Exploring Power Dynamics in Same-Sex Marriage

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PSY4025W: Honors in Psychology
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October 27, 2022

Word count:
Abstract: 156
Main body: 9408

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Abstract

Marriage, as an institution, is underpinned by religious and political discourse that often construct marriage as exclusively heterosexual, thus marginalizing queer persons. The aim of this study is thus to expand the diversity of voices represented in research around marriage through exploration of the negotiation of power dynamics and roles in same-sex marriage. A convenient sample of six South African queer individuals who were married or engaged to individuals of the same sex were interviewed. Through narrative-discursive analysis of the results two themes emerged namely: negotiating heteronormativity and negotiating power through marriage. Participants negotiated heteronormativity through either rejecting or conforming to heteronormativity and hegemonic gender roles. Participants reported highly egalitarian relationships. Negotiating power through marriage was evident in how marriage served as a tool for familial acceptance and how marriage served as a tool for legitimacy. Through the law legitimising same-sex marriage, participants were able to have increased agency, as well as legal benefits and protection.

Key words: Same-sex marriage; Decolonial Feminism; heteronormativity; power; agency; legitimation

Contents

Introduction

Marriage as an institution is embedded in systems of power and thus often acts as a site of normative violence against those who fall outside of hegemonic constructions of gender, sexuality, and being. Higgs (2017) argues that, in South Africa, both marriage and sexuality were constructed under the colonial agenda and imperial interpretations of the Bible. Within the colonial agenda, heterosexual monogamy was presented as the only acceptable form of marriage, with other marital forms being excluded, and homosexuality constructed as sinful and deviant (Ratele, 2009; van Zyl, 2011). Today, these colonial constructions of sexuality and marriage continue to play a fundamental role in the structuring of marital norms (Mamdani, 1996; Matebeni & Msibi, 2015).

This study attends to how queer individuals in same-sex marriages or engagements negotiate power dynamics in their relationships. In the next section, we review literature focusing on power dynamics within same-sex marriages and how these are mediated through marriage's entanglement with power (Fetner & Heath, 2016; Green, 2010). Following this, we outline our aims and objectives as well as delineate our understanding of decolonial feminism and its applicability to this study. This will be followed by how our feminist framework affects the methodology we utilized, as well as the ethical considerations. Utilizing narrative-discursive analysis two key themes emerged from the data, namely: negotiating heteronormativity and negotiating power through marriage. We will conclude with the limitations of the study and potential future directions.

Literature review

Marriage is often constructed as timeless and universal yet there is no agreed-upon definition (Yalom, 2001). Different societies have different notions of what constitutes a legal or legitimate marriage, who can marry, and how married individuals should act (Yalom, 2001). For this study, we define marriage as a social contract or union that is legally recognized between people who are partners in a personal relationship (Makama, 2020). We understand marriage, as an institution, is fundamentally implicated in systems of power and meaning (Yalom, 2001). We explore the relationship between marriage and institutions of power such as legal systems and the church.

Law, Power, and Same-Sex Marriage

In South Africa three types of marriages are legally recognized, namely, Civil Marriages registered under the 1961 Marriage Act No. 25, the 1998 Recognition of Customary Marriages Act (RCMA), and the Civil Unions Act 17 of 2006 (Bonthuys, 2008; Makama, 2020). Of specific interest to us, is the Civil Unions Act 17 of 2006, which legalizes monogamous same-sex marriage (Bonthuys, 2008; Lynch & Maree, 2013). In the legal sphere, same-sex marriage can be seen to be embedded in inequality (Rolfe & Peel, 2011). For example, there is a distinction between the Civil Marriages Act, the RCMA, and the Civil Unions Act, where Civil Marriages and the RCMA are exclusive to heterosexual couples (Bonthuys, 2008; Makama, 2020). The Civil Union Act under civil law offers a form of protection that is not afforded under customary law (Bonthuys, 2008; van Zyl, 2011; Mamdani, 1996). The usage of the term 'union' instead of 'marriage' suggests a differentiation between the types of commitment queer and heterosexual couples can make to each other (Mkhize, 2019). Further, customary marriages and civil unions are authorized separately from the Civil Marriages Act, implying that there are imbalances and hierarchies between the types of marriages (Mkhize, 2019). Thus, creating a dichotomy of heterosexual marriage as superior and same-sex marriage as other (Mkhize, 2019; Rolfe & Peel, 2011).

The legalization of same-sex marriage offers same-sex couples legal protection and recognition (Fetner & Heath, 2016). Same-sex couples are offered legal protection for their assets, families, and unions (Bonthuys, 2008). Society considers marriage "universally desired" (Lynch & Maree, 2013, p. 465) and the "capstone of adult personal life" (Green, 2010, p. 427). Therefore, the legalization of same-sex marriage can be seen to legitimize the love and relationship queer individuals have in society and the family. This legitimation is evidenced by significant shifts in the way same-sex relationships are understood and received (Green, 2010). In a study on queer unions, conducted by Green (2010), male participants in same-sex marriages indicated how the legalization of same-sex marriage aided in the assimilation of queer individuals into the workplace environment. Similarly, same-sex marriage became increasingly seen as equivalent to heterosexual marriage, such that, families of same-sex married couples, accepted, and offered greater emotional support towards the union (Green, 2010; Rolfe & Peel, 2011). The legitimating aspect of same-sex marriage emphasizes the power marriage holds in society (Reddy, 2009).

The Civil Unions Act 17 of 2006 empowers queer individuals and same-sex couples with the ability to practice marriage independently from heterosexual marital ideologies (Jowett &

Peel, 2019). This manifests in terms of the roles, norms, and power dynamics seen in same-sex marriages. Schweingruber and colleagues (2004) for example, found that same-sex couples subverted norms seen in heterosexual marriage proposals. Proposals incorporate elements that showcase power dynamics, specifically the power of the man. This can be evidenced by the hegemonic gendered roles taken during proposals such as the man presenting the woman with the ring, the man as the proposer, and the man asking permission from the father to wed his daughter (Jowett & Peel, 2019; Schweingruber, et al., 2004). The ring is an important element of the marriage proposal as the cost of the ring has been portrayed, in media and social discourse, as representative of the man's commitment to the relationship and his ability to provide for his wife and family (Schweingruber, et al., 2004). Thus, through the man presenting the woman with a ring, he is symbolically expressing his role and worth as a provider, and assuming control of the marriage's trajectory (Fetner & Heath, 2016). These roles place women as subordinate to and dependent on men (Green, 2010; Schweingruber, et al., 2004).

Unlike heterosexual relationships, same-sex couples are considered to be more egalitarian (Rolfe & Peel, 2011; van Zyl, 2011). Same-sex couples frequently have more negotiated approaches to initiating marriage, as neither party is assigned the role of proposer based on hegemonic gender norms (Jowett & Peel, 2019). Partners in same-sex relationships are able to negotiate gender roles outside of hegemonic constructions of marriage and how it should function (Fetner & Heath, 2016; Mays, 2017; Rolfe & Peel, 2011). For example, women in same-sex relationships are said to split household chores according to the enjoyment of doing the chore, rather than obligation or gendered norms (Mays, 2017). In addition, decision-making is reported to be 74% more egalitarian in same-sex relationships than in heterosexual relationships (Mays, 2017). Although some scholars argue that same-sex marriage is more egalitarian than heterosexual marriage (Rolfe & Peel, 2011; van Zyl, 2011), other scholars argue that one cannot suppose that same-sex marriages are void of power dynamics that reflect gender roles in heterosexual marriage (Green, 2010; Jowett & Peel, 2019). Therefore, reflecting contention in the literature and providing a gap for more research in this sphere.

The Church, Heterosexism, and Same-Sex Marriage

The dominant discourse surrounding marriage emanating from the Church reflects marriage being constructed as heteronormative (Wilcox, 2020). Thus, excluding types of love that deviate from hegemonic norms. The church has positioned marriage as virtuous and holy, and homosexuality as sinful, thus marriage is constructed as unattainable for homosexuality. Marriage has been seen as a civilizing agent that functions to curtail male promiscuity and

promote hegemonic family structures (Fetner & Heath, 2016; van Zyl, 2011). In contrast, queer people have often been constructed as 'naturally' more sexual and demonized further as a result (McCullers, 2011). This religious and moral discourse is shown to continue to mediate dominant beliefs and attitudes surrounding marriage and sexual morality in South Africa leading to heterosexist societal attitudes (Robertson, 2020). A survey by the HSRC and The Other Foundation (2015) found that 76% of respondents, drawn from a nationally representative sample of South Africans, agreed that- "God's laws about … marriage must be strictly followed" and 72% thought same-sex sexual activity was immoral. Green (2010) corroborates that same-sex marriage is still constructed in moral terms, which include fears around its perceived negative effects on family, opposite-sex marriage, and society. Likewise, the Church often presents same-sex marriage as a threat to heterosexual marriage, traditional family structures, and societal morality (Green, 2010; Wilcox, 2020).

Davids and colleagues (2019) argue that heterosexist societal attitudes, such as those delineated above, can reduce queer individuals' perceptions of security and power within society and result in internalized homophobia. Internalized homophobia can cause feelings of shame, anxiety, and anger which manifest in interpersonal relationships through toxic expressions of power and extreme power imbalances (Frost & Meyer, 2009). This can influence the power dynamics within same-sex relationships (Frost & Meyer, 2009; Kubicek, et al., 2015). Kubicek and colleagues (2015) express how the internalization of discourse relating to the hypersexuality of queer individuals and thus the instability of their relationships, can often lead to trust issues in same-sex relationships. Kubicek and colleagues (2015) reflect this with reference to relationship patterns wherein one partner would attempt to control the other partner's communication and movement to forcibly maintain trust. Frost and Meyer (2009) and Kubicek and colleagues (2015) articulate their studies as some of the first to explore the influence of internalized homophobia on queer relationships. This is important to note as both studies focus on unmarried queer individuals, and no literature we could find on this topic focuses on married queer individuals. Likewise, both studies were done outside South Africa. Therefore, presenting a space for further research.

Power in Romantic Relationships

Power in relationships may be defined as the extent to which one partner can influence the other partner for specific purposes (Keltner, et al., 2003). Power dynamics in romantic relationships are vital to study as they influence the subjective well-being and behavior of the individuals within the relationship (Simpson, et al., 2015). Hall & Knox (2019) found that

individuals who perceived themselves to have equal or more power than their partner were more likely to have higher levels of personal happiness and happiness within their relationship. Likewise, Krishnan and colleagues (2012) found imbalanced power dynamics negatively impact self-esteem, emotional health, and dignity of the partner who holds less power.

Power is gained and manifested within romantic partnerships in diverse ways. For example, Simpson (2007) found the individual and relational implications of relationship power are influenced by the degree to which the partners in the relationship are new to each other and the level of commitment. Beyond this, Hall and Knox (2019) express power differences as reflecting a combination of individual, relational and environmental factors. Individual factors refer to the characteristics of the individuals in the relationship including the personalities and identity facets imbued with social and political meaning, such as gender, age, race, and class (Hall & Knox, 2019). For example, Rogers and colleagues (2005) note that individuals with anxious attachment styles are more likely to be in relationships with inequitable power dynamics. Beyond impacting individuals' ability to gain and exert power in relationships, individual factors also crucially mediate how power in relationships is perceived (Hall & Knox, 2019, Mays, 2017). Relational factors include unique relationship attributes such as rules, habits, and norms that influence decision-making processes (Hall & Knox, 2019). Environmental factors include the monetary resources individuals in the relationship have access to, the quality of social support available to individuals in the relationship as well as the broader socio-political context in which the relationship functions (Hall & Knox, 2019).

The literature surrounding power in romantic relationships also tends to highlight the influence of gender in determining dynamics. Eaton and Rose (2011), for example, found that males are expected to be more powerful in intimate heterosexual relationships, Men often earn more than women which allows them greater economic autonomy and thus control over the woman in the relationship (Krishnan et al., 2012; Vogler, et al., 2008). In a study on the impact of women's changing socio-economic status on intimate heterosexual relationships, Sedumedi (2009) presents how women earning more than men resulted in men harboring insecurities, and feelings of intimidation and emasculation. Sedumedi (2009) elaborated that in reaction to these feelings of insecurity, intimidation, and emasculation; men searched for women who had a lower financial status. The results from Sedumedi's study correlate with the idea that gender norms, roles, and gendered characteristics, result in power dynamics that dictate the position men and women hold in a relationship (Atwood, 2019; Mays, 2017).

Gender is also expressed as a mediating factor in how power is exerted and expressed in heterosexual relationships. Eaton and Rose (2011) reflect that men are perceived to use sex and physical strength as significant sources of power while women utilize emotional intimacy and social skills more in general. As such, examining power dynamics in same-sex relationships presents an interesting space for research as gender as a determining factor cannot function in the same way here as in heterosexual relationships. Further, as gender is conceptualized as such a fundamental determining factor in romantic relationships many interventions focus purely on gender and gender attitudes to promote more equitable power dynamics (Krishnan et al., 2012). While these are important, they lack clear utility for same-sex couples and thus present a space for further research and intervention.

Aims and Objectives

This study aims to explore the negotiations of power within same-sex relationships. We will do this by looking specifically at how power is negotiated in the formalization of the relationship and in the everyday. Therefore, our study aimed to answer the question: how do same-sex married and engaged couples negotiate power dynamics? This aim will be met by answering the following questions:

1. How do same-sex couples negotiate power in the formalization of their relationship?
2. How do same-sex couples negotiate power in their everyday interactions?

Theoretical Framework

We locate our study within a decolonial feminist framework. Decolonial feminism stands as a radical, emancipatory framework. Decolonial feminism endeavours to enable the creation of counter-hegemonic knowledge by rejecting the universalism of western knowledge and feminisms, re-interpreting history, and critically evaluating modernity (Lugones, 2010). Decolonial feminism allows for systems of oppression and domination in the global South to be explored in a complex and multifaceted way that acknowledges both the role of and connection between patriarchy and coloniality (Miñoso, 2020; Rodrigues, 2022). As such, decolonial feminism promotes an understanding and critique of colonial knowledge and systems of power that propagate understandings and hierarchies according to colonial notions of normative identity, which subjugate those who are deemed to occupy non-normative or inferior identities according to western notions (Kessi & Boonzaier, 2018; Manning, 2021; Motlafi, 2016). Decolonial feminism can thus promote a deeper understanding of how certain social and cultural norms, values, and institutions have evolved and have been maintained so

that they can be re-evaluated, and their meanings reconstructed (Motlafi, 2016; Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2015). Decolonial feminism will allow us to better view same-sex marriage outside of western, hegemonic constructions of subjugation or deviation. This approach will also allow us to better see resistance to these harmful narratives

We argue that a decolonial feminist framework is applicable as gender, sexuality, and power continue to reflect colonial and heteropatriarchal mentalities and hierarchies (Boonzaier & van Niekerk, 2019; Kessi & Boonzaier, 2018). This is evidenced by how queer individuals' experiences have often been excluded from or pathologized in psychological literature in South Africa and globally (Kessi & Boonzaier, 2018).

We are employing decolonial feminism as opposed to mainstream or western feminisms. This is because Western forms of feminism, and associated scholarship, often only explore oppression and domination as it can be explained through gender whilst ignoring other systems of social organisation that categorise and rank identity (Lugones, 2010). This is counter-productive to understanding the complex and multifaceted ways power manifests and operates in Africa. Furthermore, these feminisms often construct Africa in moralistic and paternalistic ways that reflect coloniality (Guy-Sheftall, 2003; Mekgwe, 2010). Additionally, there is a trend in western feminist scholarship for difference and complexity as well as expressions of agency and resistance to be ignored (Okech, 2013). In contrast to western feminism, decolonial feminism promotes the construction of alternative, non-essentialised narratives that celebrate African identity and knowledge (Kessi & Boonzaier, 2018).

Methods

Research Design

In this study, we employed qualitative research methodology. Qualitative research is defined as, "research that seeks to preserve the integrity of narrative data and attempts to use the data to exemplify unusual or core themes embedded in contexts" (Terre Blanche, et al., 2006, p. 563). Within qualitative research, we utilized a narrative-discursive methodological approach to organize and analyze semi-structured interviews.

Narrative-discursive methodology stems from the social constructionist paradigm as it emphasizes the constructive nature of language and narrative-discursive methodology maintains that human subjectivity and identity are constructed and performed through talk (Morison, 2011; Taylor & Littleton, 2006). Words as performative (i.e., 'doing', 'achieving') are encompassed within the greater social environment that they are constituted in (Morison, 2011). Words as context-specific and socially constructed are congruent with meta-narratives,

which are narratives that are embedded in the institutional and cultural contexts the narrator is positioned (Esin, et al., 2014; Makama, 2020). For example, same-sex couples may narrate their experiences according to meta-narratives of how queer individuals navigate and experience their relationships within a heteronormative society (Jowett & Peel, 2019; Morison, 2011). Further, the narrative of queer individuals may reflect the words and language used within queer communities (Green, 2010). Discourses within narratives are fluid and transformative as they are articulated, constructed, and understood, according to the audience, time, and place in which they are narrated (Taylor & Littleton, 2006). The fluidity of discourses implies that narratives and the language within them are time-bound and are co-constructed by the researcher and the narrator (Bell, 2002). Narrative-discursive analysis demonstrates how identities are diverse and are influenced by people's positionality (Taylor & Littleton, 2006). Narrative-discursive methodology enabled us to examine queer subjectivities as complex and intersecting, which is congruent with feminist theoretical frameworks (Bell, 2002; Soskolne, 2003).

Data collection

Interviews are defined as, "processes of construction in which respondents constitute worlds of meaning and make sense of their experience" (Esin, et al., 2014, p. 210). Interviews are regarded as powerful tools to extract and aid in the construction of meaning-making (Linabary & Hamel, 2017). Semi-structured interviews enabled queer individuals with the ability to decide on the trajectory of their narrative and the interview process (Makama, 2020; Terre Blanche, et al., 2006). Further, semi-structured interviews allowed us greater freedom to explore ideas, and contentions as they arose (Hesse-Biber, 2007). To immerse ourselves in the data we each transcribed each other's interviews.

Participants

We recruited six queer individuals, from South Africa, who were 18 years old or older, and who were either married or engaged to someone of the same sex (see Appendix A). We recruited a small number of participants because we wanted to explore participants' subjectivities and experiences in depth (Phoenix, 1994). This level of exploration through narrative methodology, would not be possible within the parameters of our study if the sample was too large (Phoenix, 1994). Participants were recruited through social media, namely Facebook and Instagram (see Appendix B), and additionally through word of mouth. We also used snowball sampling to find participants by contacting people we know to partake in the

study and recruit others. Our participants represented a diverse array of cultures, ages, and marital experiences.

Interview Process

Upon agreement to participate in the study, participants were presented with the participant information sheet (see Appendix C), consent form (see Appendix D), and referral list (see Appendix E). The participant information sheet served to inform participants of who was involved in the research process, what the research was about, and the reason this research was being conducted. As well as the nature of the study, the benefits, and risks of participation in the study, and important contact information should they have any queries or concerns. The consent form was issued as a formal agreement to participate in the study. The referral list served to inform participants of counseling services they can contact in case the contents of the interview were triggering, emotionally charged, or if participants needed extra support. Once participants provided informed consent, the time and method of interviewing were discussed and arranged. Participants were informed that the interviews were focused on their journey and experience of the processes they participated in towards formalizing their relationship through marriage. Interviews lasted an average of 45 minutes long and we separately interviewed each participant individually using a semi-structured interview style (see Appendix F). This allowed us to reflect on each other's interviews and thus incorporate successful elements into our own future interviews. When both partners in a couple participated, we each interviewed one of the partners. This was so that the narratives constructed by their partner would not influence how we conducted the interview or result in us entering the interview with preconceived notions about the relationship.

Ethical Considerations

Conducting research requires careful consideration of the ethical issues that could potentially arise and developing means to curb these, to protect participants (Arifin, 2018). Here, we will discuss ethical issues specifically around autonomy, confidentiality, and justice. we will also discuss how power functioned within our study as an ethical consideration promoted by our decolonial feminist framework. We received ethical clearance from the University of Cape Town, Department of Psychology, Ethics Review Committee (see Appendix G).

Autonomy

Autonomy pertains to participants' freedom of choice (Singh & Hylton, 2015). Autonomy was honored through participation being voluntary. Participants were made aware of their

voluntary participation through the information sheet (see Appendix B). Participants were also able to terminate their participation at any stage of the research process, without repercussions.

Confidentiality

The consent form stipulated the insurance of confidentiality, such that the participants' identity will not be revealed to persons outside of the research process. Confidentiality was ensured by utilizing pseudonyms and safely securing all information relating to participants. Participants had the option to either be interviewed in-person or virtually. Either method of interviewing occurred in a private space to ensure participants' identities and experiences were kept confidential. Further, for virtual interviews, participants had the choice to either have their cameras on or off and the interview recording was password protected. For the virtual interviews, we utilized Microsoft Teams. Microsoft Teams provides protection by making interview recordings available only to those on call and by storing the recordings in a controlled repository that is protected by permissions and encryption (Spataro, 2020). Microsoft Teams also enables two-factor authentication and utilizes Advanced Threat Protection (ATP) (Spataro, 2020). All transcripts from both in-person and virtual interviews were kept in a locked cupboard in our supervisor's office.

Justice

Justice relates to "equal share and fairness" (Orb, et al., 2000, p. 95). Justice includes the equal share of information, therefore, to honor this, we offered participants a copy of the thesis and interview transcript (Wassenaar, 2006). Our study also enacted justice, by listening to the voices of a group that is often marginalized in research (Orb, et al., 2000; Soskolne, 2003). The concept of justice is aligned with decolonial feminism, as it aims to add complexity to the discourse around important socio-political issues and promotes empowerment (Bell, 2002; Motlafi, 2016; Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2015).

Feminist ethics

Our decolonial feminist framework promotes we consider the power dynamics present during the interview process (Kvale, 2006; Manning, 2021). There is an uneven balance of power, as the interview is an instrument in which researchers obtain participants' narratives which are analyzed and interpreted by the researcher (Kvale, 2006). The dynamic between the researcher and the participant influences the telling of narratives and the positionality of the participant, which further influences the construction of subjectivity (Morison, 2011; Taylor & Littleton, 2006). We have designed our research process around trying to balance power and have acknowledged spaces where power may be unbalanced. Due to the semi-structured design

of our interview participants were given the freedom to direct the interview according to their subjectivities and the messages they wanted to convey. We also tried to empower participants by validating their experiences and clarifying uncertainties with participants, so we were not directed too much by our own assumptions. Our participants represented a diverse array of identities thus we foregrounded varying narratives which added complexity to our research as such reflecting our decolonial feminist framework.

Reflexivity

According to feminist research principles, in order to create empowering, inclusive, and complex research, it was necessary to engage in practices of reflexivity (Mbilinyi, 1992). Reflexivity entails examining the self, such that researchers reflect and account for how their identities, thoughts, experiences, and beliefs impact the research process and the knowledge produced (Couture, et al., 2012; Githaiga, 2015). Examining how our identities and the participants' identities interacted in the interview process was vital as this affected the narratives the participants produced (Linabary & Hamel, 2017). Furthermore, reflexivity allowed us to improve our awareness of any assumptions or biases we potentially hold (Maake, 2021; Mbilinyi, 1992).

Our study focused on marriage, however, we are unmarried and this potentially resulted in us having different understandings of marriage and of how power manifests in marriage. These differences could have resulted in us unconsciously directing and analysing interviews according to our own ideas and expectations of marriage and power (Hesse-Biber, 2007). Which, potentially constrained our ability to produce research that reflected our participants' subjectivities (Hesse-Biber, 2007).

In constructing the themes for our study we sat with the discomfort of comparing same-sex relationships to heteronormative expectations of marriage and relationship power. We wanted to acknowledge that heterosexual relationships are the expected societal norm and same-sex relationships are alternative (Robertson, 2020; Wilcox, 2020), without constructing same-sex relationships as deviant or exotic.

In wanting to not construct same-sex relationships as deviant or exotic, we had to be cognisant of our use of language. This cognisance emanated not only from our feelings of discomfort but also, out of the desire to show respect to our participants and honour the narratives they produced.

Data analysis

We utilized narrative-discursive analysis as our data analysis technique. Narrative-discursive analysis allowed for the illumination of how participants positioned themselves through discourse in their stories (Makama, 2020; Taylor & Littleton, 2006). The positions that participants assumed reflected the social context in which they were embedded. Participants' socially embedded positions enabled us to draw meaning from how these positions interacted with other contextual factors and dominant narratives (Makama, 2020; Taylor & Littleton, 2006). Therefore narrative-discursive analysis enabled us to explore and understand the power dynamics within same-sex relationships, by focusing on how queer individuals conceptualize and understand power and construct their identities within their social contexts (Esin, et al., 2014). The ability of narrative-discursive analysis to identify constructions of identity and marriage, understandings of power, and positionality; foregrounds narrative-discursive analysis as a form of empowerment (Morison, 2011). Narrative-discursive analysis further promotes empowerment by focusing on how individuals utilize narratives as sites to adopt, resist, and negotiate dominant discourses embedded in larger narratives (Makama, 2020; Taylor & Littleton, 2006). Through narrative-discursive analysis of our participants' narratives, we identified four themes that detailed the power dynamics in same-sex relationships. The themes are negotiating heteronormativity and negotiating power through marriage. The themes and subthemes that emerged are discussed below.

Data analysis and discussion

Negotiating Heteronormativity

The legalisation of same-sex marriage in various contexts has resulted in much speculative literature on how queer people will inhabit this institution (Green, 2010). Of particular debate is how closely same-sex marriages follow the heteronormative script of marriage which includes notions of gendered roles and related power dynamics (Atwood, 2019; May 2017). In this section, we use the voices and narratives of same-sex married and engaged individuals to "speak back" to the vast amounts of literature speculating on same-sex marriage. The participants explored their understandings of their relationships and the roles they had in their partnerships within a heteronormative society.

Rejection of Heteronormativity and Gender Roles

In this section, we explore participants' responses to assumptions around the gendered nature of the roles they occupy in their relationships. Across narratives, participants reflected

that there was an assumption that they conformed to heteronormative roles and norms in their marriages. Nandi and Jasmine reflect:

> *It's maybe the people outside the house that will see me as the more masculine one but inside the home there are no roles. (Nandi, f, 37)*

> *And the expectation of the community will be that because she is more masculine presenting, so she'll do the more manly things, and you'll find her cooking and doing laundry and ironing and I don't like doing house chores and stuff like that (Jasmine, f, 42)*

The above extracts show how participants figured and understood their dynamics deviated from the expectations of their broader community vis-á-vis their inhabiting of gender roles in their relationships. Both Nandi and Jasmine reflected on how one spouse was assigned the masculine role by people outside of their relationship based on hegemonic understandings of gender performance. However, both Nandi and Jasmine quickly countered this narrative. Jasmine drew on narratives of hegemonic gender norms to do this by juxtaposing her partner's perceived 'masculine' identity with her partner performing traditionally feminine tasks such as "cooking", "laundry" and "ironing". Nandi likewise drew on contrasting images to express the lack of gender roles in her relationship. She utilised the imagery of "outside" and "inside" the house to show the contrast between perceived gender roles and her experience of a lack of gender roles in her relationship.

The participants ubiquitously rejected the notion of gender roles in their relationships. This rejection is particularly interesting as participants were not specifically asked how they felt gender norms, roles and expectations influenced their roles during the interview. Yet, most participants mentioned gender as a factor in role determination that they rejected. Participants would then often reflect on their experiences of navigating the assumptions of their families, friends, and broader communities regarding gender roles. This could be understood as reflective of how the heteropatriarchal narrative on marriage continues to be widely spread and insidious (Reddy, 2009). However, participants did not simply reflect an awareness of these messages but likewise resisted these by rejecting gender roles in their relationships. Through rejecting gender roles participants also rejected the unequal power dynamics within them.

The way participants constructed their relationships in contrast to heterosexual relationships appeared to be more reflective of how they understood these relationships than how they understood their own. Kimberley and Jasmine reflected:

When I was growing up right, you see a lot of heterosexual couples, and it gave us this view that's how it was supposed to be. And what we heard a lot from women was ugh, no, that's just how men are. I know he doesn't listen to me but it's fine… like we came from the idea that you're supposed to get less. (Kimberley, f, 23)

There's nothing different from a heterosexual marriage and a homosexual marriage. Everything is the same, because every decision you make, you make for two people, you never make a decision alone.(Jasmine, f, 42)

Kimberley reflected on her understanding of heterosexual relationships as being, in general, unequal and oppressive for women. Kimberley reflects on the notion of women "get less" in their relationships than men. This feeds into broader narratives wherein women as wives are constructed and expected to be self-sacrificing and put the needs of their husbands and families above their own (Berg, 2016; reference). As such Kimberley rejected the notion that her relationship was similar to heterosexual relationships. In contrast, Jasmine figures heterosexual marriage as reflecting alignment and equality as shown by, "you never make a decision alone." Thus she reflects that her relationship and same-sex marriages in general are completely "the same" as heterosexual marriages.

Interestingly Kimberley and Jasmine described their relationships similarly to each other, with reference to egalitarian decision-making and splitting of household tasks, yet when comparing their relationships to heterosexual relationships their narratives juxtapose one another's. However, we understand alignment or subversion to heterosexual relationships these participants reflected as being more due to how the person constructed heterosexual couples than how they viewed their own relationships.

Egalitarian splitting of household tasks

The rejection of gender roles was reflected in the egalitarian ways participants reported splitting household tasks with their partners. When one partner did more tasks or more of a particular task than their partner, these were explained as resulting from pragmatic or contextual factors such as the individual strengths of each partner and the time available each partner had. Rather than due to pre-established gender roles or because of the authority one partner has over the other. Jasmine and Kimberley reflect:

We just say, what is it that you enjoy doing, or what is it that you can do at this moment, then you can do it... So, we have come to that understanding. I think that's why our marriage is working out so perfectly. (Jasmine, f, 42)

And then [my partner] picks up the doggie's business outside because it must be picked up daily. So, then like we don't necessarily have like assigned tasks but at the same time like I don't like that like poopie business so like I'll make sure I do everything at home so she don't have to do anything else, just pick up the poo please (Kimberley, f, 23)

In the above extracts, Jasmine and Kimberly reflect not having assigned tasks rather tasks are split to personal preference. In addition, Jasmine reported splitting tasks according to the availability of each partner.

Our participants' egalitarian and negotiated approach to splitting tasks is reflective of the literature (Green, 2010; Mays, 2017). Green (2010) reflects that this could be because of the absence of gender-differentiated roles in same-sex relationships or because same-sex partners experience the same gender socialisation. By sharing roles participants were rejecting the heteronormative script of marriage wherein tasks are assumed and expected to be split according to gendered norms (Berg, 2006; Melville et al., 2019). Through splitting tasks the participants were showing equality in the relationships, wherein neither party had authority over the other. Jasmine's articulation of the lack of roles as being beneficial to the success of her relationship is reflective of the literature. Ellis and Bermúdez (2021) express how pressure based on gender norms placed on members of a couple can be a major source of stress.

Negotiating Heteronormativity in Decision-Making

The rejection of heteronormativity and gender roles, and the inherent power imbalances this entails, is reflected in the egalitarian ways participants reported making decisions. Participants articulated how decision-making often involves a joint discussion between both partners to determine what best suits the relationship or benefits both partners. For instance:

…anything that anybody asks us, we will say 'I'm gonna get back to you. I'm just gonna go talk to my partner first'. Always, always. For everything. I always want to know what she's thinking. And she always wants to know what I'm thinking. Like, our inputs the most important part (Kimberley, f, 23)

Then when it comes to small things like, it's summer we need to buy new clothes for the children, or we need to pay … or maybe we need to change the décor in the house, you know, those small decisions, I would take charge, I wouldn't even ask, ask for her permission or whatever… But if we have to make like major decisions, we come, we sit together, and make the decisions together (Jasmine, f, 42)

Kimberley and Jasmine express that decision-making is a mutual and negotiated process. In narrating that decision-making was joint and equal, participants positioned themselves as a unit. Jasmine distinguished how decision-making differed depending on the size of the decision. Where, small decisions, that were considered day-to-day necessities for the family unit, did not warrant a discussion. But, big decisions were made through joint communication. In contrast, Kimberley expressed that *all* decisions, no matter the size, warrant a joint conversation that leads to a joint decision. Kimberley expressed that mutual input "was the most important part" of every decision she and her partner made. She is, therefore, expressing how their decision-making process reaffirms their alignment with each other and the equality of power in their relationship.

The overarching theme in these extracts was that each partner equally contributed to the decision-making process thus ensuring equal autonomy. This suggests that neither partner had or expressed authority over their partner. Prior studies have similarly reflected that decision-making in same-sex relationships is highly egalitarian (Mays, 2017; van Zyl, 2011).

Process of formalisation

The engagement processes

Initiating the marriage proposal. Participants often described their patterns of decision-making as egalitarian and void of heteronormative gendered roles. However, in the processes of formalizing their relationships, participants frequently conformed to heteronormative formalization processes. Kimberley and Sarah reflect:

She was like I don't know, I could engage you next month, I could engage you in a year. Who knows. You don't know … I wasn't part of anything [marriage proposal planning] and then like she had a ring ready and everything (Kimberley, f, 23)

Sarah: And then I pulled out a ring and she just hugged me and said yes

Interviewer: That's so cute. So, you don't think she suspected it coming at all?

Sarah: Not at all

The excerpts above indicate how one partner assumed the role of the proposer. In this case, Kimberley's partner assumed the role of the proposer, whilst Sarah was the proposer in her relationship.

Participants, generally, expressed that the marriage proposal was conducted by one partner. One partner assuming the role of the proposer is seen as exerting explicit power to determine the trajectory of the relationship. Interestingly, participants and participant's partners who assumed the role of the proposer were also the ones who initiated the relationship. Therefore, the power evidenced in formalising the relationship was also observed in the initiation of the relationship. Two participants expressed that initially they proposed but their partners rejected the marriage proposal. They later became engaged when their partners proposed. Power dynamics can be seen here through only one partner being able to determine the trajectory of the relationship even when this does not align with the desires of the other partner.

These excerpts indicate how there was an element of surprise in the marriage proposal. The surprise element identified by Sarah and Kimberley shows the lack of negotiation leading up to the proposal thus reflecting power dynamics wherein one partner assumes control of the trajectory of the marriage (Schweingruber, et al., 2004).

Rejecting the hegemonic marriage proposal. The adoption of the hegemonic marriage proposal was not evident throughout all the relationships in our study. Half of our participants detailed how their marriage proposals did not align with hegemonic marriage proposals, as they were simple, casual, and negotiated. Daniel and Nandi reflect:

Interviewer: Can you tell me a little bit about the engagement?

Daniel: Well, it wasn't very special… it was just, we were lying in bed, then in terms of getting engaged, he was just like we should get married, it's now time, we're ready; so that's what we did

Interviewer: So, when you, how did you guys make the decision to actually get married? Was there like an engagement first or?

Nandi: Like not a formal engagement. We just talked about it.

These participants narrated that the formalisation of their relationship was part of their everyday life. As evidenced by Daniel saying, "we were lying in bed". These narrations of the marriage proposal indicate that the formalisation of the relationship was derived through talk and joint decisions. This is evident in Nandi's use of the descriptor 'we', which suggests an egalitarian decision-making process that involved both partners. Similarly, Jowett and Peel

(2019), Rolfe and Peel (2011), and van Zyl (2011) found that proposals in same-sex relationships were often more mutually negotiated than those in heterosexual relationships.

Implicit power: ultimatums and manipulation. It appeared that the individuals who initiated the marriage were not always acting on their own accord. Some participants' ultimatums and manipulations were used to influence their partner's decision. By ultimatums and manipulations, we mean the subtle inferences that influence another's decision.

> *… she said no, this is not what she is in to [marriage], so, uhm, then I gave her an ultimatum then I said "if you don't marry me in five years' time then I'm leaving (Jasmine, f, 42)*

> *When it came to the engagement I told her, okay you said it's only going to be a month or a year. If it's more than a year then I'm gonna get you a t-shirt with my face on it hey. It's like they [people] need to know (Kimberley, f, 23)*

In the above extracts, the participants gave their partners ultimatums. The ultimatums given by Jasmine and Kimberley were time bound and were accompanied by a consequence. As evidenced by, Jasmine stating, *"if you don't marry me in five years' time then I'm leaving"* and Kimberly stating, " *If it's more than a year then I'm gonna get you a t-shirt with my face on it".*

The provision of ultimatums presents an indication of who held the power in influencing the trajectory of the relationship. It can be concluded that these participants applied pressure and potentially incited fear to influence their partner's decision to get married. In some instances, instead of the use of an ultimatum, manipulation was utilised to steer the relationship. For example, Nandi articulates, "I think she worked on me. Like she was gradually working on me to get to that stage [marriage]". In this section, we can see how power manifests in complex ways during the engagement process. The nuances of power feed into the discourse of how power is transformed and transferred in different aspects of the relationship.

The wedding processes

When examining the wedding process we found that participants conformed, subverted, and transformed heteronormative marital traditions and expectations.

> *Interviewer: And how did the planning of the wedding go? Were you both equally involved with that?*
>
> *Sarah: No, it was actually my doing.*

In the extract above, Sarah displays having complete control over the planning of her wedding.

The wedding has been constructed as ‘every girl's dream’ and ‘the best day of a girl’s life’ across media and became the normative idea of the wedding process. The wedding process thus becomes a space wherein women/the bride have complete autonomy over the planning of the wedding (Atwood, 2019; Mays, 2017). Sarah initiated the marriage proposal and planned the wedding. In doing so, Sarah displayed the power she had in determining the trajectory of the relationship and in the planning of the wedding. However, holding both positions – proposer and planner – is not typical of hegemonic wedding processes (Kimport, 2012; Schweingruber, et al., 2004). Holding the dual position of proposer and planner is reflective of how same-sex couples can practice martial processes independently from hegemonic marital ideals (Jowett & Peel, 2019).

The lobola process represented a space in which heteronormativity was negotiated. Participants acknowledged that the roles they assumed during the lobola process would typically be gendered.

> *Like nobody asked why are you paying Lobola because you are both women. I don’t know. Maybe it's because I'm more on the masculine side. More than her. Yeah, I don’t know. So, they just took it for granted. (Nandi, f, 37)*

Nandi suggests that her reasons for paying lobola were based on her “being more masculine” than her partner. In presenting as more masculine, Nandi is narrating how gendered norms have influenced her family’s perception of *who* should do the lobola negotiation.

Interestingly, traditional gender roles can be seen in all the processes related to Lobola with the exception of the genders of both parties. For example, Nandi asked her partner’s father for permission to marry his daughter, and the men in the family discussed the lobola payment. Through the lobola negotiation process we see how power was enacted by Nandi following her traditions and not her partner’s. However, Nandi’s partner also displayed power in the negotiation process. As evidenced by Nandi articulating, “but I think she worked her family, not to charge me that much”. Through this statement, we see how power was expressed implicitly, as Nandi’s partner had the ability to influence her family’s negotiation prices (Keltner, et al., 2003).

Negotiating Power Through Marriage

In this section, we are discussing how participants conceptualised the institution of marriage as a way to gain power as individuals and as a couple. We outline how resistance and conformity to matters of the state both function to express agency and thus power.

Marriage as a tool for familial acceptance

One of our key findings was that marriage functioned to increase the acknowledgment and acceptance participants' families showed towards their relationships and sexuality.

Sarah and Nandi reflected:

And my mom was there [the wedding]. And she'd never really been, she, you know, not approved of gay marriage. And even [my partner's] mom was there even though she refused to come (Sarah, f, 52)

They didn't take her relationship serious…so when they saw her relationship is serious this time. Maybe that's how they viewed it: this time our child is serious. So, they didn't resist that much (Nandi, f, 37)

Sarah reflected that she and her partner had previously faced rejection from their families but that her wedding functioned as a means to bring their families together in acknowledging their sexuality and relationship. In this way, marriage functioned to enable a turning point in how open the families were to their daughters' sexualities. Likewise, Nandi reflected that the process of getting married shifted her partner's family's attitude toward the relationship. Nandi's partner's family began to acknowledge the seriousness of their relationship and of Nandi's partner's sexuality, which the family had previously denied due to her past relationships with men.

The participants' relationships and sexuality were seen as increasingly legitimate by the families of the participants. This is reflective of Green's (2010) research which similarly found that marriage shifted the way same-sex relationships were perceived by family members and society. Nandi's use of the word 'serious' reflects how marriage caused a shift in the families' perceptions of the relationship wherein previously they viewed it as not being serious. This feeds into heterosexist ideology and stereotypes which position same-sex relationships as unstable due to the perceived hyper-sexuality of queer individuals (Davids, et al., 2019; McCullers, 2011). The shift in the family's attitudes towards the relationships and sexuality of the participants could be seen to reflect the continual power the institution of marriage has in society (Lynch & Maree, 2013).

The increased legitimacy of the relationship in the eyes of the family extended to how the family viewed the couple as more stable as parents following the marriage. And likewise, as a tool that increased the participants viewing themselves as more able to be parents. Nandi reflects:

Now that we are married, maybe you can ask your parents if you can take the kids to stay with us. Cause now we've formalised everything (Nandi, f, 37)

Nandi reflected on her marriage to her partner as changing the role she had in the lives of her partner's children (from a previous relationship). Nandi reflected that after the marriage the children came to live with her and her wife. Nandi's explanation that she and her partner were better able to raise her partner's children because they "formalised" their relationship through marriage reflects the continual importance of marriage. Green (2010) reflects that same-sex spouses might perceive themselves as better able to raise a family due to the social and legal benefits of marriage.

Marriage as a tool for legitimacy

Marriage, Legitimacy, and Law

Participants reflected on how marriage functioned to legitimate their relationship in the legal sphere and the meaning this had to them.

Interviewer: What made you guys decide to get married?

Daniel: For me, it's very much like a legal thing. Because I've built this life with my partner, and I don't want my parents who I have a very bad relationship with taking anything from us, which we've worked so hard for.

No, we wanted the home affairs stuff cause like for me when I started getting used to the idea like I didn't believe cause you know moes we weren't allowed to get married before so I didn't believe I Would actually get a marriage certificate. So, I wanted to see it for myself, I wanted to touch my certificate (Nandi, f, 37)

Daniel reflected that the benefits and protection he and his partner were able to gain through marriage, stood as the primary reason he and his partner chose to get married. In particular, Daniel noted being able to determine who would inherit his assets. Daniel's emphasis on the legal benefits and protections gained through marriage is consistent with the literature (Bonthuys, 2008; Fetner & Heath, 2016; Green, 2010). Nandi's quote reflects the increased agency queer people were given with the legalisation of same-sex marriage and the meaning

this held. Nandi wanted to touch and claim her marriage certificate, as shown by "touch my certificate".

These extracts reflect that the legal aspect of marriage has pragmatic and symbolic value, both of which inherently relate to agency (Green, 2010). Agency can be understood as a dimension of power. As agency reflects how participants were able to shape and define their social reality according to their needs, values, and desires (Sen, 1989). Agency was displayed through the participants asserting their right. Participants, therefore, had the power to participate in a system they were once excluded from. The value Nandi places on the materiality of the marriage certificate is representative of Nandi expressing her agency by claiming her right to inhabit an institution traditionally constructed as exclusively heterosexual (Rolfe & Peel, 2011).

In contrast, to the value, Nandi and Daniel placed on the legal benefits offered by marriage, and the findings of Bonthuys (2008), Fetner & Heath (2016), and Green (2010), Sarah rejected that the state, through the law, should have the ability to legitimise her relationship. She reflected:

> *Why get married when the government suddenly says it's okay to get married? We weren't allowed to get married then why allow an institution to give us permission. So we kind of retaliated against it. (Sarah, f, 52)*

Sarah reflected how the legitimation of relationships in the legal sphere through marriage was not always desirable. She reflected this in terms of discourse surrounding the rejection of the government as an institution that has the power to give or refuse legitimacy to different types of love and relationships. Reflecting that initially, she had felt hesitant to get married as she did not want to give the government, which had previously functioned to invalidate her love and relationships, the power of now legitimising her love and relationship. Ultimately, Sarah did get married as an expression of love for her partner. However, her initial rejection of legal marriage also expresses agency (Rolfe & Peel, 2011).

Marriage, Legitimacy, and Heritage

Marriage functioned as a way participants gained legitimacy and agency through using this institution to connect to their family heritage and culture.

> *Let's just do a traditional ceremony where your family gives my family gifts and I give your family gifts. Just to appreciate our parents for supporting us throughout and keeping us with the tradition of the Zulu's and stuff, yeah (Nandi, f, 37)*

Nandi reflected that by inhabiting the marital traditions her family had for generations she was honouring her parents and her family tradition.

Participants are occupying traditions and norms usually occupied only by heterosexual couples or individuals. This fundamentally speaks to agency as they are expressing their right to access and embody their culture and history and utilising marriage as a tool with which to do so. Important to note here is that Nandi reflected that she and her partner adapted the traditions to suit their needs and context. Thus, further expressing how she and her partner were able to take ownership of their culture and history in a way that was meaningful and symbolic to them.

However, this was not the case for all participants- some participants showed agency through marriage by using it to break away from family heritage. Carla reflected on marriage as an opportunity to create a new family with her partner distinct from their families, by utilising an original surname. Thus, Carla is symbolically severing herself from her family history. Here the process of marriage can be understood as enabling the mutual construction of a new family and family identity (Jowett & Peel, 2019).

Despite the advancements in legal acknowledgement of same-sex marriage, there remain certain contentions in the law, specifically in regard to the customary marriage act not recognising same-sex marriage (Bonthuys, 2008). Customary marriage not recognising same-sex marriage functions to inhibit some same-sex persons from receiving legal and familial legitimacy simultaneously. As reflected by Jasmine:

> *Hence we started with the legal marriage. And now the disadvantage is that because we are from cultural families, we need to respect the tradition… the uncles, the aunties, and the grandparents, and all the elderly don't recognize the marriage because for them it's like oh, you just got married at a legal wedding. You haven't done the traditional aspect of it (Jasmine, f, 42)*

Jasmine specified how customary marriage not accommodating same-sex partnerships prohibited her from connecting fully with her family heritage. Thus, the laws surrounding same-sex marriage in South Africa functioned to rob Jasmine and her partner of the legitimacy gains of marriage in the family, and even acknowledgement of the union by the family.

Conclusion

We explored the negotiations of power within same-sex marriages and engagements. To do so, we conducted semi-structured interviews that were analysed by narrative-discursive strategies. Our study was born out of an acknowledgement that marriage, due to it being

embedded in systems of power, is often constructed in heteronormative ways (Green, 2010). The notion that marriage is exclusively heterosexual functions to marginalise queer people and same-sex love (Bonthuys, 2008). Further, much of the literature related to same-sex marriage is speculative in nature and constructs queer people and same-sex relationships in problematic and harmful ways (Green, 2010). In line with our decolonial feminist framework, we endeavoured to counter heteronormative constructions of marriage by using the voices and narratives of married and engaged queer people. Whilst still acknowledging the influence heteronormativity has on the institution of marriage and the power dynamics in and surrounding it.

We explored how queer married and engaged individuals negotiated heteronormativity and how heteronormativity influenced the way power was negotiated and exhibited in their relationship. Specifically, we explored how our participants negotiated heteronormativity in their everyday practices, patterns of decision-making, and in the processes of formalising their relationships. Participants acknowledged the influence of heteronormativity on marriage and relational power dynamics, even if this was through their rejection of heteronormativity and gendered norms. Thus, participants' narratives reflected the insidious nature of heteronormativity.

Our findings suggest that same-sex relationships are overall highly egalitarian, as reflected by the balanced and negotiated splitting of household tasks and through processes of joint decision-making. Participants' narratives reflected that power is complex, contextual, and negotiated and exhibited in explicit and implicit ways. Expressions and negotiations of power were particularly evident in the processes of formalisation of the relationship through marriage. Explicit power can be seen through which partner assumed the role of the proposer. Implicit power was seen through the subtle ways participants influenced their partners and the trajectory of their relationships. This was specifically through the use of ultimatums and manipulations. In negotiating heteronormativity, participants were seen to conform, reject, and transform heteronormative marital practices.

We further explored how participants conceptualised the institution of marriage as a way to gain power, as individuals and as a couple. Through getting married participants and their relationships, gained acceptance and legitimacy in the eyes of their families. Through the law legitimising same-sex marriage, participants were able to have increased agency, as well as legal benefits and protection. Through our participants narratives, it was evident that power in complex and diverse ways.

We utilized a relatively small sample size thus the results of our study are not necessarily reflective of the experiences and dynamics in all same-sex marriages. Therefore, for future research, we suggest having a greater sample size so as to be inclusive of more voices. For example, participants indicated that their friends who were also in same-sex marriages had different power dynamics and role negotiations. Furthermore, we decided not to interview same-sex life partners who made the decision to not get married. By broadening the exploration of power dynamics in same-sex life partnerships, research will acknowledge various forms of romantic relationships.

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Appendices

Appendix A
Participant Information

Pseudonym	Pronouns	Age	Marital status	Employment status	Location
Kimberley	She/her	23	Engaged	Unemployed: student	Western Cape
Carla	She/her	24	Engaged	Employed	Western Cape
Jasmine	She/her	37	Married	Employed	Northern Cape
Sarah	She/her	53	Married	Employed	Western Cape
Nandi	She/her	42	Married	Employed	Northern Cape
Daniel	He/him	34	Married	Employed	Gauteng

Appendix B
Participant Recruitment Advert

Appendix C
Participant Information Sheet

Title: Exploring Power Dynamics in Same-Sex Marriage

Dear Prospective Participant

We are Pelisa Michelle Bashe and Nina Skinner, two Honors in Psychology students at the University of Cape Town. As part of fulfillment of our honors' degree we are conducting research with Dr Refiloe Makama, and we are inviting you to participate in our study, titled, Exploring the power dynamics in same-sex marriage.

What is the purpose of the study?

The purpose of our study is to explore the ways in which queer individuals in same-sex marriages construct, understand, and experience marriage. This includes how roles and power dynamics are negotiated within marriages as well as exploring the negotiations and processes leading up to marriage.

Why am I being asked to participate?

Our study aims to recruit six people over the age of 18 who are living in South Africa, and who are either married or engaged. You are being invited in our study to share how you experience and understand marriage.

What is the nature of my participation in this study?

Our study involves one-on-one semi-structured interviews, that will take 45 minutes to 60 minutes. These interviews will be audio recorded. The questions in the interview will be revolved around your marriage and engagement.

Can I withdraw from this study even after having agreed to participate?

Participation in our study is completely voluntary. Therefore, after reading this information sheet you may choose not to consent to participation. Further, should you wish to participate in our study, you will receive this information sheet and a written consent form. You are free to withdraw your participation in our study at any time, without reason.

What are the potential benefits of taking part in our study?

Although there are no personal benefits to our study, your participation in our study will contribute to the ongoing literature around same-sex marriage in contemporary society.

Are there any negative consequences for me if I participate in this study?

There are no negative consequences of participating in this study. However, the questions asked in this study may be intrusive as you will have to talk about the nature of your relationship/marriage with your partner. If there are any questions or topics you do not feel comfortable addressing, you are under no pressure or obligation to answer them. All the information you provide during your interview will not be disclosed with anyone outside of the research project (i.e., primary researchers and research supervisor). Further, any personal identification information will not be used in the transcription of your interview, or the final write up of the research.

Will the information that I convey to the researcher(s) and my identity be confidential?

Your information and identity will be confidential. Your name and participation in this study will not be known to persons outside of the research project. To protect your identity, you will

be referred to by pseudonym in the transcription of the interview and the final write up of the research.

How will the researcher(s) protect the security of data?

All transcribed information from your interview will be securely stored away. All hard copies of your interview will be safely secured in the research supervisors' cupboard, for potential future use. All electronic copies of your transcribed interview will be stored in a password protected laptop. Future use of the stored data will undergo research ethics review and approval. The hardcopies and electronic copies of the transcribed interview will only be kept for five years and permanently destroyed and deleted thereafter.

Will I receive payment or any incentives for participating in this study?

You will not receive any payment for participation in the study.

Has the study received ethics approval?

This study has been ethically reviewed and approved by the University of Cape Town's Research Ethics Review Committee of the Department of Psychology. A copy of the ethics approval is available upon request.

How will I be informed of the findings/results of the research?

If you would like to be informed of the final research findings, please contact:

Pelisa Michelle Bashe	bshpel001@myuct.ac.za
Nina Skinner	sknnin001@myuct.ac.za

In the case that you may need any further information or want to contact the researcher(s) about any part of this study, please contact:

Pelisa Michelle Bashe	bshpel001@myuct.ac.za
Nina Skinner	sknnin001@myuct.ac.za

Should you have any concerns about the way the research was conducted, you may contact:

Dr Refiloe Makama	refiloe.makama@uct.ac.za
Research ethics chairperson of the Department of Psychology	rosalind.adams@uct.ac.za

Thank you for taking the time to read this information sheet and for participating in this study.

Pelisa Michelle Bashe and Nina Skinner

Appendix D
Consent Form

I, .

(participant name), confirm that the researcher asking for my consent to participate in this research has, informed me about the nature, procedure, potential benefits, and risks of this research.

Please print your initials if you agree with the following statements:

Statement	Initial
I confirm that I have read (or had it explained) and understood the participant information sheet	
I have had sufficient opportunity to ask questions and I am prepared to participate in the study	
I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I can withdraw my participation at any time without reason or penalty	
I am aware that the findings of this research will be used as fulfilment of a degree, but my participation will be kept confidential	

I agree to participate in this study	
I agree to the recording of the interview	
I have received a signed copy of the informed consent form	

Participant name and surname (Please print)

_____

Participant signature Date

_____ _____

Researcher's name and surname (Please print)

_____

Researcher's signature Date

_____ _____

Appendix E
Referral List

Below is a list of organizations that provide counselling or support, if needed.

	Triangle Project	**LifeLine**	**FAMSA**
Service	Triangle project offers counselling in person and through a hotline, amongst other services, directed towards members of the LGBTQIA+ community	24 hour telephone counselling service Rape counselling Trauma counselling Face to Face counselling	Marital and relationship counselling Family counselling Individual counselling Trauma debriefing, support and counselling
Payment	Services are charged at a sliding scale according to income	Services are free of charge	Services are charged at a sliding scale according to income
Contact	**Tel:** 021 422 0255 **Email:** health2@triangle.org.za	**Office:** 021 461-1113 **Crisis:** 021 461 1111 **WhatsApp Contact:** 063 709 2620 **Email:** info@lifelinewc.org.za	**Observatory office (Head Office)** Tel: 021 447 7951 Fax: 021 447 0174 **Web-site:** www.famsawc.org.za **General Queries:** famsa@famsawc.org.za **Appointments:** Tel: +27 21 447 0170

			Email: appointments@famsawc.org.za **Online Counselling Appointments:** Tel: 067 082 1567 Email: intake@famsawc.org.za
Address	2, 4 Seymour Street, Observatory	23B (Unit 1 – 4) Waverley Business Park Kotzee Road, Mowbray, 7925	Observatory Office (head office) 9 Bowden Road, Observatory

Appendix F
Interview Questions

Context

1. What are your pronouns?
2. Where are you from?
3. How old are you?
4. Are you employed?
5. What is your career?
6. What is your education level?

Trajectory of Marriage/relationship

1. Can you tell me the story about your relationship before your engagement
2. How did the engagement happen?
3. Can you tell me about your engagement ceremony, if you had one?
4. Can you tell me briefly about your marriage ceremony?
5. Can you tell me what being married is like for you?

Roles and Dynamics in marriage

1. What does a typical week for you and your partner look like?
2. Tell me, what does a typical weekend look like for you and your partner?
3. Can you describe the processes you and your partner go through when making an important decision that affects both of you?
4. Would you say things have changed in your relationship since getting married or engaged?

Appendix G
Ethics Approval

UNIVERSITY OF CAPE TOWN

Department of Psychology

University of Cape Town Rondebosch 7701 South Africa
Telephone (021) 650 3417
Fax No. (021) 650 4104

20 July 2022

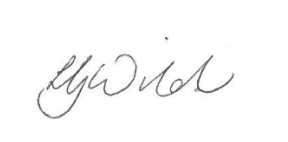
Nina Skinner and
Pelisa Bashe
Department of
Psychology University
of Cape Town
Rondebosch 7701

Dear Nina and Pelisa

I am pleased to inform you that ethical clearance has been given by an Ethics Review Committee of the Faculty of Humanities for your study, *Exploring Power Dynamics in Same-Sex Marriage.* The reference number is PSY2022-027.

I wish you all the best for

your study.Yours sincerely



Lauren
Wild (PhD)
Associate
Professor
Chair: Ethics Review Committee