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## "Not my priority" : perspectives from LGBTQ individuals who do not identify marriage equality as their primary political concern

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Elizabeth Chandler  
“Not my Priority”: Perspectives from  
LGBTQ Individuals who do not  
Identify Marriage Equality as their  
Primary Political Concern

### **Abstract**

This study was undertaken to explore a little researched and relatively little discussed area – for people who identify as Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender or Queer (LGBTQ) who do *not* identify marriage equality as their primary political concern, what is and why? Also explored was how do they relate to this movement and what issues do they choose to prioritize?

Thirteen participants living in the San Francisco Bay area were interviewed in person, and then interviews were transcribed and analyzed to expose themes. They were asked to share certain demographic information such as age, gender or gender identity, racial or ethnic identity, their sexual orientation or identity, their sense of community, and their political activism. They were then asked to reflect on same-sex marriage as a political issue and on which issues they feel are more relevant other than the concerns reflected within the Marriage Equality movement.

Findings revealed a range of reasons for not identifying same-sex marriage as a primary political concern, from a questioning of the institution of marriage to wanting to prioritize people’s more basic needs. All participants demonstrated an ability to hold dialectical tensions, or two seemingly opposing viewpoints simultaneously. Some participants cited personal reasons for not identifying with the marriage equality movement.

This study offers a unique and often overlooked perspective from within a community that is already marginalized from mainstream society.

“NOT MY PRIORITY”: PERSPECTIVES FROM LGBTQ INDIVIDUALS WHO DO NOT  
IDENTIFY MARRIAGE EQUALITY AS THEIR PRIMARY POLITICAL CONCERN

A project based upon an independent investigation, submitted in  
partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of  
Social Work.

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2011

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“Another world is not only possible, she is on her way. On a quiet day,  
I can hear her breathing.”

— Arundhati Roy (quoted to me by a participant)

There seems to be an endless amount of people to whom I owe my heartfelt appreciation for helping me through this challenging (and rewarding) process.

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## Chapter I

### Introduction

"It is not our differences that divide us. It is our inability to recognize, accept, and celebrate those differences."

— Audre Lorde

Although same-sex behaviors have existed in most societies throughout history, the concept of a homosexual identity is particular to the nineteenth century and beyond. The police raid on the Stonewall Inn in New York City and the subsequent riots that continued into the night of June 27<sup>th</sup>, 1969 are understood as a catalyzing moment for gays and lesbians in the United States. Although other public demonstrations had occurred prior to Stonewall and a homophile movement preceded the riots, Stonewall marked the beginning of a visible gay and lesbian community. The early Gay Liberation movement, as it was called at the time, focused on systemic change and the gay and lesbian community demanded deep societal change, asserting simultaneously that gays and lesbians deserve the same rights and respect as heterosexuals and maintaining a hope that they could change society enough that everyone could belong. Gay liberation was for them, “a radical movement that advocates a radical change in society – its social structures, power structures, its racism and sexual dogmas” (Mecca, 2009, p. xi).

Forty-two years later, the modern Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Queer (LGBTQ) movement has come a long way from the days of Stonewall and we find ourselves in a modern era where it is much more socially acceptable to be openly queer, though there is arguably still a long way to go. Today gay and lesbian concerns, as presented by the media, are the repeal of Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell (an event that occurred just prior to this writing) and

repealing the Defense of Marriage Act (DOMA), gaining marriage rights for same-sex couples. However, some gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender and queer people do not feel that their values are reflected in these movements and choose to focus their political energy elsewhere. Some feel that these issues are more invested in assimilating to heteronormative standards as opposed to subverting the preexisting system.

Lisa Dettmer hosted a radio program entitled "Beyond Gay Marriage; A Radical Queers Critique of the Gay Marriage Movement and the Mainstreaming of Gay Politics" on KPFA 94.1 on January 24, 2010. One of the interviewees, Deeg Gold, states,

The thing is there has always been two trends in the gay liberation movement, or the gay movement. And one trend has been a very revolutionary, radical way of looking at our lives and the other has been a much more mainstream way like six months after Stonewall when you had the gay liberation fronts burgeoning all across the country, you also had the gay activist alliance which was totally about getting rights, being equal. (Dettmer, 2010).

The interviewees in the radio piece go on to discuss how this division has been reinforced by society, how a mythology was created in order to “flex political muscle” by representing white, wealthy gays and lesbians in an effort to say “you better pay attention to us, our needs, we vote, we shop and we have power” (DeFilippis in Dettmer, 2010). DeFilippis goes on to argue that this view abandons the nuance and diversity in within the queer community. He argues,

When homophobia is your only target then the removal of homophobia will only benefit the people for whom that was the only issue facing them. If you’re homeless and you’re a person of color, and a person of color who is an immigrant, and you’re queer, getting rid of homophobia tomorrow doesn’t change the immigration battles you have, or the racism

you have to contend with, or the struggles to have to pay for your apartment (Dettmer, 2010).

How exactly marriage and the military became central and visible concerns within the modern mainstream is enigmatic and complicated. Investigating the historical roots of this shift falls outside the scope of this study, however it is important to note that it has occurred in order to contextualize the data that will be explored in the current research.

This study is an exploration of this idea and centers around the question: For people who identify as LBGQTQ who do *not* identify marriage equality as their primary political concern, what is and why? This study explores and gives a voice to a marginalized group within a marginalized population. This study offers variation and nuance to a somewhat monolithic and binary argument, as there seems to be little space to voice any variation and alternative opinions about this issue within the queer community. This is a qualitative exploratory study of 13 participants living in the San Francisco Bay area.

The following chapters will explore that research question and shed some light on this rarely explored question and marginalized community within the LGBTQ community. Chapter 2 will include an examination of the existing literature, both within and outside the field of social work, and describe the theoretical lens used. Chapter 3 will outline the methods used in the execution of the study. Chapter 4 will describe the findings from the interviews conducted. Chapter 5 will provide a discussion of how this research fits in with the preexisting literature, offer implications for social work practice and policy, explain the limitations of this study, and offer areas for future research.



## Chapter II

### Literature Review

#### Introduction

This study explores the perspectives of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Queer (LGBTQ) identified individuals who are not involved in the struggle for same-sex marriage in California. The research questions posed are: For LGBTQ individuals who *do not* identify marriage equality as their main focus of political action, what are their priorities? Why is marriage equality *not* their priority? How do these individuals feel about the movement to legalize same-sex marriage in California? What issues do they consider more important than same-sex marriage? The literature considered here will include an exploration of the history of the LGBTQ movement and the marriage equality movement; the debate over same-sex marriage, both within and outside of the field of social work; an explanation of the theoretical lens used here and finally other issues that face LGBTQ individuals as considered by the field of social work.

#### American LGBTQ History

On June 27<sup>th</sup>, 1969, the New York City police raided the Greenwich Village bar the Stonewall Inn in New York. Police raids of bars known to attract a homosexual clientele were fairly common at this time; what distinguished this raid was the fact that the bar patrons fought back and how it has been remembered in popular culture since 1969. Although this event is often cited as the first time patrons fought back, and as the catalyst for the modern LGBTQ movement, there were other raids that resulted in backlash and political organizing prior to Stonewall, such

as Cooper's Donuts in Los Angeles in 1959, Dewey's Deli in Philadelphia in 1965, and Compton's Diner in San Francisco in 1966 (Mecca, 2009). Stonewall is unique in the way it has been constructed in society's collective memory and the fact that there is now a yearly celebration to commemorate gay pride and Stonewall (Armstrong, 2006). Stonewall does mark an important moment in American history, and although it was not the beginning of radical gay and lesbian activism – there were about 50 gay organizations before 1969 and more than 800 just four years later – it is often considered as such. In this way, Stonewall marks the solidification of “a large grassroots movement for liberation” stemming from the work of previous homophile organizing (Hall, 2008, p. 657).

Some of the organizations that predated Stonewall were the Mattachine Society, formed in Los Angeles in 1951, and the Daughters of Bilitis, formed in San Francisco in 1955, the Society for Individual Rights (1964), and the Council on Religion and the Homosexual (1965). Most of the early homophile organizations provided a space for socializing as well as political activity, working with health care professions and publishing literature. The Mattachine Society and most other early homophile organizations were made up predominantly of men, with the exception of the Daughters of Bilitis (DOB). The DOB in its earliest years promoted integration and assimilation for the readers of its publication (*The Ladder*), trying to project the image that lesbians are just like everyone else, like “middle-class, heterosexual, white American women” (Esterberg, 2004, p. 430). The members of their group drew firm boundaries between themselves and lesbians who were less conformist, advising their members to avoid the butch and femme presentation that was more common for working class lesbians, and instead to present themselves in a socially acceptable manner. DOB and its publication, *The Ladder*, changed over

time, and in 1970 the Ladder split from the organization and shifted its focus entirely to the women's liberation movement (Esterberg, 2004).

The Daughters of Bilitis undoubtedly paved the way for later more radical organizations, such as the Radicalesbians and the Gay Liberation Front and contributed to the Women's Liberation movement and the Civil Rights movement, but like any organization was fraught with complexities and problems (D'Emilio, 1983). As already discussed, the early days of the movement pushed for assimilation and convincing society that lesbians are just like everyone else or "normal", at the expense of women who were not conventionally gender conforming, mostly working class women. Additionally, lesbians of color expressed that they felt marginalized by groups such as DOB, which were comprised primarily of white women. Some lesbians of color expressed that they felt marginalized from some civil rights groups because of their sexuality and struggled with white women in lesbian and feminist organizations around issues of race and class. As Ramos (in Esterberg, 1994) argued

After many years of searching for "a" movement where all parts of me would be accepted, I finally realized that each of these movements could not *by themselves* bring out the kind of society which would insure the eventual elimination of all forms of oppression ... [E]ach of them tries to force us to ... highlight some parts of our identity at the expense of others (Esterberg, 1994, p. 440).

The radical spirit of organizations that eventually emerged from many of the earlier homophile movements seemed to demand a more widespread transformation of society and an end for oppression of all people.

Fueled by the civil rights movement, the women's movement, anger about the Vietnam War, and with the groundwork laid by those movements that had come before, the gay and

lesbian movement in the 1970s, especially with the founding of the Gay Liberation Front (GLF) after Stonewall, captured a radical spirit of transformation and liberation (Hall, 2008). Mecca (2009) cites Richmond and Noguera's 1973 publication *The Gay Liberation Book* who wrote, "we have a commitment not just to homosexual liberation but to total human liberation" (p. xi). Mecca, a member of the early GLF, writes that the movement was about "tearing down all boundaries," and flaunting differences as opposed to trying to blend in as did many of those who came before (p. xi). He acknowledges many of the same problems that plagued the DOB and so many other movements from this time period (and arguably movements today), that "sexism, transphobia, and racism within the nascent movement led to split-offs by women, transgenders and people of color" (xii).

Forty-one years later, we find ourselves in a time where "marriage and military service and adoption and ordination into the priesthood are suddenly 'gay issues,'" as conveyed by the popular media (Sycamore in Ruiz, 2008, p. 237-8). Lisa Dettmer of KPFA radio in Berkeley, California wonders, "How has the gay rights movement gone from radical days of Stonewall to a mainstream gay marriage movement?" (Dettmer, 2010). This study will attempt to elicit some of the stories of individuals who hope to maintain a more radical spirit of the Stonewall days, specifically in regards to the marriage equality movement as it has become such a prominent and polarizing national conversation.

### **Debate over Same-Sex Marriage**

In much of the popular discourse, the debate over same-sex marriage seems to consider two opposing viewpoints – that of individuals and groups who believe same-sex marriage is wrong, immoral and should not be permitted, and that of individuals who support same-sex marriage, and call for a repeal of the federal Defense of Marriage Act (DOMA). In California, in

2008 Proposition 8 was put on the ballot to define marriage as between a man and woman. During the campaign leading up to the election, the argument was presented as those supporting “Yes on 8,” or those who wanted California to deny marriage to same-sex couples, or those supporting “No on 8,” those who wanted California to continue to allow marriage rights to same-sex couples. This dichotomous view of the debate did not allow any room for any variation or dissent within the LGBTQ community. Although there are arguably an endless amount of stances on the struggle for same-sex marriage in California and the United States, this study considers three existing camps of thought: 1) those individuals who believe that marriage should be defined as being between a man and woman exclusively; 2) those who believe that same-sex couples should be allowed to legally marry; and 3) LGBTQ individuals who are frustrated by the dominant role of the movement for same-sex marriage in the community as a whole. This study will focus primarily on the debate between the latter two.

Within the third group, the arguments include many different perspectives. Some call for the need for social services to get more involved in the debate over same-sex marriage (LaSala, 2007; Woodford, 2010). Some literature explores whether “marriage” as it stands should be called into question and re-envisioned (Lannutti, 2005; LaSala, 2007; Lindenberger, 2009; Sommers, 2010; Woodford, 2010). Several studies explore how people in same-sex relationships define their relationships without marriage (Riggle & Rostosky, 2010; Reczek, Elliott & Umberson, 2009; Sommers, 2010). A few of the arguments focus on the need for social service professionals to spend their time on issues that most benefits people’s lives, and what the cost of focusing on marriage may be for the community as a whole (Dettmer, 2010; Ettelbrick, 1989; LaSala, 2007). One major limitation of the current body of empirical literature is that it is narrow in scope, focuses on homogenous populations, specifically along lines of race and socioeconomic

status (Lannutti, 2005; Reczek, Elliott & Umberson, 2009; Riggle & Rostosky, 2010; Sommers, 2010).

**Need for social service engagement.** Several writers encourage social services, to get more involved in the same-sex marriage debate. LaSala (2007) argues, “lesbian and gay activists and social workers are notably silent on whether it is fair that “marriage bestows the privileges that it does onto relationships” (p. 181). Similarly, Woodford (2010) emphasizes the need for social services to more fully enter the dialogue and debate around same-sex marriage. Social science has been contributing to the literature, but “it is important that the social service field establish its own body of empirical and theoretical work on same-sex marriage and other relationship recognition alternatives for LGBT individuals” (p. 3).

**Problematize marriage.** Much of the current literature focuses on whether, instead of working towards marriage equality, if the very notion of marriage should be problematized. LaSala (2007) posits that

rather than assimilating to society’s narrow sexual and relationship norms by seeking to uncritically adopt the institution of marriage, gay men and lesbians must illuminate the relevance and unfairness of the privileges attached to it. Social workers ethically bound to support social justice and self-determination must join them. (p. 182)

Similarly, Woodford (2010) wonders perhaps instead of focusing on same-sex marriage, we should instead work towards validating same-sex relationships in other ways, or validating other forms of relationships. Woodford goes on to explain, that the debate among proponents of same-sex marriage is whether it would bring about true equality for same-sex couples or whether

marriage is inherently problematic and if same-sex marriage is an attempt to make LGBT relationships heteronormative.

Another relatively common argument that emerges in the popular discourse is whether everyone, gay or straight, should have civil unions afforded by the government and leave religious institutions to perform marriages. Lindenberger (2009) described how two Pepperdine law professors arguing on opposite sides of the marriage equality debate came to consensus that the best way to put an end to all the lawsuits over the issue is to separate marriage and the government altogether. In addition to bringing an end to the ongoing lawsuits, this would equalize relationships for heterosexual and same-sex couples alike.

Lannutti's (2005) study asked 288 LGBT participants in an anonymous web-based study, "In your opinion, how may legalizing same-sex marriage change the LGBT community for the better?" and "In your opinion, how may legalizing same-sex marriage change the LGBT community for the worse?" (p. 8). The responses were analyzed based on four themes. The first was legal equity, in which many respondents addressed this theme and argued that marriage equality would benefit the community for the better along the lines of first-class citizenship, financial benefits, and family security. The next three themes were described as "deeper dialectical tensions" in which "people experience simultaneously contradictory forces" (p. 10). The first of these themes is that same-sex marriages would either encourage LGBT couples to take their relationships more seriously, or they would marry for the wrong reasons. The next theme was that same-sex marriage would make the community as a whole stronger through validation or unification or weaker through stigmatization, in that marriage will become the norm which would marginalize those who choose not to marry for whatever reason, and assimilation, in the gay community assuming heterosexual norms. The last theme was that relating to the

relationship between the LGBT community and heterosexual others, that it could encourage healing or that it would force visibility, in that people in their community will know they are gay due to them marrying and potentially increase the risk for LGBT individuals. This study helped to elicit some of the, sometimes contradictory, opinions of LGBT individuals; the biggest limitation is that the participant pool was 93% white. The current study hopes to gather a more representative sample of the population and expand upon these findings.

In an online survey of 102 asexual, or people who do not experience sexual attraction, Sherrer (2010) found that the same-sex marriage debate re-inscribes the privileging of certain types of relationships and does little to support anyone who falls outside of that sort of relationship. She argues that the focus on dyadic, monogamous relationships re-marginalizes individuals who are asexual, polyamorous, or aromantic, meaning those who experience little to no romantic attraction to others, and reinforces the societal privileging of sex based intimacy over all others. This study represents a fairly limited population – the participants were 82% white and 73% female.

**New definitions.** Several studies explore how LGBT individuals define their relationships without using the notion of “marriage.” Sommers (2010) conducted an exploratory study of 13 LGB participants in the San Francisco Bay area who chose not to get married in 2008 when it was temporarily legal in California. This study posed four questions: 1) What influenced their decision *not* to marry; 2) how do they define their commitment and 3) the ways they feel they have marked their commitment to one another; and 4) how they relate to the marriage equality movement. Her findings indicated that their resistance to marriage is threefold: There were conceptual, resisting the concept of marriage, familial, that marriages may not have worked in their families of origin, and social, or normative expectations, deterrents. She also found that



the marriage equality movement impacted upon them positively – that it could lead to more recognition and normalization, as well as negatively – that the movement feels more fragmented politically and that there are possible new lines for discrimination. Participants recognized both positive and negative effects of the marriage equality movement. The participants in this study were all over the age of 40, almost entirely white, and fairly well educated. It helps to illuminate some of the beliefs and arguments of LGB individuals who chose not to marry. This study will attempt to gather a more representative sample and build upon these findings.

Reczek, Elliott and Umberson's (2009) qualitative study used a life course perspective to examine how "individuals construct their commitment-making stories and how those constructions reflect societal changes and life stage positioning" (p. 740). The researchers conducted one and a half hour interviews with 20 same-sex couples that have been together between 8 and 27 years. They found that legality was most important to couples; they were unlikely to have commitment ceremonies as they felt this would not make a difference in their relationships. They also found that couples thought of commitment ceremonies as secondary to the commitment itself for those couples that did hold the ceremonies. Couples in the study saw commitment ceremonies as a celebration of their relationship, but did not see it as a defining moment, in that it did not alter their relationship in a major way, as is more commonly the experience with heterosexual relationships when they get married. This study contributes useful data to the body of literature about LGB individuals and why they choose or don't choose to have commitment ceremonies, as opposed to or as the only alternative to marriage. The researchers encourage future research to creatively interrogate what marriage and commitment means to different social groups and people in all relationship formations. The sample was

overwhelmingly white and privileged, although the findings offer an interesting perspective on why couples may choose not to mark their relationship with a ceremony.

Riggle and Rostosky (2010) conducted an online correlational survey and drew 2,677 LGB participants. They used relationship status – either single, dating without commitment, commitment without legal recognition and legally recognized relationships – as their independent variable. They had four dependent variables - perceived stress, depressive symptoms, internalized homophobia, and meaning of life. They found that “being in an intimate same-sex relationship that has a legally recognized status is associated with reports of significantly less psychological distress and more well being than being single or dating” (p. 84). This study supports same-sex marriage for individuals who feel that this is an important value of theirs, as the legalization of the relationship offers a protective effect against depression, stress and internalized homophobia. However, this study does not interrogate how same-sex marriage affects those who do not desire this sort of legalization of their relationship or who choose a different sort of relationship structure.

Schechter (2008), in a mixed methods exploratory study of 50 married and unmarried same-sex couples in Massachusetts, examined and compared relationships between the married and unmarried couples, looking at their “Relationship Story” or how they think of their relationship over time. They found that the 27% of the sample that *did not* have a ceremony did not do so for three main reasons, either they were not ready for a public ceremony, they did not feel the need for a ceremony, or they did not want to participate in an inherently patriarchal institution. Some of the participants who had married felt that their marrying deepened their relationship in profound ways, while some worried about the lack of uniqueness for the gay and lesbian community by participating in the heteronormative tradition. This study offers an

interesting and informative perspective during a unique historical moment, and illuminates the impact marriage has on individuals and communities, as well as potential widespread acceptance and decreased homophobia. The main limitations were a somewhat homogenous sample and the fact that it, out of necessity, was only conducted in one geographic location. This study will potentially expand on these findings and offer perspectives from a different geographic location.

**What are the issues?** Very little of the existing social work literature centered on same-sex marriage focuses on what issues other than marriage which might be important, but a few take this on. Although marriage is important for those that want it, LaSala (2007) feels it is possible that energy being funneled into the marriage equality movement could be better served elsewhere, like “the quest for affordable health care for everyone, no matter what a person’s sexual orientation or marital status” (p. 182). Although this article consists of one person’s opinion, it is possible that the current study will support this argument or will elicit some variation of this belief.

Ettelbrick (1989) argues “marriage runs contradictory to two of the primary goals of the lesbian and gay movement: The affirmation of gay identity and culture and the validation of many forms of relationships” (p. 124). Furthermore, she believes that “more marginal members of the lesbian and gay community (women, people of color, working class and poor) are less likely to see marriage as having relevance” to struggles for survival. She questions how affirmation of relationships through marriage would be of any use to marginalized groups of a marginalized community (p. 126-7). Future studies could explore this issue of whether more pressing issues take precedence for marginalized members of the LGBTQ community.

**Limitations and gaps.** All of the empirical studies considered here have the same limitation: Homogeneity. Riggle and Rostosky’s (2010) participants are mostly females,

educated, and white. Reczek, Elliott and Umberson's (2009) participants were 80% white and with incomes ranging from \$40,000 to more than \$80,000 annually with over half in the latter category. Lannutti's (2005) participants were 93% white. Lastly, Sommers (2010) had a small sample size and a lack of diversity – 12 of her 13 participants were white, they ranged in age from 44-71, and all were well-educated and middle to upper middle class. This study attempts to gather a more representative sample of the population to address this gap.

### **Arguments from Individuals and organizations outside Social Work**

Although the field of social work has not yet considered the content and research question of this study, many individual, activists, political organizers, academics, historians, and theorists have written and spoken about this issue. Included are some of these arguments as their writings offer possible hypotheses for the current study, as well as informing the interview questions. Breen and Blumenfeld (2001) argue that this is a moment in history where issues around same-sex marriage and military service “garner media attention, but do so at the expense of issues and groups whose sexual practices, gender expressions, and political assumptions do not readily accord with those of a cultural mainstream” (p. 7). Judith Butler, one of the current leading queer theorists, expresses her dismay that “so many national gay organizations have taken the right to marriage as the most important item for the gay political agenda” (in Breen & Blumenfeld, p. 20). Although she disagrees with the homophobic opposition to gay marriage, she also opposes the same-sex marriage struggle on four counts. The first is that it privileges long term monogamous relationships when the LGB community has been struggling to establish other forms of allegiance and intimacies. Secondly, she argues that privileging same-sex marriage breaks allegiance with all other forms of families, such as single mothers and unmarried straight people. Thirdly, she feels that it shifts the attention away from the AIDS epidemic, which still

very much needs resources and research. Lastly, she believes that the struggle for same-sex marriage upholds that only married couples are worthy of health benefits. She concludes, “we leave the most vulnerable people behind in this current effort to make ourselves over as married couples” (p. 20).

Nair (2010) argues that the liberal/progressive left position on marriage is an uncritical acceptance of gay marriage, devoid of interrogation. She notes that in 2008, the US saw a spate of teen suicides (which also occurred this past year), which led to the argument that marriage would cure bullying and suicide by removing the stigma, but she believes that the “wish to bestow dignity upon queers is in fact deeply rooted in fear and loathing of the unmarried and a neoliberal belief that the addition of private rights tied to the state’s munificence will end all social problems” (p. 2). She argues that the core of the problem is society’s fear and intolerance of any deviation from the norm. She asserts that health care should be a much more important concern than marriage, and that other countries, like Canada or Norway, legalized same-sex marriage only after they had guaranteed health care access for all citizens. Nair also believes that the conceptualization of marriage as a solution “perpetuates the very inequalities that gay marriage advocates claim to resolve” (p. 6). Stanley (2010) also argues that same-sex marriage will do nothing to subvert the systems of domination in this country.

Bornstein (2010) asserts that the movement is wasting resources that could be used to save people’s lives instead. She believes that “the fight for ‘marriage equality’ is simply not the highest priority for a movement based in sexuality and gender” and that it is time to “do some triage and base our priorities on a) who needs the most help and b) what battlefield will bring us the most allies” (p. 13). Spade and Willse (2010) think that we should,

take the energy and money being put into gay marriage and put it toward real change:

Opposing the War on Terror and all forms of endless war; supporting queer prisoners and building a movement to end imprisonment; organizing against police profiling and brutality in our communities; fighting attacks on welfare, public housing and Medicaid; fighting for universal health care that is trans and reproductive healthcare inclusive; fighting to tax wealth not workers; fighting for a world in which no one is illegal. (p. 20)

Stanley (2010) argues that the marriage equality movement is framing the argument as completely binary – either you’re with us or you’re against us – which silences any chance of a debate and public discourse.

Farrow (2010) expresses his anger that the movement to legalize same-sex marriage uses the civil rights movement to gain traction in their struggle, although he believes the “history of terror” inflicted on generations of black people in this country does not “in any way compare to what appears to be the very last barrier between white gays and lesbians’ access to what bell hooks describes as ‘christian capitalist patriarchy’” (p. 29). He goes on to note that even 40 years later, little has actually changed for black people in this country.

John D’Emilio (2010), a prolific historian of LGBTQ issues in the United States, believes that not only has the movement towards same-sex marriage inadvertently created new anti-gay laws in many individual States – by bringing defeats in the courts, and some important victories – it also runs against history. He believes that since the 1960s, with a de-emphasis on the nuclear family, an increase of divorce rates, the ability of young people to cohabit and procreate outside of a marital arrangement, as examples, heterosexual realities have come to more closely resemble the imagined lives of homosexuals. In other words, as a nation, we have been moving

further away from such an intense focus on marriage and more towards a decentralization of marriage, which seems contradictory to the marriage equality movement.

### **Theoretical Lens**

Object Relations theory is a building block of psychodynamic theory, one of the four psychologies that inform modern clinical psychotherapeutic social work practice. Melanie Klein, one of the pioneers of Object Relations theory took up an investigation of an infant's early life and how these early experiences contribute to the adult life and relationships. She formulated a developmental model, based on the idea of basic *positions* we can occupy in our lives, the "paranoid-schizoid" and the "depressive" positions. The use of the idea of positions, alludes to the fact that while it is a developmental milestone to be able to move from one position to another, all people move back and forth between positions over the life course.

When the child is born, and is occupying the paranoid-schizoid position, most of his or her experience is characterized by the relationship with the mother, specifically through breast-feeding. Thus the child sees the mother as either a good breast, which is characterized by "wondrous nourishment and transforming love" infusing "him with life-sustaining milk" and enveloping "him in loving protection" or a bad breast, which is "hateful and malevolent, has fed him bad milk" which poisons him from within, then abandons him (p. 92). This position is in some ways easier for the baby to occupy, and for adults over the life course; it is easier to understand the world in divisions of good and bad, to think of people or issues in total or complete states.

When the infant moves to the depressive position, he is able to incorporate good and bad images into the same relationship. Depressive love is characterized by a cycles of hatred and reparation. In order to maintain this position, the child (or adult) must believe that his love is

stronger than his hate, although they can exist simultaneously. In this position, one must encounter the conflict of wholeness. “To be whole, one must give up the purity of ideal goodness and total badness” (Flanigan in Berzoff, 2008, p.137). This is a challenging position to maintain, and Klein believed that everyone vacillates between the two positions over the life course.

In regards to popular political ideologies or social movements, it is much easier to look at a complicated issue from the paranoid-schizoid position, to divide the world into good and bad. Arguably this way of thinking and perceiving the world is deeply ingrained in our society, it tends to be the way that elections get won and laws get passed. In regards to this study, the popular discourse around the same-sex marriage debate seems to be framed as a black and white issue, on one side are individuals who do not think that same-sex couples should be allowed to marry, for a wide variety of reasons ranging from religious beliefs to a destabilizing of the notion of marriage, and on the other those who feel that same-sex couples should be allowed this right and all the same rights of their heterosexual counterparts. On the side of the individuals committing their time and energy towards fighting for marriage equality, it is in their favor to frame the debate as either “you’re with us, or you’re against us,” framing the argument so that those who aren’t on their side seem homophobic, or discriminatory in some way; potentially making the argument more palatable for mass consumption.

This study seems to occupy the depressive position and is debatably full of contradictions, or “dialectical tensions.” Tsang (2001) explains, “the theory of dialectics is that the recognition or the generation of contradictions is necessary for producing new knowledge or change.” It is possible that the participants in this study will occupy a complicated position, as people who identify as LGBTQ who do not necessarily commit their political energy towards this gay flagship issue. Hypothetically most of the respondents, while not believing marriage



equality is the most important concern, will not condemn those who do identify this as a primary concern, simultaneously seeing both the good and the bad in the issue.

### **Other issues facing LGBTQ individuals**

It seems that the field of social work has been engaged in the same-sex marriage debate mostly to demonstrate how marriage equality is beneficial. The National Association of Social Work (NASW), in its code of ethics, sets out its commitment to service, social justice and valuing the importance of human relationships. The issue of marriage equality is certainly a social justice issue, especially in the face of rampant homophobia and a legacy of discrimination. In this way, it is logical that the field would value the importance of gaining rights for an oppressed population and support empirical studies to do just that. This study is meant in no way to detract from the importance of gaining rights for individuals who are fighting for this right, for couples who feel that they would want the label “marriage” for their own relationship or believe that it should be legalized regardless of their own personal desires.

Additionally, as social workers, we are trained to attend to the most basic and pressing needs of clients, communities and populations. A cursory review of the literature reveals this commitment, for although the specific issue considered in this study has not been investigated deeply; all the issues that are arguably being overlooked by the focus on marriage are certainly included within the larger body of social work research. In this section, I will discuss some of the more immediate and basic needs of LGBTQ individuals, and of all people, that are included within the literature, both as potential hypotheses of issues that may be more important to the participants included in this study as well as to illuminate other important concerns. More important concerns, as considered by social work are issues pertaining to LGBTQ homeless

youth, basic safety and bullying in schools, the long history of HIV and AIDS, access culturally competent health care, other health concerns facing LGBTQ individuals.

LGBTQ youth are overrepresented in the adolescent homeless population. The Gay and Lesbian Medical Association (GLMA) states, “estimates of lesbian and gay homeless youth vary, but youth service providers agree that rates are very high, ranging from 20 to 40 percent in various studies” (GLMA.org, 2010, p. 311). This is an extremely vulnerable population, at higher risk of contracting HIV and other sexually transmitted infections (Rew et al., 2005), depression, suicidal ideation and intravenous drug use (Rhode, 2001). Due to their vulnerability and risk, there has been much attention focused on this issue within the field of social work, as well as psychology, nursing, any service providers who have a commitment to serving the underserved.

Even for LGBTQ youth who are not at risk for homelessness, as a population they are more vulnerable to bullying, depression and suicidal ideation and attempts. GLMA states “six studies found that rates of various measures of suicide ideation and attempts were three to seven times higher among gay and lesbian youth than heterosexual youth. The suicidal ideation rate in one needs assessment of young transgender people was 28 percent, with 17 percent reporting actual suicide attempts (GLMA.org, 2010). Birkett et al. (2008) report that according to a 2006 school climate survey, 91.4% of their sample of LGB middle and high school youth sometimes or frequently heard homophobic slurs in school. In unsupportive school environments, LGBTQ youth are much more likely to consider or attempt suicide (Proctor and Groze, 1994).

One of the issues that has been taken up by the field of social work has been the AIDS epidemic. Since the 1980s, HIV/AIDS has ravaged the LBGTQ community. Although it was once thought of as a gay man’s disease, its impact is far reaching. According to the Centers for

Disease control, Men who have sex with Men (MSM) account for more than half (53%) of all new HIV infections in the U.S. each year, as well as nearly half (48%) of people living with HIV. However, a result of it being thought of as exclusively a gay man's disease, other communities it affects have been negatively impacted. For example, low-income women of color who have sex with women are rendered almost invisible to government researchers, health care providers and the HIV service community (Arend, 2005). Another issue that is particularly relevant today facing the LGBTQ community related to the AIDS epidemic is the risk of transmission for men who have sex with men and use crystal methamphetamine, as the latter can lead to high risk sexual behavior and increase the transmission of HIV (Halkitis, Parsons, & Stirratt, 2001).

These are just a few of the issues that continue to face the LGBTQ community that social work researchers have focused their attention and energy on. It seems imperative to devise appropriate interventions and treatment considerations for the most vulnerable and oppressed populations. This study is an attempt to gather stories from members of a marginalized population and possibly display their commitment to focusing their political energy and attention on individuals most basic needs.

## **Conclusion**

Although the need for same-sex marriage is extremely important to those individuals who are dedicating their lives to it, the literature considered here proposes a need for more points of view being discussed within the public debate. There seems to be a particular need within the field of social work to get involved in the discussion, as the perspectives considered here are seemingly absent in the social work literature. Social work as a field places particular emphasis on defining issues based on people's self-defined most acute needs. This study proposes an

exploration of a group of people who may be marginalized members of an already marginal population; those LGBTQ individuals who *do not* believe same-sex marriage should be the main priority in the LGBTQ community.

## **Chapter III**

### **Methodology**

The purpose of this study is to gather stories from LGBTQ individuals, living in the San Francisco Bay area, who do not identify marriage equality as their main form of political activism. This study focuses on eliciting the stories of these individuals, specifically around why marriage equality is not their primary concern, how they feel about marriage equality as a political issue and what other concerns seem more relevant or important to them.

The research design of this study is qualitative and exploratory, using semi-structured, open-ended, interview questions for data collection. Since these questions do not seem to have been posed within the field of social work, I used exploratory methods to draw out rich and nuanced data. Exploratory means seemed most appropriate for this rarely researched area (Rubin & Babbie, 2010).

Some definitions of the major concepts I use are important to outline. I use the term LGBTQ to indicate members of the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer community. I include transgender, for even though it describes gender identity, not sexual orientation, I want to be as inclusive as possible considering all the possible definitions people might use to describe themselves. Additionally the term “queer” is one that is problematic for some individuals and deeply meaningful for others, and I use it in the hope of being as inclusive as possible. I alternate between same-sex marriage, which is a more neutral term, and marriage equality, which is value laden, in order to mirror the language that people use. Additionally, I am aware of the fact that the use of the term “same-sex” could potentially re-inscribe a binary view of sex and gender,

when in reality both are incredibly multifaceted and fluid, as well as overlooking intersex individuals.

### **Sample**

Snowball sampling was used to recruit 13 participants. I had originally planned to utilize many methods in recruiting participants, hanging flyers in Queer organizations and neighborhoods (see Appendix A), and emailing organizations and colleagues. However, with one email to professional colleagues and personal contacts (see Appendix B) and posting the flyer in a queer health clinic, I was able to recruit more people than I had space for within my study. In the email, I asked colleagues to pass on the information to individuals who they believed would fit the criteria, as well as to post on any potential list-serves or any organizations of which they may be members. Participants then emailed me to express their interest. I responded with the letter of informed consent and we set up a time to talk and a location, and completed a brief screening to ensure that they fit the criteria of the study (see Appendix E). The sampling technique may be biased because of the fact that people passed the information along to people they knew, but I feel confident that recruitment spread far beyond my more immediate community.

In order to participate in the study individuals had to identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender or queer, they had to be over the age of 18, speak English fluently, live in the San Francisco Bay area and not identify same-sex marriage or marriage equality as their primary political concern. All of my participants fit the requirements of the study and volunteered to contribute and signed the letter of Informed Consent.

## **Data Collection**

Before the interviews I asked participants to sign the Informed Consent (see Appendix C) reminding them that participation in the study was voluntary. I also reminded them that I would be recording the entirety of the interview and asked if they had selected a pseudonym or if they would rather I choose one for them. I informed them that the questions I had selected were largely open ended, intentionally so, and asked them to share only what they felt comfortable with sharing, being clear that some of the questions might feel redundant but that I wanted to be careful to cover all topic areas. During the interviews, I asked demographic questions to provide a context for the participants varied experiences. I asked participants about their age, their gender or gender identity, their racial and/or ethnic identity, their highest level of education, their current employment status, their religion or spiritual practice and their current relationship status. I then moved to the open-ended questions, which included questions about their sexual orientation, political activism, thoughts on same-sex marriage and issue they prioritize (see Appendix F).

## **Data Analysis**

The data was analyzed using content analysis by looking for common themes in the interview transcriptions of participants. I used an inductive method of data analysis based on my observations from the data I collected. This allowed me to locate themes, commonalities and differences within the data without having to seek out a definitive conclusion, which would be inappropriate for an exploratory qualitative study (Rubin & Babbie, 2010).

## **Description of Sample**

There were a total of 13 people who participated in the study. All participants lived in the San Francisco Bay Area, in both Oakland and San Francisco. All participants were over the age

of 18, ages ranged from 24 to 59 years old, with a median age of 29 an average age of 33 and a mode of 27. Eight participants identified as female, one as “femmish – genderqueer,” one as genderqueer, two as male, one as “male bodied faggot.” Six participants identified as white, two identified as white and Jewish, one as white and Italian American, one as Italian American, one as African American and Native American, one as Arab/Anglo or as “other,” and one as Latina. In terms of education, six people identified bachelors as their highest level of education, two had masters, one had a Juris Doctorate, one had a PhD and two masters, two are currently in graduate school and one is in graduate school and has another masters degree already. Six participants were employed full time, two part time, one reported being “underemployed,” three were in school and employed part time and one was unemployed. Four participants identified no religious or spiritual affiliation or practice, one reported occasional Unitarian Universalism, three identified as culturally Jewish, three identified as spiritual but nonreligious, one identified as a Sister of Perpetual Indulgence, and one as ambivalent. In terms of relationship status, one reported being legally married, one identified as polyamorously seeing someone, two as being in open relationships, two as single, one as “unsure,” four as being in partnerships for 2.5, 3, 6 and 12 years, one as “slutty romatic,” and one as “single, or fuck buddies.” All participants identified as something other than straight, as this was a requirement of participation, and their sexual orientations and identities will be discussed in the next chapter, as this question was included in the open-ended question portion of the interviews.



Table 1: Participant characteristics by pseudonym

<b>Pseudonym</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Gender or Gender Identity</b>	<b>Racial or Ethnic Identity</b>	<b>Highest level of Education</b>	<b>Current Employment Status</b>	<b>Religion or Spiritual Practice</b>	<b>Current Relationship Status</b>
A.J.	27	Female, woman	White, Jewish,	Master's of Art	Employed, teacher, odd jobs	Kind of nonexistent	Partner of 2.5 years
Amy	28	Female identified	White	In graduate school, has a Master's of Art	Student and Researcher	Occasionally Unitarian Universalist	In an open relationship
Connie Pinko	24	Genderqueer	White	Bachelor's degree	Unemployed	Sister's of Perpetual Indulgence	Polyamorously seeing someone
Dawn Davenport	48	Female	Caucasian	PhD and two masters	Full time, but not permanent	Jewish, culturally	12 year relationship
Ecila	27	Femmish – genderqueer	White,	Two Bachelor's	Full time at a community health clinic	Spiritual practice, yoga	Unsure, uncertain
Gemini Twin	29	Female	African American, Native American	JD	Employed	Spiritual, raised Southern Baptist	3 year partnership
Jamila Rashid	31	Female	Arab/Anglo – “other”	Bachelor's	Underemployed, web designer	Belief in god, not religious	Single
Jennie	25	Female, woman	White,	Undergrad	Full time, nonprofit	Culturally Jewish	In an open relationship
Julie	30	Female	White	Master's in education	Full time, Instructional designer	Culturally Jewish, occasionally practicing	Single/ It's complicated
Margarita Navarro	39	Female	Latina	College	Self employed, not full time	Not currently, raised Mormon	Partnered for 6 years
Mark	27	Male Bodied, Identifies as a Faggot	White	In graduate school	Works for University	Ambivalence	Slutty Romantic
Peter Hughes	29	Male	White	Graduate, Master's of Science	Part time	No	Married
Sal	59	Male	Italian American	B.A. in Creative Writing	Full time, Housing rights	Proud Atheist	Fuck Buddies, Single

This sample is not representative of those in the LGBTQ population who do not identify marriage equality as their primary political goal – but the findings offer perspectives from an under studied portion of this population.

### **Ethics and Safeguards**

In order to protect the participants, I made the voluntary nature of participation clear during the initial phone screening, in the informed consent form (see Appendix C) and in person before conducting the interview. I reminded participants that they can withdraw from the study at any point until April 1, 2011 and all information related to their participation would be destroyed immediately. A few of my interviews were conducted after April 1, and for those participants I changed the date on the informed consent to April 15 or May 1, 2011. I also asked participants to come up with pseudonyms, did not use their real names in any of my notes or transcriptions, and kept their informed consent forms in a separate, secure location. A few participants chose not to come up with a pseudonym themselves, so for those participants I selected one for them. I did not use a transcriber, so no one other than myself came into contact with the raw data at any point. Additionally, I offered participants a list of low cost therapy if they at any point felt they might need support (see Appendix D).

The following section will outline the major findings from this study. It will include a presentation of participant's sexual orientation or identity, sense of community based on sexual orientation and political activism. It will then move to an exploration of participant's feelings on same-sex marriage as a political issue – how it affects their lives, other issues in the LGBTQ community and finally what issue they prioritize over this concern.

## **Chapter IV**

### **Findings**

Each participant was asked to provide a pseudonym at the start of the interview, and in the event that they chose not to, I selected one for them. I will briefly introduce each participant to help individualize them as well as to contextualize their responses.

AJ is a 27-year-old, white, queer woman who has a master's in art, and is in a 2.5-year monogamous relationship. She expresses complicated feeling towards the marriage equality movement, strongly identifies as an anti-racist activist, and believes some of her activism stems from her work as an art educator, although she struggles with the reality that most of her students are relatively privileged due to the fact that they have access to higher education.

Amy is a 28-year-old, female identified, queer, white person who already has one master's and is currently in a Master's in Social Work program. She is in an open relationship. She identifies as increasingly anarchist and believes that real change cannot come from within the existing political structures.

Connie Pinko is a 24-year-old, white, genderqueer, queer identified person who holds a bachelor's degree, is currently unemployed and is in a polyamorous relationship. They are quite politically active, working closely with the Sister's of Perpetual Indulgence doing philanthropic and community-based work. They prioritize focusing on fighting for people's more basic rights over issues of marriage equality.

Dawn Davenport is a 48-year-old, Caucasian, queer, female who has a PhD and two master's, identifies as culturally Jewish and has been in a monogamous relationship for the past

12 years. She is a historian and discusses her investment in preserving queer history, but believes that people's more basic needs must be met first.

Ecila is a 27-year-old "femmish," white, queer person who has two bachelor's degrees and is "unsure" of her current relationship status. She works at a community health clinic and explains the emphasis she puts on one on one interactions and recognizing people's individual dignity.

Gemini Twin is a 29-year-old African American and Native American, lesbian, female with a Juris Doctorate and has been in a monogamous relationship for the past three years. She believes the issue of marriage equality is a civil rights issue, but points out the racism she perceives within the movement and does not believe that legalizing same-sex marriage would alter anyone's opinions on gay and lesbian people in this country.

Jamila Rashid is a 31-year-old, Anglo/Arab queer female who is single, underemployed and has a bachelor's degree. She expresses a significant "rage" at the current political climate of this country and thinks economic justice and corporate responsibility are more important to her than marriage equality.

Jennie is a 25-year-old, white, Jewish, queer female who has an undergraduate degree and is currently in an open relationship. She works for a nonprofit that does social justice, diversity and peace building work. She discusses how she deeply feels that another world is possible and she feels committed to working towards her ideal vision.

Julie is a 30-year-old, white, queer female who has a master's in education, works designing professional development courses for teachers and is currently single. She identifies as having a strong sense of justice and equality and feels that it is more important to work towards

people's more basic needs and is frustrated by how our society privileges couples over all other forms of relationships.

Margarita Navarro is a 39-year-old Latina, lesbian who has a college education, is self employed and has been in a monogamous relationship for the past six years. She does not identify as politically active, but supports her partner who strongly identifies. She feels that marriage equality is an inevitable but she does not choose to put her energy towards this issue.

Mark is a 27-year-old, male bodied, white, faggot identified person who is currently in graduate school, works part time for the university and identifies his ongoing relationship style as "slutty romantic." He is involved in the Radical Faerie community and while he believes that marriage is inherently flawed, does feel like the movement carries symbolic weight but believes we need to address people's more basic needs first.

Peter Hughes is a 29-year-old white, queer and bisexual male who is currently pursuing a Master's of Science and is legally married to a woman. He explains that he feels that same-sex marriage should be legalized and that he is able to enjoy all the benefits of marriage as a post transition transgender person, but believes people's more basic needs should be addressed first.

Sal is a 59-year-old, Italian American, queer person who has a B.A. and works for a housing rights organization and does not believe in relationships. His main political concern is issues of economic justice and believes marriage is an oppressive institution.

### **Group findings**

The thirteen participants living in the San Francisco bay area were interviewed about their sexual orientation, political activism and thoughts on the marriage equality movement. Most people who participated in the study identified their sexual orientation as Queer (n= 10) and do identify with the larger Queer community based on their sexual orientation. Most

participants do identify as politically active, with most participants identifying their job as a form of their activism. When asked about marriage equality, most participants identified that they can understand why it is important for people and although they feel supportive of it as a political issue, they think that too much money, resources and organizing energy are going towards it. Participants had a large range of issues that are more important to them, a majority of which were health care and economic justice.

This chapter explores the major themes that emerged from the interviews conducted. Participants were asked about which word or words they use to describe their sexual orientation, what the word means to them and whether they feel that they are a part of any community based on their sexual orientation. They were then asked to reflect on if they identify as politically active and then what motivates this political activism. Next they reflect on their feelings about same-sex marriage as a political issue, about the movement specifically in California, about whether they feel that this movement impacts their life or any other important LGBTQ concerns. Lastly, they were asked what issues feel more pressing or important to them. Participants were also allowed additional time to reflect on anything that might have come up for them during the interview or anything that might not have been covered by interview questions.

### **Sexual Orientation**

Of the thirteen participants interviewed, ten identified their sexual orientation as “Queer,” and cited various personal meanings, two identified as “Lesbian” and one as “a Faggot.” Of the ten participants that identified themselves as queer, seven identified both sexual orientation as well as some sort of political ideology. One participant, AJ, explained, “being queer to me feels like as much as it is about my sexual practice and desire as it is about my politics and community and the way that I choose to live my life.” Another participant, Jennie, shared that Queer for her

“represents the way that [she] walk[s] through the world in terms of [her] sexuality that’s different than what the world tells us it should be. And it’s also an honoring of histories and political struggles that has reclaimed that word.” Another participant, Sal, defines the word as being “outside norms of sexuality, as defined by this culture.”

Of the three participants who did not cite political reasons, all three identified gender inclusivity or fluidity as reasons for using the word. One participant, Ecila, shared that she uses Queer to mean “non-heterosexual normative” and that everyone she has been in romantic relationships with have identified as “genderqueer.” Another participant, Julie, explained that she has had relationships with both men and women, and feels that queer is the most comfortable for her – “most open to change and fluidity.” Lastly, Peter explained that he identifies as both bisexual and queer, as he has had relationships with men, women, and transgender individuals and considers himself sexually attracted to all three of those categories.

Both participants who identified as lesbians based their sexual orientation solely on their romantic relationships with other women. One participant, Gemini Twin, explained that she uses Lesbian because she is in a same-sex relationship, but that this identity does not fall within the first 5 indicators of her identity. Another participant, Margarita, stated “lesbian is a good short hand word to describe my orientation because I think whatever sorts of assumptions people are making about that are probably pretty accurate for me.”

Lastly, the one participant, Mark, who identified as a “faggot” both in his gender identity and sexual orientation described, “when I use the word faggot, to me it’s a way of politicizing my gender performance and my sort of sexual life.”

## Community

Five participants shared that they actively identify with the queer community, three identified that they are members of the queer community by default, three identified they do not identify with any community based on their sexual orientation, one identifies with the “radical faerie community,” and one with the FtM community.

AJ, who identifies with the queer community, does not identify with gay and lesbian culture, and also identifies with an artist community. Jamila also has a challenging time with more mainstream gay and lesbian culture, especially with the prevalence of butch/femme roles as they replicate heteronormative principles in her mind. Amy has come to feel more of a sense of belonging in the queer community and feels that a sense of community is quite important to her. Connie identified that they identify with the queer community, but also identify with lesbians and dykes and the bear community. Julie explained that she does identify with the queer community, in which she includes sexual orientation and gender variance.

Two participants, Dawn and Mark, struggled with the idea of community. Dawn explained that she has always felt “fringy” and does not feel like “we’re all monolithic because we have same-sex relationships.” Mark identified his wariness with the concept of community because of its basis on exclusionary principles, but does identify with the Radical Faerie community.

Gemini Twin, who identifies as a lesbian, was the only participant who clearly stated that she does not identify with any community based on her sexual orientation or identity.

Ecila explained that she feels a part of the queer community “by proxy” and that it feels important to find people that we see ourselves reflected in. Jennie feels a part of the queer



community “but not officially” and values queer spaces. Margarita feels that she is a member of the queer community “by default,” but that it is not a conscious decision.

Both Sal and Peter do not identify with any community based on their sexual orientation. Peter identifies with the female to male transgender community. Sal identifies the community that he is most connected with as being “groups of people who are the people who are struggling for economic justice no matter who they sleep with.”

### **Political Activity**

Six participants identified as politically active, one did not identify as directly politically active, five identified as less politically active than in the past or less than they wish they were, and one identifies as moderately politically active. Additionally, eight participants identified their current job as a part of their political activism.

AJ explains that she volunteers for housing rights and working with women and transgender people in prison. Amy identifies as increasingly politically active, but does not currently consider herself involved with any political movements. Connie identifies as politically active, especially in work through the Sisters of Perpetual Indulgence, an organization of “21<sup>st</sup> century nuns that do a lot of philanthropic and political community building work.” Gemini Twin identifies as actively political through educating herself around issues she cares about, and occasionally attending rallies and fundraisers. Peter, although he does not consider himself an activist, does feel politically active through voting and an occasional rally. Sal identifies as politically active in areas of social and economic justice.

Margarita does not identify as politically active, but she feels like she contributes to being “a good citizen of the world” through supporting her activist partner. She also sees her writing, her voiceover work for radical cartoons and her standup as political. Ecila identifies as

“moderately politically active,” but feels that she can “connect much more with people than ... with political ideas because ... [she] can have much more of an impact when [she is] dealing with people one on one.”

Five participants identified as either less politically active than they once were or than they would like to be. Dawn feels that while she considers her work in a GLBT historical society as somewhat political, she does not identify as politically active. Jamila feels that she is a lot less politically active than she was in college and attributes this to her feelings of pure rage at what is happening in this country and sense of feeling a “little more powerless to do something, or maybe a little more - jaded.” Jennie and Mark both describe being less active than they have been in the past, Jennie feels like she was much more active in the past and is currently not as much as she would like, while Mark describes feeling like he is “in a bit of a spell right now” focusing on his studies. Lastly, Julie describes being less political than in the past and feels like she is more personally political now, but keeps herself aware.

An interesting theme that emerged in the interviews was the fact that eight of thirteen participants identified their jobs as a component of their political activism. Two participants who are currently in school describe their scholarship as a type of activism – Mark is currently doing research around HIV prevention and hopes that it will have an important impact, and Amy is in a social work program and expresses the politicism in this work for her, especially practicing “anti-oppressive social work.” AJ works within the arts and teaches classes within institutions, bringing her lens and commitment to anti-racist activism into that work. Julie works in education reform, creating “professional development courses for teachers” and identifies this work as politically meaningful to her. Dawn is an historian and believes preserving Queer history, especially her commitment to try to “diversify the collections that we have to make sure that

they're more representative of the larger queer community that exists." Ecila considers her work in a community health clinic "which serves many many queer, trans people also women, also immigrants, also low income and uninsured people" as important to her. Jennie works with an organization that educates youth from around the bay area in "peace building, conflict resolution skills, understanding and appreciating diversity, we teach them about stereotyping and prejudiced discrimination" as 'peace work' as opposed to 'activist work, but sees it as a part of her dedication to creating a better world. Lastly, Sal considers his work at a housing rights coalition as working towards economic justice.

### **Motivation behind Activism**

Participants were asked to identify what motivates their political activism, now or when they have been more active in the past. Responses were similar, but ranging in that three people identified their upbringing as motivating them to act, three feel some sense of doing what is "right" and eight spoke to some sense of being compelled or obligated to help others.

AJ shared that she was raised in a feminist household and she has moved from a focus on gender equality to expand her commitment to racial and economic justice as well. Connie shared a story of crying their eyes out after witnessing a rally about "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" as a child where the Westboro Baptist Church was present with "God Hates Fags" signs and their parents supporting their desire to *do* something. Jennie describes a mixture of internal and external factors that contribute to her activist sensibility, particularly being raised in a Jewish community and at times feeling frustrated by the unilateral focus on helping out the Jewish community when there are so many other people in need.

Peter believes his motivation comes from an inner sense of what is "right," from wanting equality and financial concerns. Jamila shares her motivation to act politically when she feels

like there is a need for visibility in political movements. Ecila explains her desire to work one on one with people affected by political decisions.

Amy explains “I think the farther one is from suffering, the greater the obligation to alleviate the suffering of others.” Connie believes that “seeing inequity in various forms” motivates their political activism, Dawn expresses a desire for equality. Gemini Twin offers “when people are being taken advantage of, by power structures that gets me really passionate.” Jennie believes there is something innately about who she is in believing “that it’s possible to create a different kind of world.” Julie identifies a sense of justice, her own idealism and a search for truth as her motivation. Mark feels that being active is an “absolute necessity” for him and that he does it for himself and hopes he will reach others in the process. Sal locates his motivation in a “sense of the total immorality of the unequal distribution of wealth and resources in our culture.”

### **Opinions on Same-Sex Marriage as Political Issue**

Participants were asked what their opinion was on Same-sex Marriage as a political issue and there was a large range of responses. Some of the major themes that emerged were those who either do not think about it or that it is not a priority issue for them, those who think it is important for people who hold that as a goal for their lives, those who think there is too much time, money or energy being funneled into this issue, those who spoke to some sort of critique of marriage or description of the movement as “assimilationist,” and lastly those who either described a personal focus on more basic needs or alternatively a feeling that this movement is tailored to the more privileged.

**Not concerned.** Five respondents described that they are not interested in the marriage equality movement. AJ reported not spending much time thinking about it and Ecila indicated

that she hears about it peripherally. Both Amy and Sal explained that it is not, and never has been, a priority issue for them, with Sal stating very clearly “not my priority.” Jennie shares that she is “over it,” but that she was never really “into it.”

**Important for people who want it.** Seven participants shared that they understand why people want it or that they value the fact that it is important for people for whom it is a priority issue. Peter answered very concisely that he thinks it should be legalized and knows people for whom it is quite important. Similarly, Gemini Twin argued that it is a civil rights issue and that people who want that right should have it. Dawn, Jamila, Jennie and Margarita all expressed that it is important for people who want it, but that they still have concerns about it being such a priority: Jamila does not think it should be required to validate relationships; Sal, who strongly criticizes the institution of marriage believes that as long as it exists, everyone should have the right to participate; Jennie describes it as a “symptom of a very sick world and it would be cool to fix it.”

**Too much time, money, energy.** Six participants reported that they believe that too much time, money or energy is going towards this one movement. Ecila expressed “that the energy that is spent on it can be utilized more intelligently and more appropriately in other areas of political and social justice.” Julie shared that same-sex marriage is “funneling a lot of those resources and funding away because it’s an issue that’s easy to label as queer and it draws a lot of people to it because it’s a way for people to find community.” Sal believes it is a “black hole that is sucking out our energy, time and money” and expressed his frustration that \$43 million was spent on the Proposition 8 campaign.

**Assimilation or critique of marriage.** Four participants expressed some amount of belief that the movement is inherently assimilationist in nature and four others shared a critique

of marriage as an institution. Both Amy and AJ explicitly use the word “assimilation” in regards to the movement to legalize same-sex marriage, while Dawn and Margarita both spoke to the fact that they believe the movement is about encouraging queer people to conform to heterosexual values or heteronormativity. Julie expressed that rights like health care or immigration status should not be linked to marriage in any way, Sal described marriage as an “innately oppressive institution,” and Mark believes that marriage is inherently exclusionary.

**Basic needs ignored or privileging.** Three participants shared in answering this question that they feel like the movement is ignoring more basic needs that face people, although others addressed it in later questions. Additionally, two participants explicitly used the word privilege – Connie shared that the people who “are willing to put time and money into the fight for marriage are the people who have the time and money to put into the fight for marriage.” Additionally, Julie shared that she read in an essay that described the struggle for marriage equality as “a grab for privilege rather than a fight for justice,” in that the marriage equality movement is privileging the already privileged as opposed to struggling for justice for everyone.

### **Movement in California**

Participants were then asked to reflect on how they have felt specifically about the movement to legalize same-sex marriage in California in 2008. Responses varied from individuals feeling disconnected to feeling somewhat supportive of the movement, to feeling angry about the blaming of communities of color here in San Francisco.

**Ambivalence.** Three participants shared that they were either ambivalent or disconnected from the movement here in California, AJ was in graduate school and so feels like she paid little attention during the campaign and felt “ambivalent”, Amy shared that she did not live here at the

time so she does not hold a strong history with the movement, and Ecila expressed that it was “not very interesting” to her.

**Supportive or affected.** Eight participants expressed some degree of support and/or being affected by the movement here in California. Peter shared that he is in a unique position as a queer person who is legally married as a post transition transsexual and has enjoyed the financial, social and personal benefits of having this status. While he can understand the desire to do away with marriage, he does not see this as possible and so supports the movement. Gemini Twin explained that she had volunteered for the ‘No on 8’ campaign (the only participant who mentioned that they had), but found it to be an unwelcoming environment as a person of color. Jamila expressed that she is glad people are putting their energy towards the movement.

Connie and Julie both shared that they felt surprisingly wrapped up in the movement on election night 2008 and felt like they were unable to fully celebrate the election of Obama in light of the passing of Proposition 8: Connie described it as “a social justice issue” and Julie shared that it felt like a “slap in the face” and the “legitimizing and institutionalizing of homophobia.” Margarita, Jennie and Mark all expressed feeling affected by it, even if not fully behind it: Margarita was frustrated by the denial of rights, Mark felt like there is a symbolic weight of the loss and believes it could open certain doors, but shut others as well. Jennie shared that she felt the effects of the loss but did not feel like she need to work towards it because she knows “people are going to be fighting that battle and so [she is] more useful other places.”

Three participants mentioned their sadness or anger that communities of color were blamed for the passing of Prop 8. Amy spoke to how marginalizing that conversation must have been for queer people of color. Dawn expressed that she saw it as a lost opportunity for coalition building. Gemini Twin expressed that the white mainstream gay community has totally

dominated the discourse around this issue, felt really upset about the criticism of the Black community, especially considering she, as a Black lesbian, had volunteered for the campaign. She shared that she thinks, “the problem is the communication to the black community, and particularly the black gay and lesbian community.”

### **Impact on Life**

Participants were next asked if they felt like the movement to legalize same-sex marriage impacts their life in any way and if so in what ways. Responses to this question included one participant who reported no impact, some who felt it could be positive, some who feel frustrated, and some who feel like it has made them more aware of discrimination or they have found the experience thought provoking.

**Potentially positive.** Both Connie and Jamila spoke to the positivity of a national conversation about gay people and gay lives, Connie expressing no intent to marry but appreciating a potential normalizing affect, Jamila speaking to potential for visibility and acceptance. Gemini Twin revealed that she and her partner both see a contract as unromantic, but she appreciates the potential protections provided to them and tax implications. Similarly, Margarita feels that the legalization of same-sex marriage is an inevitable and believes that she will reap the benefits of that work should she decide to get married.

**Frustration.** Ecila shared her frustration about the issue detracting from issues she feels more committed to and that she has no intention to marry, but recognizes her privileged position and possibly taking the benefits of marriage for granted. Julie shared that the movement does not particularly affect her life except that in that people expect her to have a strong opinion on the issue as a queer person. She also shared her frustration about all the energy spent on it. Sal expressed his deep frustration with the movement, as it affects his ability to raise money and



awareness for homeless and poor communities. He sees Gay Marriage as a front-page issue that detracts attention from other queer issues. Lastly, Mark feels like the prevalence of marriage equality in popular culture and his subsequent strong reaction to it causes him to be more self-critical, he relates, “if I want to be sort of vehemently against this then I have to be prepared to answer questions like you’re asking me of well then what do you want to see and what would be a better strategy?”

**Awareness of discrimination.** Amy, Dawn and Margarita all share that they feel more aware of discrimination against them and ongoing homophobia due to the prevalence of the issue and the passing of Proposition 8. Amy feels that although it is not her personal goal to marry, she also doesn’t “want to be overtly discriminated against or have other members of my community for whom that is a goal be overtly discriminated against.” Dawn describes feeling more aware of ongoing homophobia in this country and Margarita shares her frustration about having to pay higher taxes as Domestic Partners as opposed to being a married couple. Jennie shares that she feels marginalized by the movement to legalize same-sex marriage as she feels outside the mainstream LGBT community and does not relate to their goals. Peter, although he does not feel that the movement impacts his day-to-day life, he has friends who want to marry and he also has a, potentially irrational to him, fear that his own marriage could be called into question, as he was born female.

### **Impact on other LGBTQ concerns**

Participants were next asked whether they believed that the focus on same-sex marriage impacted any other important concerns within the LGBTQ community and if so, in what ways. All participants felt that there was an impact, the majority of individuals expressing that it felt like it was taking away from other important issues. Around half the participants communicated

their commitment to prioritizing more basic needs over marriage equality, and a quarter stated that this movement makes the already marginalized more marginalized. A few respondents expressed their concern about racism within the LGBTQ community.

**Distraction.** Seven participants stated that they believe that the focus on same-sex marriage is distracting or detracting from other, potentially more important concerns. AJ feels like it “robs us of a more holistic and complicated view of queer politics.” Dawn believes it draws attention from other issues, Amy feels that it distracts from other more important issues, Ecila feels that it takes away opportunities to respect other family structures, Julie believes that it pulls resources and energy, Sal describes it as a “black hole” and Margarita “other conversations get circumvented because we have put all of our queer energy into this issue.”

**Basic needs.** Additionally, six participants feel that in the focus on same-sex marriage, we are overlooking people’s more basic needs. Connie expressed “it’s all about that hierarchy of needs, right? Like people are willing to ignore the fact that there are a lot of people who are still just trying to make that bottom part of the hierarchy, if we’re not addressing those needs then we’re really doing a huge disservice to our community. Similarly, Ecila shares, that the marriage equality movement leaves people “scrambling at the bottom and everyone is going to be working towards different things and goals and energies are going to be dispersed and resources are going to be dispersed.” Margarita calls into question “what’s happening to poor communities of color where there are both queer and non queer people, immigrant communities where there are these horrible injustices that are being committed. And I feel like as queer people of conscious” we should be engaging in the larger scale conversations. Gemini Twin argues that “for people who are lower income, who are struggling with just finding health care, finding shelter, finding a

place to live and getting treatment if they are HIV positive those are the issues that I don't think gay marriage is going to affect."

**Further marginalization.** Five participants believe that the focus on marriage equality affects the most marginalized individuals, both inside and outside the queer community and only serves to benefit the already privileged. Amy argues that the more that we focus our attention on the marriage equality movement, "the less we are focusing on issues that affect the most disenfranchised and marginalized members of our community." Dawn believes that the focus on same-sex marriage "does draw attention away from other issues, and again not even just queer issues but just this focus on these normative things like the military and marriage it just makes it hard for people on the margins who don't have money to buy food." Peter, who supports the movement, does believe that "such a focus on marriage has really excluded some of the most marginalized queer people from the discussion and we're focusing more on marriage than, we're focusing on marriage at the expense of thinking about other issues too." Lastly, Mark describes the movement as a "battle for accumulating unnecessary resources," leaving the marginalized by the wayside.

**Racism.** Three participants discussed the issue of racism within the queer community. Dawn believes that an issue that the LGBTQ community could focus on instead of marriage "is to fight the racism, sexism, classism, transphobia, etc. within our own community." Jamila argues that as queer people, she feels like there is some inherent difference, and that within that there is so much

difference that it doesn't really make sense to say this is only our issue because there is so much injustice and so much bullshit going on that we can't really afford, I mean numbers wise, to isolate ourselves in not including, say racism, as one of our big issues.

Gemini Twin, who lives in the Castro neighborhood of San Francisco, which she sees as dominated by white, privileged, mainstream gays, argues that this movement does nothing to address the issues of racism within the community or within the movement specifically.

### **Important Issues**

The last open-ended questions participants were asked were, as LGBTQ people who do not identify marriage equality as their primary concern, which issues do they choose to focus their energy or attention on, or which social or political concerns do they prioritize. The biggest issues that participants discussed were the need for health care (n=6), issues of economic justice (n=7) and immigration reform and rights (n=5). Other issues included housing rights (n=2), prison reform (n=1), education (n=3), the Employment Non-Discrimination Act (ENDA) (n=2), concerns about the military and current wars (n=2), addressing various ‘isms (classism, racism, sexism) (n=3), police having too much control (n=1), youth – specifically queer youth (n=1), issues of safety and violence (n=1), and one person who identifies as an anarchist and thinks we need to entirely dismantle the current system as it is.

AJ discusses the importance she places on housing as a primary political concern as if you have a roof, a stable roof over your head all other things are possible, it makes it more possible to get a job, it makes it more possible to take care of your body, it makes it more possible to have healthy relationships with people, so that I feel like is something that I continue to be really invested in and I think of as one of my primary political causes and motivations.

Amy explains that she has become increasingly anarchist and it’s hard for her to think of some of these “issues within the preexisting political structure ... because the preexisting political structure is inherently flawed.” Jamila states that she sees a big issue both within and outside the

queer community being “racism, classism, sexism, homophobia and the fact that it’s virtually invisible and people think that it’s fixed somehow.”

### **Final Thoughts**

Finally, participants were allowed some time at the end to share any final thoughts, anything that might have struck them over the course of the interview. Four participants declined to use this time, stating that they had shared all they wanted to. Some themes that emerged during this portion of the interviews were the importance of recognizing alternative family structures, the need for coalition building, various personal reasons and a sense of deep idealism.

**Alternative family structures.** AJ spoke to the tension she feels around this issue, that she doesn’t think marriage is the answer, but she also doesn’t want to offend people for whom marriage is quite important or who have been together for 40 years. She shared:

I think that what would be ideal to me and the vision that I hope that becomes a reality is to see different relationships be treated, be legitimized regardless... it just seems like there needs to be a lot more work and more conversations around what constitutes a family and also how important love is.

Similarly, Amy states that “I think it is ultimately just about expanding our understanding of what we think of as a support network and as a family unit to be more inclusive and providing adequate support to those groups and the members of those groups.” Lastly, Julie believes that the fight is not really about queer people and straight people, but more about how our society privileges couple hood over all other forms of families “think that it’s less about queer people achieving equality with straight people and more about people being treated as individuals and not being funneled into this particular family structure that doesn’t necessarily fit for a lot of people.”

**Personal reasons.** Three participants cited the possibility of personal reasons affecting their ability to critique the marriage equality movement, or not being interested in fighting this fight. Peter states that as a queer person who is already married (he being the only participant in the study who is married) so perhaps that is the reason why the issue is less pressing for him. Gemini Twin wondered if one of the reasons she has the space to criticize the movement is the fact that her parents are not accepting of her sexual orientation and would not attend a ceremony regardless of whether same-sex marriage became legalized. Lastly, Mark states that he has never been particularly good at or interested in relationships, so perhaps that is why he is able to critique it. He states,

I wonder am I staunchly opposed to it because of that or is it because I've always thought that I wasn't on a pathway like that that allows me to be more staunchly opposed because I've never really perceived it, or it's not one of my, not even political but I don't really think that's ever going to happen in my life course.

He wonders whether that allows him the freedom to be “anti same-sex marriage.”

**Coalition building.** Dawn clarifies that she respects other's opinions, she just sees a lost opportunity and feels “like the progressivism of the new left and gay liberation has somewhat been lost and I'd love a civil rights movement that was more like the example of the, just more broad based coalition of workers and people of all different races...” Additionally, Jamila believes that

We can't separate our issues from everybody else who is struggling. And numbers wise the number of people who are discriminated against, looked down upon, at the short end of the systemic stick are so much bigger than the ones who actually have power if we were to find a common ground, they would be in trouble.

Similarly, Jennie holds onto her idealism of want to, and believing we can create another world and “to know that we are so far away from it and so many people are not even near thinking of it that we have a lot of other work to do.”

### **Dialectical Tensions**

All of the participants in this study shared some sort of dialectical tension, or opposing viewpoints on this issue. Julie phrased it as “so I guess I’m arguing with myself now” and Jennie expressed the importance for her of “holding onto both” opposing viewpoints. Participants shared both personal and political conflicts, of not identifying this issue as their primary concern, while simultaneously holding the importance of it for others or themselves.

Eight participants shared their beliefs that while this issue is not what they choose to spend their political energy on, they can understand why it is such an important issue. Amy expressed that she “is working really hard to not alienate people for whom that is an important” political cause, and that she simultaneously does not feel personally committed to getting married, she also “does not want to be overtly discriminated against.” Dawn clarified that she is “not anti gay marriage” and that she can understand the benefits of marriage for people who value its importance. Jamila explains that it is “fine for people who want it.” Mark feels that this issue

does bear symbolic weight in terms of a narrative of progress which I don’t necessarily agree with but that can open many more doors but also close off a lot as well... it would probably be a good thing ... I’m just wary of the doors that I think it might close by securing that kind of status.

AJ shares that has “ambivalent” feelings about marriage and how the queer community expresses feelings about the movement, she feels like she stands “in the middle of what [she] see as two different arguments in [her] community, and although she doesn’t feel like she “needs that in [her] own life” but that doesn’t mean that she doesn’t “recognize how important this is for them. [She] gets really frustrated with a lot of the ‘I’m so radical, fuck your 40 year relationship,’ because [she] doesn’t think that helps anybody.”

Sal explains that he was involved in the Gay Liberation Front and the goal there was to eliminate marriage because it was about “ownership of women and children” and that it “was never about love, love is a more modern concept.” He shares

I still look at marriage and think Why? Why does anybody want to be a part of it? On the other hand of course, I think that as long as we have marriage, people of the same-sex or people who whatever, who want to get married should have that right.

Peter expresses that many of the queer people he knows “have been motivated to sort of fight against the institution of marriage as a whole, rather than fight for same-sex marriage – eliminating marriage because marriage shouldn’t be the only way in which a person gets social and financial benefits” but does not believe that would happen in his lifetime although he wishes “it were that way.” He then argues that we “should allow people to get married who want to and “hopefully will have some sort of trickle down affect in terms of societies acceptance of gender non conforming and sexually variant people.” Margarita states “There’s no movement for the subtlety... and maybe that’s necessarily so. Maybe there needs to be these two movements on these opposite sides in order for there to be movement in the middle, but I don’t know.” Also she shares how the conversation she would have with her conservative aunt and uncle in Southern California would be very different than with a queer person in SF.



Gemini shares “you know it’s really funny, or ironic, that after, I actually wrote an op-ed on the equation of the black civil rights movement to the gay rights movement and I basically debunked it and was like this is what the problem is right here.” Then in conversation with her father, who is not accepting of her sexuality, she said to him, “you know if the Tea Party went and took over Montana and decided that black people weren’t allowed to vote, that wouldn’t be ok” she “immediately reverted into civil rights arguments and I know that’s not, I know that’s not correct, that’s not how I feel.”

The majority of participants in this study identify as queer, associate with a community based on their sexual orientation or identity, see themselves as politically active and see their job as a form of political activism. Beyond this, the responses were varied and multifaceted in regards to their feelings about marriage equality, about the impact that it has on their lives and what other issues they choose to prioritize over same-sex marriage. The most common finding was that every participant expressed some sort of dialectical tension; they shared contradictory forces about the issue that they can simultaneously maintain; each participant acknowledged that although it is not their primary concern, they believe that there are positive aspects to it.

The next section will discuss these findings and help contextualize the meaning of this study within the existing literature and the larger context of social work. It will also include implications for social work policy and practice, then suggestions for future research and finally the limitations of this study.

## **Chapter V**

### **Discussion**

The purpose of this qualitative exploratory study was to explore the perspectives of people living in the San Francisco Bay Area (n=13) who identify as LGBTQ who do *not* identify marriage equality as their primary political concern. Included was an examination of participant's sexual orientation or identity, their sense of community, political activity, their feeling about the movement and which issues they prioritize over same-sex marriage. Responses were as varied and diverse as the participants interviewed and still some common themes did emerge. This section will relate the findings from this study to the existing literature and theoretical frame. It will also explore the implications for social work practice and policy, limitations, and suggestions for future research.

#### **Relating the Findings to Previous Literature**

The results from this study are consistent with the previous literature, and the participant's responses in this study range in similar ways to the theorists and researchers that have come before. Participants spoke to the potential assimilationist nature of same-sex marriage, or problematized marriage as an institution, they spoke to the necessity of changing the ways that rights are afforded to be more inclusive of other family and relationship structures, or for single individuals. They also discussed the necessity of addressing more basic needs of individuals who are more marginalized, and the fact that marriage plausibly only benefits the already privileged. They also explored this notion of 'dialectical tensions' and demonstrated the capacity to sit in ambiguity around this issue, or in Klein's 'depressive position.'

**Assimilation to heterosexual norm versus redefining relationships.** Some of the findings of this study were consistent with the argument from the literature that same-sex marriage is potentially assimilationist in nature, or that our society holds up a heterosexual model of relationships and privileges that over all other forms of family structures. Participants spoke to their perception of the pitfalls of marriage, in that it has become the pinnacle form of relationship in our society and comes with subsequent rights in a way that no other relationships, perhaps other than biological relationships, are afforded. LaSala (2007) asserts that social work should enter the conversation about which relationships are privileged in our society and for what reasons, an issue tackled by several participants. Four participants spoke directly to their belief that fighting for same-sex marriage is an attempt for queer people to conform to a heteronormative form of relationship and four others critiqued marriage directly. Margarita believes that this movement is a demonstration of the loss of queer ideals, and that it represents, “blending in and becoming recognizable as harmless.” Sal discusses his experience in the early days of the Gay Liberation movement and states, “I still look at marriage and think ‘Why? Why does anybody want to be a part of it?’”

**Alternative family structures.** Many participants discussed their belief that resources and norms should be restructured so that forms of relationships other than the traditional heteronormative models are valued and afforded legal and social recognition. Sherrer (2010) believes that the current marriage archetype we currently have re-marginalizes people who do not fit the mold. Amy asserts, “the more we focus on same-sex marriage ... the less we are focusing on issues that affect the most disenfranchised and marginalized members of our community.” Similarly, Etlebrick (1989) believes that the original objective of the gay and lesbian movement was to validate many forms of relationships, and thinks we have experienced

a dramatic departure from this ideal in the fight for same-sex marriage. Julie questions why marriage is the vehicle for so many rights in our society and believes that it is less about “queer people achieving equality with straight people and more about people being treated as individuals and not being funneled into this particular family structure that doesn’t necessarily fit for a lot of people.”

**Prioritizing basic needs over same-sex marriage.** Many of the individuals interviewed discussed their commitment to working towards issues that face people’s more basic needs first, a couple participants mentioned Maslow’s (1943) hierarchy of needs, or his argument that people begin with a focus on more basic, or physiological needs and then move to safety needs, love needs and so on. Kate Bornstein (2010) and Spade and Willse (2010) argue that gay marriage is using resources and organizing energy that could better be used elsewhere to make bottom-up structural change. Peter, who is a proponent of same-sex marriage, does feel that the issue excludes more marginalized queer people from the discussion and overlooks basic needs like homelessness and the need for adequate health care. Gemini Twin also discusses how the white, gay, mainstream movement has dominated the discourse and gaining marriage rights will not help people with more pressing life-or-death concerns.

**Dialectical tensions: Seeing both positives and negatives.** Another similarity between the findings from this study and the literature as well as the theoretical lens used is in the concept of dialectical tensions. Lanutti (2005) found in her study that the respondents expressed contradictory forces in their feelings about the movement to legalize same-sex marriage, that they can maintain both positive and negative feelings about the possibility of legalization. Similarly, Klein’s theory rests on the notion that this achievement is a developmental milestone, to begin to see people, and by extension concepts, as whole objects, not as split off part-objects.

Every participant in this study exhibited the ability to do just that, with many of them maintaining that while marriage equality is not their primary political concern, they can see a benefit in its legalization. The practice of holding two opposing ideas in mind is a challenging and important ability, and makes political progress more challenging. It seems much easier to package and sell a political idea when the boundaries of it are clearly defined – for example, the potential framing of this debate as either ‘you’re with us, or you’re against us.’ The participants in this study, while ranging in their personal frustrations with this movement, all express positivity about the potential benefits of gaining marriage rights for the LGBTQ community.

**Unexpected finding.** One response that was not considered by the literature was personal reasons for not identifying marriage equality as a primary political concern. Participants mentioned their individual feelings about marriage as an institution, their parent’s lack of acceptance of their sexual orientation, and their own resistance to relationships as potential reasons for not relating to the movement. This finding will be addressed in a later section discussing suggestions for future research.

### **Implications for social work policy and practice**

The question of what issues are more pressing for LGBTQ individuals other than marriage equality is an important one for social work policy and practice. First and foremost, social work’s commitment to helping those most in need is outlined clearly in the National Association of Social Worker’s (NASW) *Code of Ethics* (1996). The first sentence of the preamble to the document states,

The primary mission of the social work profession is to enhance human wellbeing and help meet the basic human needs of all people, with particular attention to the needs and empowerment of people who are vulnerable, oppressed, and living in poverty.

Addressing people and community's basic needs is an issue that is discussed throughout the previous literature and findings in this study, as being the primary concern for individuals, especially queer people.

Although U.S. society has made significant strides over the past 40 years in terms of its acceptance of LGBTQ lives, there is much room for improvement. Issues of homelessness, poverty, lack of access to health care in general, especially affordable care, substance abuse, housing rights, suicidality, and mental health concerns among other troubles still plague the LGBTQ community. Answers to how these concerns can best be addressed are varied, political and profoundly complicated. Proponents of same-sex marriage hope that achieving equal rights will have a systemic effect and the equality will diffuse through the culture. Peter, the only participant who clearly stated that he was in favor when asked how he feels about same-sex marriage as a political issue argued that he hopes that it will have some sort of "trickle down" effect. It is possible that advocates of same-sex marriage and the individuals represented in this study are coming at the same issue of fighting discrimination and working for social justice, but approaching it from a different angle.

Social work maintains a commitment to conducting a needs assessment before implementing any intervention, in clinical work, in communities or in policy-making decisions. It is interesting that there seems to be a fairly silenced or silent group of people within the community who do not identify with the marriage equality movement and do not feel that it would affect their life or lives of those most in need. Brian Basinger of the San Francisco AIDS Housing Coalition argues,

The reality is for the folks that I know and the folks that we work with here is that there is not a lot of upper middle class gays coming down to the tenderloin and swooping up a

homeless disabled person with AIDS living on 843 dollars a month. And suddenly going to take them under their wing and provide them with all the benefits of marriage and access to their corporate health insurance. I don't see a lot of that happening. So regardless of whether those people over there get marriage rights, nothing in our lives here in the tenderloin is going to change (Dettmer, 2010).

It seems possible that if the groups and organizations who put so much money and political activism into this issue had taken a more thorough needs assessment of the diverse LGBTQ community about which issues are most important or critical to the LGBTQ community, they would have found a variety of concerns other than same-sex marriage.

An issue that came up throughout the interviews was the questioning of why we, as a society, still hold marriage up as the ultimate goal, with monogamous, dyadic unions being the only valid forms of legitimate relationship. AJ states

I think that what would be ideal to me and the vision that I hope that becomes a reality is to see different relationships be treated, be legitimized regardless. Because we have grandparents who take care of grandchildren and aunts and uncles who take care of their grandchildren and children and people who take care of their parents and adopted families and foster families and queer people raising kids together in all kinds of different variations of that and it just seems like there needs to be a lot more work and more conversations around what constitutes a family and also how important love is.

According to the U.S. Census (2009) 49.9 percent of all households in California are married-couple families, which begs the question, what is the family structure of the other 50.1 percent? Although there are undoubtedly incredible personal and emotional benefits to marriage, as well as over 1,300 legal rights and responsibilities that are currently attached to this form of family

structure, there are an infinite amount of relationship structures that exist in this country. The organization Beyond Same-Sex Marriage (2006) explain “household and family diversity is already the norm” and argue that all forms of family structures should be legitimated and bestowed legal and social rights. Examples of alternative household or relationship structures they include are: adult children living with and caring for their parents; grandparents and other family members raising their children’s (and/or a relative’s) children; households in which there is more than one conjugal partner; blended families; single parent households; extended families living under one roof, whose members care for one another. It seems that the field of social work has a responsibility to advocate all forms of family and work to ensure that every person’s values and relationship are recognized and protected. It is curious that people are celebrated or penalized based on who they do or do not choose to have relationships with.

### **Limitations**

Although the 13 participants who responded to this study offer unique and valuable perspectives to the research question posed, the results are not generalizable to the LGBTQ community as a whole. The sample is limited in a few different areas. First, it is limited to people only living in the Bay area of California. This particular geographic area is urban, relatively expensive to live in and overwhelmingly liberal. Also, this location carries a deep and complicated history for the movement to legalize same-sex marriage, as it has been legal in San Francisco during two different time periods, in 2004 and again in 2008, and then the rights have been revoked. LGBTQ people living in the bay area perhaps have no choice other to consider this issue. The results of this study might have been quite different if the study had been conducted in a different location. Secondly, the participants in this study are mostly White, female and between the ages of 24-31. Also, everyone in the sample had a college education or



beyond, with some people possessing multiple advanced degrees. It would have been ideal to include more racial, gender and age diversity in this sample to represent more of the LGBTQ community.

Snowball sampling was used in the recruitment process, which might introduce some bias into the findings. I sent a recruitment email to colleagues, classmates, and friends who I thought might have some interest in the topic and asked them to distribute the information and flyer widely (see Appendices A and B). Next, I had planned on posting the flyer in organizations and neighborhoods known to be frequented by LGBTQ people, I did not do so because as a result of the email I received a flood of participants who were eager about the topic and enthusiastic to join the study. Although I am confident that the email spread much farther than my extended community, as a result of it launching from my network, it could introduce some bias.

Additionally, as a result of this study utilizing qualitative methods, there is a reasonable chance that this introduces personal bias into the results. How I followed up on questions, my facial expressions, verbal and nonverbal gestures undoubtedly influenced the way participants responded to the questions asked and tailored their responses accordingly. Although I attempted to be as neutral as possible, this is a topic that I have a great deal of interest in and easily get passionate about, even when I am making a concerted effort to temper my reactions. Also, the fact that I am a white, queer female, who is of a middle to upper socioeconomic status and am currently pursuing an advanced degree, inevitably influences my own thoughts and feelings as well as the reactions of the people interviewed. Undoubtedly when two people sit down together they affect each other in ways that may not be perceptible or vocalized and reflecting on my own subjective experience is important.

### **Areas for future research**

One potential area for future research would be to try to gain a larger, more diverse sample and to potentially try to compare findings based on demographic criteria. In the coding of this data, I did not find any significant relationships along the lines of any demographic information, but as stated before the sample was small and somewhat homogenous. Another area of potential expansion of this work would be to look in other geographic locations, potentially to explore whether there are any differences between places where same-sex marriage is already legalized or in more conservative places where legalization of same-sex marriage does not appear to be a potential possibility in the near future. It would also be interesting to compare people's opinions over time. For example, many respondents in this study mentioned that around the time of the Proposition 8 ballot initiative, they were more supportive of the issue; several mentioned that the passing of Prop 8 felt like "a slap in the face" or was disappointing. It is possible that if they were interviewed in the fall of 2008 as opposed to the spring of 2011, they might have offered different perspectives.

An unexpected finding from my study that was not included in the interview questions was personal reasons for not identifying marriage equality as a primary political concern. Mark discussed his resistance to romantic relationships of any form, monogamous or polyamorous, which caused him to wonder if that allowed him the freedom to be frustrated with the movement. Similarly, Gemini Twin expressed very clearly that she felt confident that her parents would not accept her sexuality even if same-sex couples were allowed to marry, which might have contributed to her resistance to consider marriage for herself. An investigation into LGBTQ individual's personal and familial reasons for being attracted to or resistance to same-sex marriage would certainly offer rich perspectives to a discussion of marriage equality. In

hindsight I would have liked to delve into this area more deeply and to have asked participants directly about this theme. Future research should explore how personal reasons can impact upon their position on the issue of marriage equality.

Another potentially interesting study that could offer a great deal of depth and value to the debate would be to do a comparative study, to try to recruit people who identify marriage equality as one of their primary political concerns and to ask the same set of questions to both groups and compare results. This was a possible structure for this study, but due to the small sample size it was outside of the bounds of what could be accomplished. Additionally, this is a marginalized or silenced group within a marginalized population and the hope was to gain a more in depth picture of what this group of people thinks and for what reasons.

One participant, Julie, raised an interesting point that this is “an issue that’s easy to label as a queer issue ... it draws a lot of people to it because it’s almost a way for people to find community.” This is an obviously “Queer” issue, and perhaps queer people gravitate towards it for that reason. AJ believes that marriage equality’s impact on other concerns within the community “it takes away from the opportunity for stable housing to be viewed as a GLBTQ issue or health care or sustainable, healthy communities, our relationships to each other.” Marriage has an obvious appeal because the argument becomes about love and allowing queer people to love whomever they choose. It would be interesting to examine how, or whether, it would be possible to rally queer people around another, more basic issue such as housing or health care.

### **Contextualization and Conclusion**

During the eight-month course of this project, I was working in a field placement at a community clinic, serving women – with a focus on queer women – transfolks, uninsured and

low-income individuals. Throughout my time there, the clinic found itself in the middle of its “perfect storm,” due to the country’s current financial crisis, a freeze on Medicare payments and funding sources drying up, among other complicated and unfortunate reasons. The clinic was teetering on the edge of closure and was a million dollars in debt. The Queer community in the Bay area stepped up in astounding ways, with grassroots fundraising and individual donations keeping the clinic afloat. This example is presented to share my personal frustration at the realization that over forty million dollars were raised to contribute to the same-sex marriage efforts, while this clinic that is so profoundly vital to the community it serves could barely stay afloat needing comparatively so much less money. It is an example of health care becoming a visible queer issue that can be rallied around and also to share my personal astonishment and unending gratitude for the people who contribute their time, money, energy and lives to serving the most marginalized and disenfranchised members of our community.

This study offers an attempt to create a space to elicit stories from a community that seems somewhat absent from the dominant discourse. Although the only clear commonality throughout all of the interviews was the fact that each participant identifies political concerns other than marriage equality as being most pressing to them, the perspectives offer a richness and nuance to the queer community and the field of social work. Although some queer people are frustrated with the amount of money and attention going towards the marriage equality issue, it seems safe to say that since it has become such a prominent issue that most LGBTQ people hope that it will become legalized. In the field of social work there needs to be people working towards policy change as well as people in direct practice with clients, and those two groups ideally have solid understandings of what the other group is working towards. Perhaps with large scale societal change there needs to be people working on a larger scale, or from the top down,

and concurrently there need to be people doing advocacy work, from the bottom up. With the combination of policy work at the systemic level and grassroots efforts on the individual level perhaps this possible other world could become a reality.

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Appendix A

Recruitment Flyer



## Appendix B

### Recruitment Email for Colleagues/Friends/Community

Hello,

My name is Liz Chandler, and I am a graduate student at Smith College School for Social Work. I am conducting a research project designed to elicit and explore the stories of people who identify as Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgendered and Queer (LGBTQ) who are living in the San Francisco Bay Area, and do not identify same-sex marriage as their primary political concern. This exploratory study will investigate their opinions, goals and priorities other than same-sex marriage as well as explore their perspective on the marriage equality movement.

This confidential, graduate-level research will enable participants to share their stories and have their perspectives heard. Their contributions will provide important information that may be helpful in educating others about the varied views, opinions and goals of LGBTQ people. Participation includes a 45-60 minute interview with the participant and myself.

You or someone you know may offer wonderful contributions to this study if:

- You identify as LGBTQ
- You do not identify same-sex marriage, or marriage equality as your primary concern
- Are over the age of 18
- Speak English fluently
- You live in the San Francisco Bay area

Please review the attached flyer and get in touch if you would like to participate. Also, please pass this along to anyone you know who may be interested *and* to any list-serves or organizations to which you subscribe. Help spread the word!

Please get in touch via email or phone (###) ### – #####.

Thank you!

Liz Chandler

## Appendix C

### Letter of Informed Consent

Dear Research Participant,

My name is Elizabeth Chandler and I am a graduate student at the Smith College School of Social Work. I am conducting a research project designed to elicit and explore the stories of people who identify as Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgendered and Queer (LGBTQ) who are living in the San Francisco Bay Area, and do not identify same-sex marriage as their primary political concern. This exploratory study will investigate your opinions, goals and priorities other than same-sex marriage as well as explore your perspective on the marriage equality movement. I am conducting this research for my MSW thesis, for professional presentation, and for possible future publication.

You have been asked to participate in this study because (a) you identify as LGBTQ and b) you do not identify same-sex marriage, or marriage equality as your primary political concern. In addition, English is your primary language, you are 18 or older. As a participant in this study, you will be interviewed with a series of questions for approximately 45-60 minutes. I will conduct the interview and I may take a few notes during the interview process. I will audio record the interview and then transcribe your responses later in order to ensure the accuracy of your statements. If a transcriber is used, s/he will sign a confidentiality pledge before having access to the recording. In order to conduct the interview, we will agree on a location that is somewhat private and convenient.

Although this is a low risk study, participation in this study may trigger some feelings as you reveal your thoughts and feelings about your own identity, your community and its needs and your feelings about the marriage equality movement. I will provide you with a list of low cost therapy referrals in case you would like support around these reactions. Although there will not be financial compensation for taking part in this study, participation will allow you to share your thoughts, feelings and experiences as an LGBTQ person who does not identify marriage equality as your primary concern. Your contributions will provide important information that may be helpful in educating others about the wide range of social and political issues that LGBTQ people find important. The interview will be a unique opportunity to express your opinions and goals on LGBTQ issues. This information can be beneficial within the field of social work, social policy and politics.

Your identity will be protected in a number of ways. The audio recording of the transcription will be assigned a number for identification. You will not be asked your name or any other identifying information during the recording. In the write-up and presentation, a pseudonym will be created, which will be used to discuss your responses and to protect your identity. I will be the primary handler of all data collected. After all identifying information has been removed; my research advisor will have access to the data collected during the interview including any transcripts or summaries created and may assist in the analysis of the data. Any person assisting

in transcription will be required to sign a confidentiality agreement. I will keep the audio record, the transcripts, consent forms and other data in a locked and secure environment for three years following the completion of the research, consistent with Federal regulations. After that time, all material will remain locked and secured if still being used or destroyed if no longer needed. Should this study be presented or published at any time, the data will be presented as a whole and when brief illustrative quotes or vignettes are used, any identifying information will be disguised and a pseudonym will be used.

This study is completely voluntary. You are free to refuse to answer specific questions and/or to withdraw from this study. If you decide to withdraw, all recordings and data describing you will immediately be destroyed. You have until April 1, 2011 to withdraw from this study. After that time, the interview will be integrated into the written report. If you have any questions or would like to withdraw from the study, please contact Elizabeth Chandler at: **email address or (###) ### - ####** *Please keep a copy of this consent form for your records.* If you have any concerns about your rights or any aspect of the study, you may contact me, or the Chair of the Smith College School for Social Work Human Subjects Review Committee at **(###) ### - ####**.

Thank you for participating in this study.

**YOUR SIGNATURE INDICATES THAT YOU HAVE READ AND UNDERSTAND THE ABOVE INFORMATION AND THAT YOU HAVE HAD THE OPPORTUNITY TO ASK QUESTIONS ABOUT THE STUDY, YOUR PARTICIPATION, AND YOUR RIGHTS AND THAT YOU AGREE TO PARTICIPATE IN THE STUDY.**

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Signature of Participant

---

Date

---

Signature of Researcher

---

Date

## Appendix D

### Low Fee Therapy Options

#### **LGBTQ-friendly Options:**

*Gaylesta, LGBT Psychotherapists Association of the Greater San Francisco Bay Area*

5245 College Avenue, Suite #713

Oakland, CA 94618

Therapist Referral: (888) 869-4993

[www.gaylesta.org](http://www.gaylesta.org)

Raising awareness of mental health issues as they concern the LGBT community through seminars, consultations and speakers, resource and referral services.

#### **San Francisco Therapy Collective**

A queer mental health space

470 Castro St., Suite 205 (at 18th Street)

415-659-8282

(Sliding scale & some insurance)

#### **Iris Center**

Women's Counseling & Recovery Services

333 Valencia St., Suite 222, SF, CA 94103

415-864-2364

(Mental Health Counseling ; HIV Services; Harm Reduction and Drug & Alcohol Recovery Services; Parenting Skills; Childcare & Counseling Services; LGBT Groups; DBT; Sliding scale & Medi-Cal)

[www.iriscenter.org](http://www.iriscenter.org)

#### **Women's Therapy Center**

501 Kearney Street, El Cerrito, CA 94530

510-524-8288

<http://www.womenstherapy.org/>

#### **Pacific Center**

2712 Telegraph, Berkeley, CA 94705

(510) 548-8283

[www.pacificcenter.org](http://www.pacificcenter.org)

#### **Sliding Scale Options:**

##### **Liberation Institute**

<http://www.liberationinstitute.org/>

Phone: 415.606.5296

Email: [info@liberationinstitute.org](mailto:info@liberationinstitute.org)

#### **California Institute of Integral Studies – counseling centers**

<http://www.ciis.edu/x534.xml>

*San Francisco Psychotherapy Research Group*

9 Funston Ave, The Presidio

San Francisco, CA 94129

(415) 677-7946

[http://sfprg.org/low\\_fee\\_clinic.html](http://sfprg.org/low_fee_clinic.html)

*San Francisco DBT Center*

1735-A Union St.

San Francisco, CA 94123

(415) 345-1396

[www.sfdbt.com](http://www.sfdbt.com)

*Oak Creek Counseling Center (East Bay & SF)*

1-888-637-7404

[www.oakcreekcenter.org](http://www.oakcreekcenter.org)

*A Center for Psychotherapy*

(415) 931-4888 (SF)

(510) 849-2878 (Berkeley)

[www.psychotherapycenter.net](http://www.psychotherapycenter.net)

*Jewish Family Services*

<http://www.jfcs.org/Services>

*Marina Counseling Center*

2137 Lombard St

San Francisco, CA 94123-2712

(415) 563-2137

[www.marinacounseling.com](http://www.marinacounseling.com)

*ACCESS Institute*

110 Gough St

San Francisco, CA 94102-5971

(415) 861-5449

[www.accessinst.org](http://www.accessinst.org)

*Psychoanalytic Institute of Northern California*

2252 Fillmore St.

San Francisco, CA

(415) 922-4050

**Community Behavioral Health ACCESS**

888-246-3333 or 415-255-3737

(various clinics in SF that accept Healthy SF/Families)

## **Appendix E**

### **Screening Guide**

I need to ask a few questions to see if you are appropriate for this study. Some of the questions are somewhat personal, but you can refrain from answering any that are uncomfortable to you.

Participation in this study is voluntary.

- 1) Do you identify as Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender or Queer?
- 2) Do you feel that some other social or political concerns are more important at this time than Marriage Equality?
- 3) Do you live in the San Francisco Bay Area?
- 4) How old are you?
- 5) Are you fluent in English?

## Appendix F

### Interview Guide

#### Demographic Questions:

1. Age
2. Gender and/or Gender Identity
3. Racial/Ethnic Identity
4. Education level
5. Employment Status
6. Religion/spiritual practice
7. Current Relationship status

#### Open-ended Questions

##### *Open-Ended Interview Questions:*

(Although some of these questions may seem a bit redundant, I want to make sure I cover all these topics and will tailor my questions accordingly.)

- How do you identify your sexual orientation or identity?
  - What does the particular word you use mean to you?
- Do you consider yourself as politically active? What does this mean to you?
  - What motivates your political activism?
- Do you identify with any community based on your sexual identity/orientation?
- How do you feel about same-sex marriage as a political issue?
  - How do you feel specifically about the movement to legalize same-sex marriages here in California?
    - In your opinion, does the focus on same-sex marriage impact other important concerns in the LGBTQ community? If so, in what ways?
    - How do you feel that this movement impacts your life?
- Are there other issues that feel more relevant or important?
  - Specifically, do you think that there are other critical issues relevant to the LGBTQ community that you would prioritize over same-sex marriage?
  - Do you think there are other, more important political issues in general, not necessarily within the LGBTQ community?



## Appendix G

### Human Subjects Review Board Approval



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Smith College  
Northampton, Massachusetts 01063  
T (413) 585-7950  
F (413) 585-7994

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January 31, 2011

Elizabeth Chandler

Dear Elizabeth,

Thank you for your letter about your activities and your agency's successful struggle for survival. One could think that available low coast health and mental health services were more important than the right to marry.

Your materials have been reviewed and they are fine. There is one thing which I didn't pick up before that I would like you to delete. That is that under **Risks** the last two sentences are troubling. You have added a screening requirement here that doesn't appear in your **Characteristics** section. Further, there is no way that you should or could get into evaluating their emotional and mental state over the phone. If, when you start the interview they seem not to be in good shape, you can suggest that perhaps they would like to withdraw from the interview. I doubt very much that this kind of question will attract very troubled people. (Some kinds of questions might.)

The other thing is just a suggestion. Wouldn't it be better to phrase your screening question on political and social interests in a way that includes rather than excludes. Something like "Do you feel that some other social and political concerns are more important at this time than Marriage Equity?"

In any event, we are glad to approve your very interesting project with the understanding that you will send Laurie Wyman a copy of your corrected materials for the permanent file.

*Please note the following requirements:*

**Consent Maintaining Data:** You must retain all data and other documents for at least three (3) years past completion of the research activity.

*In addition, these requirements may also be applicable:*

**Amendments:** If you wish to change any aspect of the study (such as design, procedures, consent forms or subject population), please submit these changes to the Committee.

**Renewal:** You are required to apply for renewal of approval every year for as long as the study is active.

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**Completion:** You are required to notify the Chair of the Human Subjects Review Committee when your study is completed (data collection finished). This requirement is met by completion of the thesis project during the Third Summer.

Good luck with your study.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Ann Hartman". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Ann Hartman, D.S.W.  
Chair, Human Subjects Review Committee

CC: Pearl Soloff, Research Advisor

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