Borrowed and Something Blue: A Comparative Study of Weddings and Civil Partnerships, conducted by Katie Bruce as part of her PhD qualification.

Please tick each box below to demonstrate your consent to participate in this research:

☐ I consent to participate in an interview for the above study.

☐ I consent to the interview being audio-recorded.

☐ I consent to anonymised quotes from the interview being used in

the researcher's thesis and future publications.

☐ I understand that I can withdraw from the study at any time without penalty or refuse to answer particular questions.

There are two copies of the consent form, one of which I may keep.

Please contact the researcher (address, telephone and email details above) with any questions or to request a summary of the research findings.

The project is under the supervision of :

Professor Derek McGhee

Reader in Sociology

Sociology & Social Policy

Direct tel: +44 (0)23 80594807

Direct fax: +44 (0)23 80593859

email: dpm1@soton.ac.uk

<http://www.southampton.ac.uk/socsci/sociology/staff/profile.php?name=DerekMcGhee>

Any concerns or complaints can be directed to:

Dr Martina Prude

Head of Research Governance

Corporate Services (37/4001)

University of Southampton, Highfield Campus

Southampton, SO17 1BJ

Tel: 023 8059 (2)5058

Email: mad4@soton.ac.uk

Researcher's name

Researcher's signature

Date

Participant's name

Participant's signature

Date

Appendix 4: Research information and case study consent form

Katie Bruce
Postgraduate Research Student
Division of Sociology and Social Policy
School of Social Sciences
University of Southampton
University Road
Highfield
SO17 1BJ
Tel: 07541 954424
Email: kreb103@soton.ac.uk

Research project title: Something Old, Something New, Something Borrowed and Something Blue: A Comparative Study of Weddings and Civil Partnerships.

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I, _____, agree to participate in the research, Something Old, Something New, Something Borrowed and Something Blue: A Comparative Study of Weddings and Civil Partnerships, conducted by Katie Bruce as part of her PhD qualification.

Please tick each box below to demonstrate your consent to participate in this research:

☐ I consent to participate in the above study. My participation will consist of interviews and phone or email correspondence with the researcher.

☐ I consent to the interviews being audio-recorded and the researcher making notes about the phone/email correspondence.

- ☐ I consent to anonymised quotes from the interviews being used in the researcher's thesis and future publications.
- ☐ I consent to the researcher accompanying me on a wedding/civil partnership related trip and observing and making notes on the experience.
- ☐ I understand that I can withdraw from the study at any time without penalty or refuse to answer particular questions.

There are two copies of the consent form, one of which I may keep.

Please contact the researcher (address, telephone and email details above) with any questions or to request a summary of the research findings.

The project is under the supervision of :

Professor Derek McGhee

Reader in Sociology

Sociology & Social Policy

Direct tel: +44 (0)23 80594807

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<http://www.southampton.ac.uk/socsci/sociology/staff/profile.php?name=DerekMcGhee>

Any concerns or complaints can be directed to:

Dr Martina Prude

Head of Research Governance

Corporate Services (37/4001)

University of Southampton, Highfield Campus

Southampton, SO17 1BJ

Tel: 023 8059 (2)5058

Email: mad4@soton.ac.uk

Researcher's name

Researcher's signature

Date

Participant's name

Participant's signature

Date

Appendix 5: Photograph Project Information Letter

School of Social Sciences
University of Southampton
University Road
Highfield
Southampton
Hampshire
SO17 1BJ

Dear.....,

I would like to thank you for taking part in the Wedding and Civil Partnership Research Project and for sharing your stories and experiences with me.

The research is being extended to include a photograph project and I am writing to see if you would like to take part. This will involve you taking 5 digital photographs of significant things relating to your wedding/civil partnership. These photographs can be of anything related to the planning of your wedding/civil partnership or the event itself. They can be photographs of mementos that you have kept, photographs of photographs, or anything else that is significant to your experience of the event. If you are taking photographs of photographs please ask the person who took the original photograph for their permission due to copyright issues. Also, if you are including images of people or places or anything else that may identify you, please be aware that your anonymity may be compromised (although real names will not be used along with the photographs). Please think carefully before including images that identify other people, and make sure that you get their permission to do so. The photographs should be emailed to kreb103@soton.ac.uk along with detailed descriptions and explanations as to why you chose to take those particular images, what they mean to you and why. These descriptions, along with the photographs, will be used in conjunction with the interview data to build up a more in-depth understanding of contemporary weddings and civil partnerships. They may be used for educational and/or non commercial purposes, in presentations, publications and websites connected to the PhD project.

If you would like to discuss the photograph project further or clarify how the photographs will be used then please do not hesitate to contact me. Also, if you do not have access to a digital camera or email then just let me know and I can arrange a visit and provide a digital camera.

Thanks again for your contribution to the research project.

Katie Bruce

Doing Coupledness

Kind regards

Katie Bruce
PhD Student
University of Southampton
07541 954424
kreb103@soton.ac.uk
www.weddingandcivilpartnershipresearch.co.uk

Appendix 6: Photograph Consent Letter

School of Social Sciences
University of Southampton
University Road
Highfield
Southampton
Hampshire
SO17 1BJ

Dear.....,

Thank you for taking part in the photograph project as part of the Wedding and Civil Partnership research project.

Please find a photo reproduction rights consent form enclosed. Please both sign next to each photograph that you consent to being reproduced for educational and/or non commercial purposes, in presentations, publications and websites connected to the PhD project. It would be helpful if you could then return the signed form in the stamped addressed envelope provided.

If you want to discuss further how the images may be used please do not hesitate to contact me.

Thanks again

Kind regards

Katie Bruce
PhD Student
University of Southampton
07541 954424
kreb103@soton.ac.uk
www.weddingandcivilpartnershipresearch.co.uk

Appendix 7: Photo Reproduction Rights Form

Wedding and Civil Partnership Research Project
Katie Bruce
University of Southampton

This form refers to photographs that you took as part of the Wedding and Civil Partnership research project in which you have participated. Copies of these photographs have been reproduced below. Please both sign next to each photograph to demonstrate your consent to them being reproduced for educational/non-commercial purposes, in presentations, publications and websites connected to the PhD project. Real names will not be used with the photographs.

Photograph 1:

Sign:
Print:

Date:

Sign:
Print:

Date:

Photograph 2:

Sign:
Print:

Date:

Sign:
Print:

Date:

Photograph 3:

Sign:
Print:

Date:

Sign:
Print:

Date:

Photograph 4:

Sign:
Print:

Date:

Sign:
Print:

Katie Bruce

Doing Coupledome

Date:

Photograph 5:

Sign:

Print:

Date:

Sign:

Print:

Date:

If you would like to discuss this form please contact Katie Bruce on
07541 954424.

Appendix 8: Ethics approval letter

Ms Bruce
School of Social Sciences

6 January 2009

Dear Katie,

Approval from School Research Ethics Committee

I am pleased to confirm that the Research Ethics Committee of the School of Social Sciences has given your research project ethical approval:-

Application Number: SOC20089 - 08

Research Project Title: Something Old, Something New, Something Borrowed and

Something New: A Comparative Study of Weddings and Civil Partnerships

Date of ethical approval: 6 January 2009

In order for the University to ensure that insurance is in place for this research, please complete the Insurance and Research Governance Application form attached and return to the address below as soon as possible, along with a copy of this letter and all supporting documents relating to your project:-

Research Governance Office
University of Southampton
Building 37
E-mail rgoinfo@soton.ac.uk

It is your responsibility to complete and return this form, and work on the project should not begin until insurance is in place. The form may also be found on our intranet in the Staff and PGR Zones:- <http://www.soton.ac.uk/socscinet/>

Yours sincerely,

Professor S J Heath
Chair, School Research Ethics Committee
School of Social Sciences

Katie Bruce

Doing Coupledness

Direct tel: +44 (0)23 80592578

E-mail: Sue.Heath@soton.ac.uk

Cc: File

School of Social Sciences, University of Southampton, Highfield Campus, Southampton SO17 1BJ

United Kingdom

Tel: +44 (0)23 8059 9393 Fax: +44 (0)23 8059 2954 www.southampton.ac.uk/socsci

Appendix 9: Recruitment Leaflet

Wedding and Civil Partnership Research

Are you currently planning a wedding or civil partnership? Or have you had one since December 2005?

A new research project seeks to explore the role and meaning of contemporary weddings and civil partnerships in the South of England by interviewing couples about their experiences.

To find out more and express your interest in taking part please ring Katie Bruce from the University of Southampton on 07541 954424 or email kreb103@soton.ac.uk. See www.weddingandcivilpartnershipresearch.co.uk for more information.

Appendix 10: Participant Photographs

All of the photographs (excluding those in which names of people or places featured) provided by participants as part of the photograph project are reproduced below along with the captions they wrote to describe their choices.

Jennifer and Andy:

Figure 9: Photograph 7 - Jennifer and Andy



This is a picture of how our dining room table looked for about 3 months before the wedding. As you know, we made a lot of things for the wedding, and the process was really enlightening and lovely. It was hard going and a little stressful at times but we're both so very glad that we did it. On the day it was so satisfying to see all our hard work pay off, but more importantly, we spent a lot of time together working as a *team* on these projects. We already knew we worked well together and how that dynamic worked for us, but it meant an awful lot to know that we crafted the wedding in the same way that we do everything -

together. I think we learned a little bit more about each other in the process - Andy discovered I am way more crafty than I ever let on, and he's more of a perfectionist than he likes to let on too. He's handier with a scalpel than I guessed, and I know swearwords he'd never heard before - in multiple languages! That prompted a bit more teamwork, but I'm very glad that I only needed to make 4 of those bouquets and not another which I suspect may have pushed us both over the edge!

Figure 10: Photograph 8- Jennifer and Andy

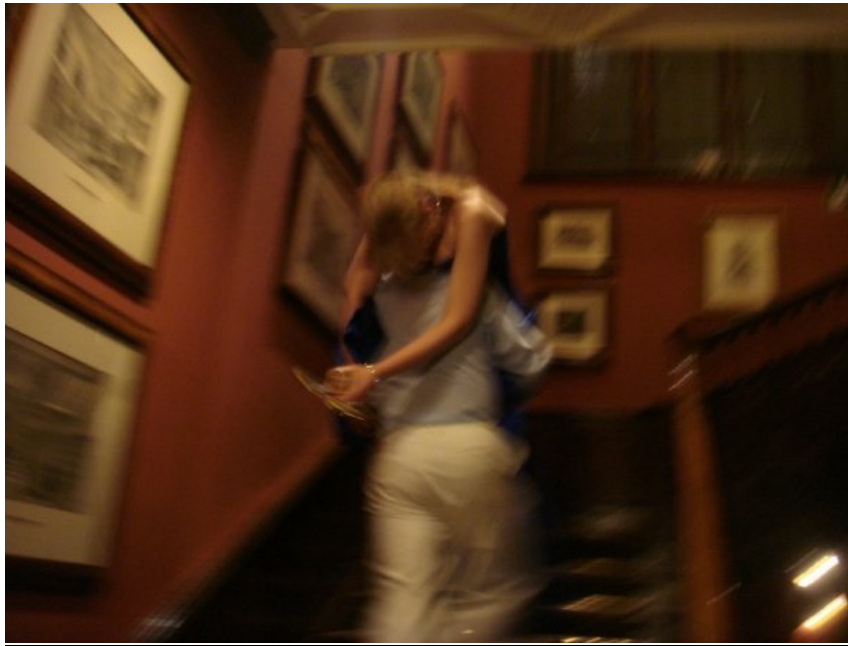


Photo 2 (shaky but happy!) was taken at the very end of our wedding day, about 1.30am. We were pretty much the last to bed, and it was taken by my sister (the other last to go with her boyfriend). I was so tired and achey and the honeymoon suite was upstairs, and there was no lift at the venue, so Andy put me over his shoulder and carried me to bed. This isn't that unusual - it happens at home sometimes when I'm feeling bad but I think it illustrates that he loves me in sickness and in health. A lot of pressure is put on you to be healthy and the perfect princessy bride, and it's just not always possible, in the same way I can't manage it every day either. I had a good day health wise all things considered (I crashed and burned badly the next day though!) but it's an important part of our relationship and was factored in our planning for the day. As much as I would love to be healthy and never have experienced some of this stuff, it is gratifying to know that I can fully rely on him, and he knows he can on me, through good and bad. Another important bit of our marriage, rather than the wedding!

Figure 11: Photograph 9- Jennifer and Andy



Photo 3 is a photo of one of our cork angels from our decorations. The corks were almost all from parties and celebrations of our friends and families, and some from the cocktail bar we frequent regularly - the owner always says hello to us in person and saved us some. We liked the idea that all of our friends and families happiness could contribute to our own celebration - it was a nice way to include everyone whilst sticking to an aesthetic. The aging theatre studies student in me loved the symbolism of this, and the corks were fun to collect! We got the idea for them from a trip to Vienna at Christmas the year before we got married - it was the first time Andy and I had had any time together for ages, and it was a lovely (freezing!) time. There were some similar decorating the window of a jewellers, and they were magical - we instantly fell in love with them and took a trip back across town to take a photo of them before we left. Almost all of the ideas for the wedding were settled on that trip - but I still think these are my favourite!

Figure 12: Photograph 10- Jennifer and Andy



This photo is an attempt for me to illustrate the internet! Most of the wedding came from the internet in one way or another – and more importantly, a lot of practical support that we didn't have from friends and family came from there too. I think that the whole process of planning the wedding taught us both quite a lot about ourselves that Andy pretty much knew already but was news to me; in trying to plan a wedding that was "us" we needed to work out what that was. I, personally, had no idea – I'd never thought about it. It turns out I'm not very traditional, don't much like doing things because that's what everyone else does, and I'm some sort of crafting fiend! We discovered the people that we thought were supportive and our friends weren't always as they seemed, and I made some really lovely new friends via the wedding forums – Particularly the unconventional brides section of You and Your Wedding. The Weird Brides even threw me a hen do where I had the most fabulous time with all these women I'd never met before in person but knew so much about – and had made all that effort (in one case travelling to London from Edinburgh!) for me - yet my "own" hen do I had to organise myself (after being let down and told nothing was sorted the day before) was not about me at all, but about the others who I had ended up feeling pressured to invite-some of whom then never came. My new internet chums were a cheering squad giving me the

confidence to be me/us, and not who other people thought I was/we were. I think I owe them (and Ariel Meadow Stallings, author of offbeat bride) a huge debt of gratitude, as this has sense of self and confidence in doing what *I* want rather than what is expected has made a huge difference to my life ongoing (how dramatic!!!). We are also grateful that we didn't go down the white dress, non-pirate, all bought route, which though was never a natural option for us did briefly make an appearance in the list of suggestions at the start. We are both glad we didn't do that – it just wasn't/isn't us!

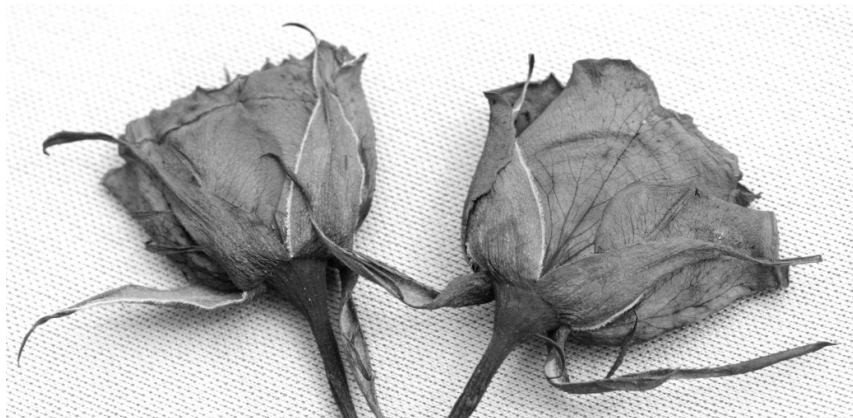
Mike and Robert:

Figure 13: Photograph 11- Mike and Robert



Two rings: This is to symbolise our joining.

Figure 14: Photograph 12- Mike and Robert



Two dried roses: Even though they have died they are still with us and we have put them in our wedding folder.

Figure 15: Photograph 13- Mike and Robert



The Pictures of us signing the papers to show it was done. All legal and signed.

Figure 16: Photograph 14- Mike and Robert



No caption provided.

Natalie and Jakob:

Figure 17: Photograph 15- Natalie and Jakob



My mum's veil and my grandmother's wedding ring. This is a photo of the items I brought into the wedding in order to bring in a little bit of loved ones who are no longer with us. Wearing my mum's veil made it feel like she had a presence at the wedding, without doing anything too mawkish that would upset people. I had my grandmother's wedding ring as my wedding ring as a link with my family history. It fits perfectly.

Figure 18: Photograph 16- Natalie and Jakob



The dress has to be in this list! It was one of the most important decisions to make during the planning, and one of the hardest. I did very extensive research online and through magazines, and tried on countless dresses. I agonised over which one to buy out of a final shortlist of three. The dress had to be unusual, it had to be one that would be admired, and it had to reflect my personality. Ideally I wanted something with flowers on it, but I also wanted something sleek, sophisticated and unfussy. In the end I chose my dress largely because it was the one that made my bridesmaids get all teary, and even though it was rather fussy and not very sleek, I had to admit that it was indeed very me.

Figure 19: Photograph 17- Natalie and Jakob



This picture is here because I love flowers and my bouquet was very important to me in the planning of the wedding. I told Jakob right from the start that flowers were a priority, and when we were working out our budget I wanted a decent allocation for them. My bouquet contained blackberries, which was another subtle reminder of my Mum, as every autumn I would go blackberrying with her and this is one of my favourite and enduring memories of childhood. Funnily enough it hadn't occurred to me to put them in my bouquet - it was the florist who added them, not knowing anything about their meaning for me, and it was such a wonderful surprise to see them on the day that I burst into tears. It made my bouquet very special.

Figure 20: Photograph 18- Natalie and Jakob



I have always loved horses and couldn't imagine any other way of arriving at my wedding than in a carriage pulled by a pair of greys. It became a bit of a bone of contention during the planning, as Jakob was very against it, due to the cost and because he perceived it as extravagant, a bit grand and even pretentious. To my shame I went to my father with the rather manipulative 'Since I was a little girl I've always seen myself arriving at my wedding by horse and carriage, but Jakob says it's too expensive'. Of course he offered to pay for it, and then the two of them ganged up on me to tease me about the whole thing. A number of our friends knew about the argument, and took sides themselves. It all became a bit of a sideshow. On the day, both my Dad and Jakob both confessed how pleasant it was, and said how much they surprised themselves by enjoying the carriage, and that it felt appropriate. It is now one of those things we laugh about, and I still maintain that riding in that carriage was one of my favourite parts of the wedding.

Figure 21: Photograph 19- Natalie and Jakob



This was our favourite shot of the wedding, and the one we turned into thank you cards (this photo is of one of the cards). It is our favourite because it captures the mood; in it we are relaxed, tired and happy, and our pose is very informal. Behind us the Great Conservatory makes a stunning backdrop, and without a doubt the Conservatory was the star of the whole wedding; it was so beautiful, historic, and unusual, and yet without the sometimes intimidating formality of the fine rooms that many wedding receptions at country houses are held in. It was the perfect venue for us, and is probably the thing that most guests remember about our wedding.

Daniel and Sophie:

Figure 22: Photograph 20- Daniel and Sophie



This is a photo of our reception room where we ate the wedding breakfast. We tried really hard in the planning of the wedding to have a cornflower blue colour scheme to match the bridesmaid dresses, and we think this room demonstrated this. When we walked in, we were so happy with how the room looked. We loved the chair covers and the flowers and felt these were well worth the money to how the room looked.

Figure 23: Photograph 21- Daniel and Sophie



Daniel and I in the horse and carriage leaving the church to get to the reception. A horse and carriage has always been a childhood dream of mine, so I was very excited about this, and for both of us, it meant we had half an hour after getting married to be together, just the two of us, to talk and drink some champagne! This was a really special half an hour, as the rest of the day went in a bit of a blur, as there were so many people to talk to, so this was pretty much the only moment in the day where we could enjoy being a newly married couple!

Figure 24: Photograph 22- Daniel and Sophie



This is our guestbook. Our guests for us are what made the day so special. We purposely chose a venue where everyone could stay, and it meant so much to us that everyone joined us in our special day. This book is our favourite memento, as pretty much all the guests signed it, and it showed how much they enjoyed the day, as well as being a memento for us on who was there. This is something that we are so glad we did, as it is great to read it every now and then! Our bridesmaid table in particular wrote a very funny poem in it which made us laugh!

Lauren and Zoe:

Figure 25: Photograph 23- Daniel and Sophie



This photo is of the both of us taken by our photographer in the grounds of the venue on the day. It shows both of us in the outfits we chose to get married in, me in a dress and Lauren in a suit. The dress was initially hired from a lady who worked in the business of wedding dresses from home; it was love at first sight. Lauren's suit, however, was handmade by a local tailor to our specification. We went for a blue colour scheme so her suit was of a dark navy with a subtle pinstripe. We looked for a suit to buy in every available shop locally but could find nothing that met Lauren's requirements; a suit that lacked the fashionable "girly" edge, cut longer in the jacket than usual and yet tailored in at the waist to show that she was a woman. The shirt was a tricky one for us, eventually forcing us to turn to the boys section in Debenhams. The matching baby blue dupion silk cravat and waistcoat were found on a website and ordered in a boy's medium size. Despite this, the overall image is of us both comfortably formal for our special occasion and feeling our best. We chose this photo because it illustrates both our struggles and successes in our search to source our outfits, an integral part to a wedding. We wanted to look smart and traditional, but also be comfortable. On occasion we felt the pressure on us to look a certain way, to wear certain gender defining clothes, but it was important for us to be happy too and we were pleased with the result.

Figure 26: Photograph 24- Lauren and Zoe



We chose a colour scheme of navy blue, baby blue, white and baby yellow. The florist was incredibly helpful when we were deciding on colours and textures. This photo depicts my bouquet which was a larger version of Lauren's pocket flowers. With the florists help we chose white roses, white freesias, yellow freesias and purple-blue flowers, all set off against eucalyptus leaves and ivy. My bouquet was solely of white roses and white freesias and smelt divine. The stalks were tied with blue ribbon and secured with pearl pins. We chose this photo because we were so happy with the flowers and as we had ten centre pieces we were able to gift them to friends and family after the event. They also had special significance to me because my mother who sadly passed away the year before the wedding had white freesias in her wedding bouquet and I wanted something to remind me of her on my big day.

Figure 27: Photograph 25- Lauren and Zoe



This photo is of us cutting the cake. The cake itself was made by a friend of a friend we found on Facebook. She gave us a discount and in our opinion did an amazing job. There were three tiers of vanilla sponge with raspberry jam and white icing. The largest and smallest tiers were tied with baby blue ribbon whilst the middle tier was intricately decorated with ivy leaves and vines in icing. Surmounting the top tier was a castle made from clay. This was one of my own creations knocked up in an evening pottery class. We wanted a castle cake originally but due to expenses we decided on something simpler and my castle would sit on top. On each corner sat handmade icing flowers made by Lauren's aunt who learned the skill just so she could make them for the big day. We chose this photo of the cake because it had so many personal touches and was just very 'us'. I enjoyed making the castle and it worked to great effect, setting off the ivy that gave the impression of traditionalism and an almost medieval feel. The flowers were a lovely touch by Lauren's aunt and looked great, a special addition to a beautiful cake and a sign of acceptance.

Figure 28: Photograph 26- Lauren and Zoe



This photo shows the guestbook. I sourced a plain white book of handmade paper and a box to keep it in from the web. The embellishments are of silver and ribbon and were handmade by me. The white rose is in keeping with our flower choice and the loop holds two silver hearts that symbolise soul mates being joined. The book itself is decorated with silver wire words that read "Mrs & Mrs" as this is nearly impossible to find anywhere and yet "Mr & Mrs" products clutter the net. I made the words using wire and pliers and used baby blue seed beads to make lavender-esque type flowers being alighted on by dark blue button and wire bees. There is a white ribbon bow and blue button in the top left corner to finish off the design. This photo was chosen because it illustrates something handmade by us and unique. It was what we wanted and matched our scheme. We love nature and the theme of lavender and bees seemed appropriate for an early September wedding; summery and full of summer flowery scents. It's also special to us because it's full of personal messages wishing us well in our life together.

Figure 29: Photograph 27- Lauren and Zoe



We knew immediately that we wanted bespoke rings. By coincidence we were in H Samuel's the day the specialist sat in and it seemed the right thing to do. Both bands are platinum, with four diamonds inlaid along the band either side, surrounding a sapphire. Eight of the diamonds were from a ring belonging to my grandmother and I felt it made ours extra specially by having something of hers in our rings. For Lauren's ring the sapphire was a round cut, whereas my ring was a princess cut. This suited our tastes. Along the inside of each bands reads "Always and Forever", some words that we use when talking about our union. We chose this photo because it shows the similarity of the designs and yet the differences to. Like myself and Lauren as a couple, the rings are similar enough to be a pair and yet subtly different enough to be two distinct pieces. They also symbolise our undying love for one another.

Nick and Arthur:

Figure 30: Photograph 28- Nick and Arthur



The wedding pictures themselves. We chose these because they so effectively help us to recall the day and the two pictures in the photo also show the stunning setting of Clandon Park, which made such a great venue for us.

Figure 31: Photograph 29- Nick and Arthur



The red London bus. We chose this because it was such an impressive way to transport our guests from the Leatherhead Registry Office to Clandon Park. Our guests on the bus were excited to be able to travel on it and the other guests waiting for our grand entrance at Clandon Park were also suitably impressed.

Patrick and Amanda:

Figure 32: Photograph 30- Patrick and Amanda



Amanda: It's kind of symbolic of the preparations that went on and the fact that I had no idea what the flowers were going to be until I saw them. It was putting trust in mum who put trust in her mate Daniel who did the flowers and we still haven't had an invoice for them, so goodness only knows.

Patrick: the first one is just like the preparation before. I think it's important to show what went on before.

Figure 33: Photograph 31- Patrick and Amanda



The musical crackers- I see it as part of the theming with me being a musician and all of my mates being musicians and I wanted to have something that people could do it, because I get really bored. I thought if anybody else is like me you've got to have something to do because otherwise you are just going to be bored stiff. So the musical crackers... and they were a real hit with everybody. They were expensive, but they were really worth it.

Figure 34: Photograph 32- Patrick and Amanda



Amanda: The photo of us in the door because we are both so happy and smiling and the light is brilliant and it was just so fabulous.

Patrick: And everybody said that school when they saw this photograph they were just like wow.

Figure 35: Photograph 33- Patrick and Amanda



Amanda: Literally we got to our room and sat on the bed talking about the day and I saw these cushions and went 'those are really nice- right put your hand there and then let's have a photo of the hands', because it seemed like a nice thing to do. And it was right at the end of the day when we were both like I've had enough, let's go to bed. It was really good. So that's right at the end of the day.

Elizabeth and Andrew:

Figure 36: Photograph 34- Elizabeth and Andrew



Photograph of Andrew waiting in the church before my arrival- he looks both pensive and confident and there is an air of excitement about it.

Figure 37: Photograph 35- Elizabeth and Andrew



Photograph of us both giving our joint speech, illustrating that we wanted to do it together rather than it be a male-dominated thing.

Figure 38: Photograph 36- Elizabeth and Andrew



Photograph of us cutting the cake with a rather inappropriate knife- a bit of a comedy moment- and important because there were a few moments of humour in the wedding which are great memories and show that the best moments are not just when things go perfectly.

Figure 39: Photograph 37- Elizabeth and Andrew



Photograph of us leaving on the rickshaw. The rickshaw for us was about creativity, environmental awareness, innovation and fun!

Appendix 11

Figure 40: Participant characteristics

Couple	Type	Research involvement	Ritual date	Age at interview	Length of relationship at ceremony	Occupations	Class categorisation	Ritual cost
Lynn and John	Heterosexual	Case-study	Sep-09	42/53	5 years	Part-time healthcare worker/Book-keeper	Working	£12,000.00
Patrick and Amanda	Heterosexual	Case-study	Jun-09	34/30	2 years	Teacher/Musician	Middle	£10,000.00
Natalie and Jakob	Heterosexual	Case-study	Jul-09	34/34	5 years	Garden designer/IT contractor	Middle	£35,000.00

Katie Bruce

Doing Coupledness

Sophie and Daniel	Heterosexual	Case-study	Jul-09	27/30	3 years	HR advisor/HR advisor	Middle	£16,000.00
Emily and Ed	Heterosexual	Case-study	Jul-09	28/30	6 years	Marketing manager/Marketing manager	Middle	£30,000.00
Jennifer and Andy	Heterosexual	Case-study	Sep-09	30/40	3.5 years	Corporate systems specialist/Consultant	Middle	£18,000.00
Jenna and Brian	Heterosexual	Retrospective	Apr-08	24/45	2 years	Nursery nurse/Builder	Working	£3,000.00
Claire and Tim	Heterosexual	Retrospective	Aug-08	50/30	5 years	Housewife/Warehouseman	Working	£2,000.00
Abigail and Dylan	Heterosexual	Retrospective	Jun-07	29/32	2 years	Project officer/IT worker	Working	£4,000.00
Holly (and Kieran)	Heterosexual	Retrospective	Aug-06	31/38	7 years	Doctor/IT manager	Middle	£10,000.00

Katie Bruce

Doing Coupledrom

Andrew and Elizabeth	Heterosexual	Retrospective	Jun-09	29/27	2 years	Researcher/Doctor	Middle	£6,500.00
Jade and Aaron	Heterosexual	Retrospective	May-09	27/27	9 years	Postgraduate student/Journalist	Middle	£7,000.00
Amelia and George	Heterosexual	Retrospective	Sep-09	32/47	10 years	Researcher/Caterer	Middle	£5,000.00
Eleanor and Charles	Heterosexual	Retrospective	Jun-08	30/31	6 years	Research officer/Financial services manager	Middle	£unknown (parents paid)
Lauren and Zoe	Same-sex	Case-study	Sep-09	24/25	2 years	Admin worker/Admin worker	Working	£15,000.00
Jessica and Nicola	Same-sex	Case-study	Sep-09	29/35	6 years	Student/Painter decorator	Working	£3,500.00

Katie Bruce

Doing Coupledness

Kat and Molly	Same-sex	Case-study	Mar-10	32/26	4 years	Musician/Exams officer	Working	£14,000.00
James and Ryan	Same-sex	Case-study	Jul-09	32/29	8 years	Graphic designer/Commercial executive	Middle	£14,000.00
Robert and Mike	Same-sex	Case-study	Jan-10	31/33	18 months	Student/Out-of-work photographer	Working	No budget- as cheap as possible
Julie and Mary	Same-sex	Retrospective	Jul-06	57/60	17 years	Artist/Retired	Middle	£3,000
Alison and Kathy	Same-sex	Retrospective	Jan-06	42/38	7 years	Healthcare worker/Healthcare worker	Middle	< £1,000.00
Kayleigh and Leanne	Same-sex	Retrospective	Jul-09	28/39	5 years	Youth justice worker/Social worker	Working	<£2,000.00

Katie Bruce

Doing Coupledome

Nathan and Ollie	Same-sex	Retrospective	May-08	41/27	5 years	Finance director /Accountant	Middle	£13,000.00
Matt and Josef	Same-sex	Retrospective	May-07	42/40	12 years 6 months	Purchasing director/Brand manager	Middle	£21,000.00
Jeff and Neil	Same-sex	Retrospective	Sep-09	52/46	9 years 6 months	Commercial manager/Accountant	Middle	£4,000
David and Gavin	Same-sex	Retrospective	01/10/08	54/51	5 years	Counsellor/funeral celebrant	Working	£1,600.00
Nick and Arthur	Same-sex	Retrospective	Jun-07	45/51	12 years	Local gov officer/Civil servant	Middle	£12,000.00

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