

Article

LEFT BEHIND BY THE ALTER: WHY QUEERS AND SOCIOLOGISTS NEED MATERIALIST FEMINISM

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Biographical Note

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Abstract

The United States marriage rights movement just culminated in July 2015 with the Supreme Court declaring same-sex marriage constitutional. The mainstream – the mainstream media and the mainstream LGBT rights movement – all applaud this trajectory, with no attention to those who get left behind in marriage politics. In this paper, I will argue that same-sex marriage is in need of a materialist feminist analysis. I will critique my discipline – Sociology – for failing to adequately theorize same-sex marriage as a key component of the 21st Century landscape of the capitalist mode of production. I will also critique the mainstream LGBT rights movement and the media attention given same-sex marriage for their lack of attention to the classed relations embedded in marriage rights. A materialist feminist analysis will allow us to see that there's still a need for a larger, more emancipatory sexual politics.

Keywords

LGBT rights, materialist feminism, queer theory, same-sex marriage

Introduction

On June 26, 2015 the United States Supreme Court federalized same-sex marriage. For most in the LGBT community, this success feels like the just end of a long fight for equality. And while this does feel like a big success — and it is, as there was lots of activism that went into the process — I am left wondering if it's really just, and equal. And more importantly, I'm left feeling concerned that it's an ending, especially given the centrality of

marriage to the movement (Bernstein and Taylor 2013), and given scholars' arguments of being "beyond the closet" (Seidman 2002) and "post-gay" (Ghaziani 2011). We've seen this trajectory before, as the Civil Rights era has led us to the color-blind, post-racial era (Gallagher 2003), as well as to the "post-feminist" (McRobbie 2004). The problem with this end is that marriage rights are not emancipatory, in that while queer politics in general and marriage rights in particular are understood to be important culturally (Butler 1997), when considered in relation to economics and the means of production, marriage reflects the social positions of middle class, white members of the LGBT community and in ways that will function to further marginalize those queers who are already the most marginalized—the poor, people of color, transgender people, homeless queer youth (Bernstein and Taylor 2013, Duggan 2002). If we are shifting into the "post-gay" era as Ghaziani (2011) argues, then we risk being left with marriage and no further activism or politicking.

Marriage, as represented in mainstream media accounts of this political process, is framed as the logical desire of loving couples rather than as an economic arrangement that benefits the middle and upper classes. Poor queers are being left behind by the alter. Rosemarry Hennessy wrote that "the relationship between sexual identities and capitalism remains for the most part an unexplored — even unspeakable — area of inquiry" (2000, 4). I would argue that the same is true of the current moment: same-sex marriage needs a material analysis! Specifically, the LGBT rights movement and sociological scholarship on same-sex marriage need a materialist framework lest we find ourselves facing another "stalled revolution" (Hochschild 1989).

For the purposes of this paper, materialist feminism will be deployed as the lens through which same-sex marriage will be analyzed, and the marriage rights movement and sociological scholarship on the movement will be critiqued. Materialist feminism is also often referred to as socialist feminism or Marxist feminism, and there are lots of different trajectories of thought within these frameworks (Hennessy and Ingraham 1997), so it is important to clarify what it means in the context of this paper. As a sociologist, my relationship to materialist feminism is grounded in my discipline, and has its roots in Marx's concept of historical materialism, where the real conditions of life are understood through the lens of historical structural forces. For me this has often meant that activism alone is never enough to instigate social change; the social conditions for change must exist in order for activism to be successful. Rendering a materialist approach feminist means understanding that/how gender and sexuality intersect in the social world with capitalism, and that as such institutionalized heterosexuality must be connected "with the gender division of labour and the patriarchal relations of production" (Ingraham 1997, 276). As a result, in order to interrogate same-sex marriage through the lens of materialist feminism, it must be understood historically, in relation to larger social forces (as well as micro level activism) and as emerging from capitalist modes of production, the nuclear family, and heteronormativity.

Why Same-Sex Marriage?

Queer politics in the twentieth century has gone through many transformations, attending to a multitude of issues from decriminalization and the removal of homosexuality from the DSM to HIV/AIDS and coming out politics. According to Bernstein and Taylor (2013), “the first time that the lesbian and gay movement publicly put marriage on its agenda was in 1987 at the third national March on Washington for Lesbian and Gay Rights” (3). Since then, the mainstream movement has been centered on securing marriage rights (Duggan 2006, Kandaswamy (2008). In the early 1990's Hawaii brought the legal fight over same sex marriage to the forefront of American attention. This attempt at legalization had a positive impact on queer political mobilization, sending marriage rights to the center of the movement's attention, despite the fact that there was significant disagreement within the community over the importance of marriage; while many argued that it was important symbolically or necessary for legal rights, such as in raising children, others argued that it was “homonormative” and could result in the loss of a specifically queer identity and culture (Bernstein and Taylor 2013, Ghaziani)

Hawaii instigated a significant backlash, including the passage of the Defense of Marriage Act in 1996 and this backlash fired up the LGBT movement. Since then--from Vermont in 1999 to Massachusetts in 2003 to California in 2004 and 2008--marriage has monopolized queer politics, to the benefit of a few, and with a silencing impact on a range of material issues impacting the LGBT community that marriage rights won't solve. Instead, marriage rights are presented as the route to health care access and economic stability (Kandaswamy 2010). As Chrys Ingraham argues, an “imaginary” creates ways of thinking that render invisible the real conditions of life, that “mask the historical and material conditions” that exist in the real world (2008, 23). It seems the imaginary at work in mainstream attention to same-sex marriage renders queers one marriage away from middle class comforts, full employment, health insurance, and romantic bliss. The reality behind this imaginary is a context in which we “trade the commodification of our lives for limited social rights” (Attwood 2006, 15) that function to benefit a few, while silencing the many.

A Sociological Marriage?: A Brief Review

Sociology is a particularly useful discipline for making sense of how sexuality is organized, thus rendering it important for making sense of how same-sex marriage will operate in the social world and in people's lives. Sociological theories — from symbolic interactionism to social construction theory — have been central to constructing arguments against essentialized understandings of sexuality, especially those arguments that denaturalize heterosexuality and thus opening up the space for successful LGBT activism (Katz 2007). Despite this, it is clear to me that my discipline hasn't adequately addressed the relationship between same-sex marriage and income inequality, or connected queer

marriage to a larger materialist understanding of the institution of marriage.

A quick review of the sociological literature reveals discussions on attitudes towards same-sex marriage (Baunach 2012), research on gay marriage bans (McVeigh and Diaz 2009, Soule 2004), the intersection of religion and (opposition to) gay marriage (Langbein and Yost 2009, Sherkat et. al 2010), and the symbolism of same-sex weddings (Kimport 2013). Kimport, for example, argues that lesbian wedding photography, as taken during the wedding protests of 2004 in San Francisco, challenges heteronormativity because of the presence of gender nonnormativity in the images that serve to dispute “the assumed association between sex and gender” (294). For Kimport heteronormativity isn’t an organizing structure of society that shapes relations to production, reproduction and consumption in a capitalist society; rather, for Kimport heteronormativity is about normative gender display and heterosexual practice. Arlene Stein (2013) importantly connects same sex marriage to the privileged classes in a capitalist society and argues that “if marriage offers economic benefits, it does so mainly for those who possess considerable economic resources” (56), though she does not explore precisely how or why capitalism produces a version of heteronormativity that includes same-sex marriage.

A lot of the sociological scholarship on same-sex marriage is grounded in social movement theory rather than Marxist, materialist or economic theory. Soule’s (2004) research on state bans is grounded in social movement theory and questions the impact of social movement action on policy. She explored the extent to which elite allies, electoral competition and state law impact the movement and policy changes, and finds that, “movements do matter” in impacting same-sex marriage policy changes, especially “interest organizations” (471). Jeffrey Kosbie’s (2013) work explores how dissent within the movement in Massachusetts functioned and with what consequence. Given that “queer activists criticized the focus on marriage as displaced” but still participated in the movement, Kosbie examined how debates within the movement were managed, arguing that “mobilizing this discursive community depended on strategic framing and de-emphasis of identity differences” (111).

This, along with the argument that the LGBT community’s desire for marriage is “homonormative,” that is, it mimics rather than challenges heterosexuality is what causes Ghaziani (2011) to question, “if identity requires difference, then how is it constructed during moments when such differences are de-emphasized, that is, when gay activists assert their similarities to, rather than differences from, heterosexuals” (100). This is all interesting and important work, just as same-sex marriage is important in addressing “injustices of recognition” (Fraser 1997, 280), yet it fails to situate these arguments (including the queer arguments) within the larger context of exploitation and capitalist labour relations. Hennessy and Ingraham argued that “if feminism is to maintain its viability as a political movement aimed at redressing women’s oppression and exploitation worldwide, the theory that underlies feminist practice cannot eclipse the material realities that bind race, gender, sexuality and nationality to labour” (1997, 2); the same goes for LGBT activists and theory in

the 21st century.

While this is obviously not an exhaustive representation of the sociological literature it does help to illuminate the absence of a materialist approach to the issue. While sociologists have addressed the debates and schisms within the LGBT community over marriage politics (Kosbie 2013) and media representations of those debates and schisms (Bernstein and Burke 2013), limited attention has been paid to the material conditions that shape couples' relationship to the institution of marriage. Scholars have addressed the intersection of economics and marriage outside of the context of queer marriage rights, illuminating why poor couples don't marry despite valuing marriage very highly (Edin and Kafalas' 2005). Daniel Schnieder, reports that "recent research suggests that wealth may be an important economic prerequisite of marriage and may help to explain the disparity in marriage by race and education" (2011, 633). While this work is important, it doesn't insert marriage itself as central to the (re)production of class inequalities.

Sociological scholarship that situates (hetero)sexuality within the capitalist mode of production is also minimal. Chrys Ingraham's (1999, 2008) work is a clear exception to this, as her work explores the wedding ritual from materialist perspective, importantly arguing that weddings and marriage reproduce inequalities of race, class, gender and sexuality. Other sociologists have connected the beginnings of the gay social context to the anonymity that urban life provides in the context of capitalism and wage labour (D'Emlio 1997, Valocchi 1999). Meanwhile, others argue that the commodification of gay life has negatively impacted both queer communities and activism (Kelly 2014, Sears 2005). These examples represent important work but don't represent the current moment. The discipline of sociology needs to be invigorated and elaborated to incorporate recent changes in marriage policy into a materialist analysis of sexuality.

Sociological scholarship has (in my reading) spent the past few decades in the rabbit hole of identity and identity construction. The consequence of this, is the conflation of sexuality with sexual identities, and the erasure of (hetero)sexuality as an organizing principle of social life not actually contingent upon bodies or identities, but built into social structures. For example, Gillian Dunne (2000) argues that "lesbian motherhood undermines a core signifier of heterosexuality and challenges heterosexual monopoly of norms for parenting" (16). She also argues that her study of lesbians who opt into motherhood via donor insemination present the "possibility of showing what can be achieved when gender difference as a fundamental structuring principle in interpersonal relationships is minimized" (13). Without delving into her findings and analysis, I take issue with the assumptions built into these quoted arguments, as they center gender and sexuality as components of the bodies present in relationships, rather than as larger structural dynamics shaping all people's relationships regardless of identity. That is, heterosexuality for Dunne is dependent upon the presence of one man and one woman; gender structures don't exist in the presence of two women. Identity work tends to hide the larger structural arrangements, and the queer theoretical response largely perpetuated the same problem the

work attempted to address in that “in most of [queer theory] capitalism remains completely invisible” (Hennessy 2000, 53).

We Are Our History – Materialist Feminist Understandings of Same-Sex Marriage Rights

Homosexuality has always existed to bolster the economic sexual order of the industrial West. As such, using a materialist frame reminds activists and scholars alike that same sex marriage is an inevitable outcome of history, rather than a liberatory politics. Rosemary Hennessy and Chrys Ingraham (1997) write that

emancipatory change that aims to eliminate exploitation and oppression within a social system cannot take place by eradicating inequities only in one sphere of social life--whether it be the economy, state, or culture. For change to be truly emancipatory, it must include civil rights and cultural reforms and extend to the social structures that allow wealth for the few to be accumulated at the expense of the many (4).

Hennessy and Ingraham remind us that not all politics are truly emancipatory. This is the position the LGBT rights movement in the U.S. is in, by allowing marriage without illuminating or critiquing the class-inflected nature of marriage. By disconnecting marriage from the larger economic structure of society, as organized also by the state, the movement fails to be emancipatory as Hennessy and Ingraham suggest. A materialist approach also reminds us that change doesn't just happen because of the hard work of activists--though activism is crucial to speed up the process — but as a result of larger historical forces.

In the context of the successes of the post-Stonewall, post-HIV/AIDS LGBT rights movement, an often overlooked but significant impact on the successes of this movement have been social and medical changes in reproduction, along with the deinstitutionalization of marriage and the emergence of the post-modern, post-industrial pure relationship (Cherlin 2004). It is within this context, and in relation to the capitalist mode of production, that the ground shifted towards same sex marriage. Homosexuality has always functioned in society to organize and normalize, marriage, reproduction, and heterosexuality; same sex marriage does not change that.

Heterosexuality and homosexuality have not always been the social categories that function to organize sexuality socially. In fact, prior to the 19th century, the terms didn't even exist in the vernacular (Katz 2007). The reproductive imperative is what drove all structural, cultural, and individual understanding of bodies. All that changed along with the economic transformations of the Industrial Revolution, when the new “science” of sexuality, and the culture at large, deployed heterosexuality and homosexuality as social mechanisms to facilitate re-organization of the new economy. As D'Emilio writes

gay men and lesbians have not always existed. Instead, they are a product of history, and have come into existence in a specific historical era. Their emergence is associated with the relations of capitalism; it has been the historical development of capitalism--more specifically, its free labour system – that has allowed large numbers of men and women in the late twentieth century to call themselves gay, to see themselves as part of a community of similar men and women, and to organize politically on the basis of that identity (1993, 468).

The transformation from a subsistence agricultural economy to an industrial capitalist economy created the context for wage labour and urbanization, which D’Emilio argues created the space for individuals to construct anonymous space for living gay lives. This transformation also instigates changes in regards to the reproduction of the labour force, and thus changed the context of sexual socialization and policing. As such, as homosexuality emerges so too does homophobia and heterosexism. The homosexual "other" and the social stigmatization experienced by these "others" helped to organize the majority ensuring heteronormativity. A devalued homosexuality serves to push heterosexuality into more valued space and the state (via marriage, labour laws, decency laws, and gendered norms) pushes homosexuality into the closet (Seidman 2002).

Further, heterosexuality as a social sexual idea is a key player in the transformation of understanding our bodies as sources of (re)production to sources of pleasure. Making sense of the body as a source of pleasure not only serves to facilitate a transition to an industrially appropriate hetero-ethic, it also opens up the necessary relationship between pleasure and consumption, an impact of capitalism on the sexual world. Purchasing out of want rather than need requires organizing the social and the self around pleasure pursuits. Birth control, especially the development of the pill and the legalization thereof, solidifies the shift towards a sexual pleasure ethic that begins to blur the boundaries of sexual morality and regulation.

Further, according to Katz, "the decreasing value of procreation, and increasing value of pleasure sex, make heterosexual and homosexual seem even more similar. This undermines, as we'll see, old rationales for unequal treatment, and, finally, the very basis of the heterosexual/homosexual distinction" (2007, 86). This marks the transformation from an industrial production oriented society to a post-industrial consumer oriented one, and as Katz argues, begins to destabilize the heterosexism of the industrial era. At the root of heterosexism, however, is the organization of socially necessary labour. What we are seeing in the late 20th and early 21st century is most certainly a moment of increasing space for LGBT lives, as evidenced by the emergence of same-sex marriage. At the same time, however, the undermining of heterosexism does not automatically result in the reorganization of labour relations that heterosexuality has historically organized.

Queering Labour Relations? A Materialist Analysis of the Household Division of Labour

As materialist feminist scholars have been arguing for decades, "as an economic unit, the nuclear family is a valuable stabilizing force in a capitalist society" (Benston 1997, 21). The nuclear family's reliance on a breadwinner secures the capitalist economy wage labourers, and at the same time, the nuclear family's dependence on a homemaker secures capitalism's need for consumption and a well cared for (future) labour force. The nuclear family in the context of state regulated marriage, wage laws, and limited welfare ensures the privatization of care work.

Further, privately organizing reproductive labour frees the state, and thus society, from said responsibility. As the state regulated the nuclear family through marriage policy as a heterosexual unit, and organizing the private and public labour as separate gendered spheres subsequently keeps men and in particular, women, dependent upon each other, and on the institution of marriage that organizes this relationship. This dependency—women's dependency on men, men and women's dependency on civil marriage—is productive for the capitalist economy. Again, as Benston points out, "...the amount of unpaid labour performed by women is very large and very profitable to those who own the means of production" (1997, 22), as is a breadwinner who reports to work every day, unlikely to ask questions about his labour conditions, so as to support his wife and children. Same-sex marriage will support, not alter these dynamics. All bodies are organized by these mechanisms of labour relations, not just heterosexually identified people in "opposite sexed" relations. As stated previously, (hetero)sexuality is a mechanism by which labour is organized; it is not an essential property of individuals.

Ingraham and Hennessy write that "women's labour continues to be a primary source of capital accumulation. Feeding and caring for children, attending to the sick and the elderly, and providing one of the main sources of cheap labour in waged work have been women's longstanding contributions to capital accumulation across the globe" (1997, 1-2). This argument is key to a materialist analysis of marriage, gender, and sexuality. Mainstream social science seems to have ignored this theoretical trajectory, particularly in relation to same-sex marriage. For example, Green (2010) states that a "traditional" marriage is one that is monogamous, reproductive, and organized around a gendered division of labour (402), and thus argues that same sex marriages "queer" this tradition simply by dismantling the gendered division of labour. Absent here is any discussion of labour from the perspective of capital accumulation. Even if the couple is same-gendered, someone is still doing all the labour and thus, exploitation is still at the center of the same-sex household. In fact, according to Green,

...the negotiated quality of the domestic division of labour and authority across same-sex married couples does not align with the critical

feminist/queer prediction that marriage will assimilate lesbian and gay spouses into role-differentiated marriages that reproduce power inequities found in traditional heterosexual marriages (424-5).

The power inequities that he is referring to are gendered dynamics – the male dominated breadwinner-homemaker structure of the “past.” What materialist scholars must tend to here, however, is the extent to which gendered power dynamics are central to 21st century marriage from the perspective of capital. Just because these couples don't have “traditional” gender roles embedded in their daily lives, doesn't mean that their lives don't “reproduce power inequities.” The issue here is in part operational definitions. If we confine our understanding of marital power to patriarchy, and of power being essentially tied to particular types of bodies then we will miss the larger economic function of the privatized institution of marriage. Marriage doesn't just exist to serve patriarchal functions, but to serve capitalistic functions, of which patriarchy has been (re)organized to serve.

There is a reciprocal relationship between capitalism and same-sex marriage; capitalism has encroached into this aspect of queer lives and politics. As an example, one of Green's (2010) participants, a 33 year-old male made clear that the affordability of day care versus hiring a nanny was going to shape him and his partners decision making regarding family size. This means that while he and his partner may challenge the heteronormativity of the patriarchal structure it is clear that via hiring a nanny or using a day care provider they will still be relying on the labour of women – likely poor transnational women of color – to facilitate their paid labour. That is, their household does not live outside of the globalized capitalist mode of production. As such power inequities are maintained by these same sex households; but as white middle class men and women who can afford either a day care or a nanny, they don't see or feel the inequities as they largely impact other families homes.

Dunne's (2000) piece offers similar analytic issues. For example, a lesbian couple who opted into motherhood via insemination are described as such:

The experiences of Thelma and Louise are not atypical of mothers in this situation. They have been living together for seven years in an apartment they own in inner-city Manchester. They have two daughters, Polly, age four, and Stef, age two. Thelma works in desktop publishing, and Louise is a teacher. Like many in the sample, Thelma and Louise operationalize shared parenting by reducing their paid employment to half-time (21).

The ensuing analysis of this couple focused on how they are redefining parenting in queer ways. No attention was ever paid to their professions, their home ownership, their ability to afford half-time employment, nor is there a discussion of the realities that one egalitarian household does not restructure macro level dynamics of ownership and capital that produce social (in)equities in society and in households.

Clearly, what these sociologists are missing is a materialist frame. As Hennessy writes, “capitalism does not structurally require patriarchal gender asymmetry, but historically, it has made use of the institution of marriage and the heterosexual norms it regulates to reproduce gendered divisions of labour both in and outside the family” (2000, 65). As Hennessy makes clear in this comment, while heteronormative gender relations are not necessary, they have been useful. What’s crucial here, however, is that “patriarchal gender asymmetry” is not a functional requirement of capitalism; so long as there are people willing to exploit themselves in the labour market and child care and other forms of care work are privately funded through (shrinking) wages, the capitalist organization of labour in society remains functional.

Sociologists regularly argue that gender and sexuality are socially constructed social institutions, and yet, when they situate those same dynamics within bodies, they fail to deploy their own disciplinary perspective. Heteronormative gender relations have always been about securing a passive wage labour pool and a privatized system of care work. What studies like Green (2010) and Dunne (2001) actually make clear is that gay men and lesbians do not organize their households in ways that challenge these underlying functions. As stated earlier, homosexuality has always functioned to the benefit of heteronormativity, and heteronormativity has always functioned to the benefit of capital. Same-sex marriage reorganizes this process while keeping historical capitalist labour relations firmly in tact. In fact, in the 21st century, these labour relations are so hegemonic, we are seeing a weakening of heteronormative gender relations — in both “same” sex and “opposite” sex households — without the equivalent weakening of the structure of capitalist labour relations.

Love Has Everything to Do With It – Media Framing of the Marriage Movement

Since the 1990's era of Ellen DeGeneres' televised coming out, followed by Will and Grace, the LGBT community has become increasingly visible, largely relying on the culture industry (Adorno 2001) to shape this visibility. As a result, and as Sears has noted (2005), consumerism (by queers) and profit (for the industry) have dominated. This visual representation has had a significant, and positive, impact on the LGBT community in relation to coming out, identity construction, and cross-sexual interactions with friends and family (Edwards 2009). At the same time, these images have the potential to hurt the community, to lure us into a false sense of (economic) security.

Since the early 21st century, media scholars have been pointing out that the media has “stereotyped” the LGBT community as “affluent” despite plenty of documentation to disprove this belief (Ragusa 2005, 656). Of course, these visual representations obscure the reality of life in the LGBT community, rendering invisible the homelessness, poverty, and violence that many members of our community experience. As reported by The Gay and Lesbian Task Force, transgender people are more likely to live in poverty: “our sample was nearly four times more likely to have a household income of less than \$10,000/year

compared to the general population” (Grant et. al. 2011:2). The queer representation that emerges from the mainstream media does not shed light on these very relevant concerns, while it is important in framing our understanding of the world. As Bernstein and Burke (2013) point out, “scholars find that newspapers are highly influential in shaping public opinion about important issues” and that “media coverage [is an] indicator of value change” (322-333). Given the extent to which queer media visibility shapes queer politics, it is no surprise that same sex marriage, a middle-upper class issue, has come to dominate the mainstream movement’s attention in the 21st century.

Margaret Bentson (1997) writes that,

One function of the family, the one taught to us in school and the one which is popularly suggested, is the satisfaction of emotional needs: the needs for closeness, community and warm, secure relationships. ...This function of the family is important in stabilizing it so that it can fulfill the second, purely economic function (20).

We can see the function of emotional needs in media reports of fights over marriage rights. That is, the emotional-romance ideology that emerges from the same sex rights movement is that marriage is the place to secure love relationships. In this sense, the economics of marriage are excluded from the narrative and romantic love becomes the “imaginary” (Ingraham 2008). For example, the *Dallas Morning News* (2014), in a report on pending cases to challenge the same sex marriage ban, quoted one member of a suing couple as arguing that, “we love each other and, like most straight couples who love each other, we want to get married” (1). This argument situates marriage in relation to romantic love rather than in relation to property rights; it is also a culturally powerful argument. Now that reproduction no longer requires (hetero)sexuality, love becomes the ideological force that maintains the institution of marriage.

As a scholar, it seems to me that these normative frames make very clear the reality that same-sex marriage is a limited version of “equality,” in that it functions to the benefit of heteronormative structuring of labour relations, securing docile wage labourers and performers of reproductive labour as “labours of love.” There’s no real social transformation going on; rather, it a state-sanctioned restructuring of who’s involved in the status quo. As one woman from South Carolina is reported as saying, “you think about your heterosexual life and we do the exact same thing you know I go to work all day come home and we watch TV and go to bed. It’s a normal married life” (Mishkin 2014).

Class relations are silenced in these narrative, even as they are still present. The Texas couple was reported by the *Dallas Morning News* as a physician’s assistant and a lawyer by profession. In addition, the article reports that “both couples in the suit have connections” with the law firm representing them in the case. This information clearly situates the parties in this case in economic terms, making it easy to imagine how these couples will benefit from

being able to access the economic benefits of marriage. Further, as Schneider (2011) argues, wealth is often a pre-requisite for marriage, whereby one's access to resources shapes perceptions of marital desirability. As a result, access to resources both precedes and emerges from marriage. Despite these classed relations, marriage rights are framed in terms of access to marriage and democratic citizenship rights, where the institution is the rightful home for love relationships.

Similarly, *The New York Times* reports on a few of the couples who were challenging the marriage bans in Virginia. One couple is reported to be “an English professor” and a “real estate agent” who “wants to be married like everyone else” (Eckholm 2014). As Gregory Mantsios writes, “for the most part, the news media ignores the poor” (1998, 1) and that by “by ignoring the poor and blurring the lines between the working people and the upper class, the news media creates a universal middle class” (3). This is clearly what *The New York Times* is accomplishing with quoting this real estate agent, who declares that everyone wants to get married, erasing the economic realities of multitudes of working poor partnerships opting-out of marriage for economic survival. The other couple reported in this article are declared to be an “expert in special education” and an “education professor” (Eckholm 2014). All of these jobs are reported as mundane and class-less, though they are all clearly professions that situate these individuals within classed positions, ready for the property rights marriage will deliver.

Again in *The New York Times*, marriage is framed as a positive, universal “victory” all while the class relations are silently lurking—present but unremarked upon. According to the article, “Erin E. Miller and her wife may have to pay more income tax this year, but they aren't about to protest. Quite the opposite. They are delighted” (Delafuente 2014). The article continues: “I don't care,” said Ms. Miller, a software engineer who lives in Beverly, Mass. ‘I'm thrilled that DOMA was struck down, regardless of my own personal situation’” (Delafuente 2014). Here, her situation — having to pay more taxes — is framed as a difficult “personal situation,” rather than the clear classed position that it really is. As a software engineer, it's clear she can afford not to care; and the article frames this as normal and just, as if “we [the universal middle class] all share the same concerns” (Mantsios 1998, 3). This normalization is powerful.

As reported in *Milwaukee-Wisconsin Journal Sentinel* in 2014, same sex marriage is about “one thing: basic fairness” (Editorial Board). The outcome of an argument like this, however, is problematic, as it sets up marriage rights as the only impediment to “simple justice” (Editorial Board). Rather than discuss the continued inequities of wages, unemployment, lack of access to affordable health care, the growing wealth gap, or the impacts of the housing crisis, marriage is framed the solution, as the last bastion of unequal social relations. The article even deploys a color-blind frame by comparing the abolition of same sex marriage bans to the abolition of interracial marriage bans, all while

perpetuating the notion that these legal changes will solve the underlying social inequalities that they organized during their reign. Instead of reports on the realities of class inequality and how marriage functions to perpetuate that inequality, we get the “heterosexual imaginary” (Ingraham) and visions of love and equality: “this lawsuit, at its core, is about family. It’s about loving committed couples... This is about dignity and equality for all... families” (Johnson 2014).

Of course this analysis reflects the time period in between the *United States vs. Windsor* (2013) and *Obergefell vs. Hodges* (2015); the period where DOMA was struck down but the marriage bans in upwards of 30 states were still legal. What these snippets of media attention make clear, however, is the inevitable trajectory towards legalization. In the larger cultural context as outlined here, it is culturally difficult to argue against love, as love is central to 21st century heteronormativity. It is no surprise, then that in response to *Obergefell vs. Hodges* the Human Rights Campaign website declared “love wins” and CNN quoted a physician who said: “the main reason there is a benefit to being in a legally recognized marriage is that it introduces a level of stability into a relationship. This is going to help change the social climate. Hearing the Supreme Court say this is OK will help couples feel like they’re part of regular society” (Smart 2015, 3). Despite the reality that there are still plenty of dissenters (including four members of the Supreme Court), there is a clear normalizing effect at play in the mainstream media. Being gay or lesbian and married, thus a part of “regular society,” means having “resources of economic and social class” as well as racial privilege “to achieve the ordinariness they desire” (Stein 2013, 48). As such this normalizing media frame participates in the larger project of “simply expanding current conceptions of what is normal and acceptable to include same-sex married couples” and will do nothing to “support people with nonnormative family structures” whether queer or heterosexual (Bernstein and Burke 2013, 319).

Conclusion: We Got Married, But The Rest are Poor

It is important to recognize what marriage doesn’t accomplish towards equality. According to Gary Gates and Gallup (2014), the LGBT community doesn’t fare as well in regards to well-being when compared to their heterosexual peers. According to the poll, this is even more pronounced for women in the LGBT community (Gates 2014). Given the historical relationship between women’s oppression and the institution of marriage, it is difficult to argue that marriage equality will be what changes LGBT women’s lives and sense of their own well-being.

Further, given the economic contours of marriage we know that marriage benefits and privileges white and higher income couples at the direct expense of people of color and the working class and poor, via normalization and welfare policy (Kandaswamy 2008). As Kandaswamy points out, “same sex marriage emerges as a possible avenue towards rights and

inclusion only against a historically specific landscape in which the institution of marriage has been instrumental in defining citizenship rights in racially stratified ways” (708). In addition, nowhere in the mainstream movement do you hear attention to the difficulties that poor couples have in balancing their desire to be married, for example, with their economic need for child care subsidy eligibility. Instead, organizations such as the Human Rights Campaign frame their argument to read that the denial of the 1000+ benefits (including social security, tax, immigration law, employee benefits, COBRA insurance) of marriage affects us all the same. Marriage discourses are used to silence attention to the problems of economic inequality (Kandaswamy) to the point where it seems forgotten that marriage is an economic arrangement.

This can have a significant — and negative — impact on the LGBT community. Barrett and Pollack (2005) discuss the class bias of the LGBT community by illuminating how middle and upper class gay men, as a result of material as well as symbolic resources are more able to move into and operate visibly within the queer community. As a result, the needs of the community come to be defined by those who are able to participate. This is how marriage, an institution that only benefits the middle-upper class few, comes to be the final frontier of LGBT rights. All the while, as the Gallup poll (2014) reports, finances is the area where the LGBT community lags the most in comparison to straights, and that the findings are “consistent with research from UCLA’s Williams Institute, which shows that the LGBT population is at a disproportionate risk for poverty and food insecurity” (2).

Given this economic insecurity, marriage will not likely be the trajectory that leads to improved material conditions for these folks, in the same way that marriage doesn’t alleviate heterosexual families poverty (Edin and Kefalas 2005). In fact, marriage rights could make matters worse for poor queers by maintaining the connections between citizenship rights and property relations as private matters to share only among the married, rather than addressing resource distribution as a public good regardless of relationship status. These connections organize inequality; they don’t dismantle it. As Kandaswamy puts it, “in seeking greater access to the top two tiers of the welfare state through marriage recognition rather than making more universal claims, same-sex marriage advocates rely upon and reproduce the already existing structure of stratified social rights (2008, 718).

For example, despite the on-going political debate about the Affordable Care Act, mainstream queer politics has been markedly silent on the impact this policy might have on the LGBT community, such as access to needed health care and child care costs. The Human Rights Campaign's website has this to say under the "health and aging" link"

Fear of discrimination causes many LGBT people to avoid seeking care and, when they do get treatment, studies have shown that LGBT people are often not treated with the respect that all patients deserve. Through pioneering efforts such as the Healthcare Equality Index, the Human Rights Campaign is dedicated to improving healthcare for LGBT people and their families

(retrieved on September 24, 2013).

No attention is given to the Affordable Care Act as it pertains to the LGBT community, or anything else about access to health care, the rising costs of insurance, employment instability, denial of coverage of certain "elective" procedures, or the impact of poverty on health and overall quality of life. These issues are of specific importance to the LGBT community, as more and more same sex partners become parents, as the trans-community continues to be denied access to medical procedures important to those who wish to use such procedures, and as all of us continue to face a changing policy and economic context that will shape our access to health care.

For example, "Bassinger and his partner are both HIV positive and on disability funding. If they were to get married they would lose their SSI and SSDI benefits. And his situation is not uncommon" (Dettmer 36). Dettmer continues on, raising the important issue of the symbolic importance of marriage, as many people argue that even if marriage won't benefit an individual or a couple materially, symbolically it's an important marker of acceptance:

But as Joseph DeFilippis, former executive director of Queers for Economic Justice points out, "When homophobia is your only target, its removal will only benefit people for whom it was the sole issue. If you're homeless and a person of color, or a person of color who is an immigrant and queer, getting rid of homophobia doesn't change the immigration battles you face, or the racism you have to contend with, or your struggle to pay for your apartment! (37).

Clearly the idea of a blanket homophobia that impacts the queer community universally is hiding the every day material realities of many queers. When half of the homeless youth are queer youth (Dettmer 2010, Reck 2009), it is clear that minimizing homophobia symbolically won't directly impact the material realities of their homelessness. According to Reck (2009), participants report the import of the Castro, while also stating that the "MUNI station... is the only public space in the Castro where kids can sit down without spending money" (232). Even cities that are historically known for being queer friendly are seeing the impact of these larger social and economic transformations, as there are very few public spaces left that haven't been commodified.

Though lesbians and gays can now marry with Federal protection in the United States, I can't help but wonder, will we have health insurance to share? Will we have retirement benefits to share? Will we be able to keep our child care subsidies if we do get married? As Dettmer points out, "...the majority of LGBT people actually consider economic discrimination to be the No. 1 issue in their lives, ...[and] that queer white men are the most likely to be coupled where as black lesbians are the least likely to be coupled, thus

demonstrating that marriage will benefit gay white men more than queer women of color" (2010:34). Clearly, both scholars and activists alike need to take a minute to reconsider the impact and import of same-sex marriage policies and the silencing (silenced by scholarship, by media framing, by mainstream politicking) impact this movement has had on material conditions. Same sex marriage must be understood through the lens of material analysis so as to keep scholars and the movement focused on the real conditions of the lives of members of the LGBT community. There is a lot left to fight for.

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