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| Title | Civil partnership and marriage: LGBT-Q political pragmatism and the normalization imperative |
| Authors | Neary, Aoife |
| Publication date | 2016 |
| Original Citation | Neary, A. (2016) 'Civil partnership and marriage: LGBT-Q political pragmatism and the normalization imperative', Sexualities, 19(7), pp.757-779. https://doi.org/10.1177/1363460715616943 |
| Type of publication | Article (peer reviewed) |
| Link to publisher's version | 10.1177/1363460715616943 |
| Rights | © 2016, the Author(s). - https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/ |
| Download date | 2026-11-06 09:29:51 |
| Item downloaded from | https://hdl.handle.net/10468/17627 |

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**Reference:**

Neary, A. (2016) 'Civil Partnership and Marriage: LGBT-Q Political Pragmatism and the Normalization Imperative', *Sexualities*,19 (7), 757-779.

http://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/1363460715616943

**Title of Paper:**

Civil Partnership and Marriage: LGBT-Q Political Pragmatism and the Normalisation Imperative

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## Introduction

Since the 1990s, many (neo)liberal states have been concerned with extending the rights of citizenship through the recognition of same-sex relationships (Richardson, 2004). In Ireland, the last decade has been a period of significant change in LGBT-Q politics. A Catholic church depleted in moral stature (Donnelly and Inglis, 2010) coupled with European directives and initiatives on human rights related to sexuality (Weeks, 2008) have been central factors in this speedy process of political change. The Civil Partnership and Certain Rights and Obligations of Co-Habitants Bill was signed into law in 2010. This legislation provided many of the same rights as marriage such as pension, inheritance and tax entitlements. However, there are significant deficiencies in the CP legislation, most notably in relation to children, guardianship rights and definitions of the family (Fagan, 2011). Despite a deep divide amongst advocacy groups in the emergence of CP, there now appears to be a united

front for equal access to marriage (Rose, 2012). There is mainstream political support and a constitutional referendum on equal access to marriage is scheduled for May 2015.

Internationally, a body of literature focuses on the pros and cons of legal same-sex partnership structures. However, following Butler's (2002) critique of this binary, much literature has moved away from 'for and against' arguments towards inquiry into the complexities of discourses, practices, meanings and effects of same-sex relationship recognition (Harding and Peel, 2008; Young and Boyd, 2006). Furthermore, the path towards same-sex partnership legislation in each context is shaped by its own cultural and political specificities (Waaldijk 2004). In Ireland, although some work has focused on issues such as how the constitution has been interpreted in the Zappone and Gilligan case (O' Sullivan, 2009) and how the existence of CP solidifies a hierarchical two-tier system of relationship recognition (Asher, 2009), there is a dearth of literature around the legal recognition of same-sex relationships. Rather than adopting an argument for or against CP and marriage, this paper provides new insight into the lived nature of LGBT-Q politics through inquiry into the discourses and decision-making of LGBT-Q advocates as CP and marriage emerged in the Irish context.

To this end, a moment of discomfort serves as the starting point of this paper. I was a member of the audience for a debate on extending marriage to same-sex couples on a current affairs programme in Ireland in April 2013. Buoyed by academic scholarship related to the normalising perils of marriage, I planned to raise a question about the appropriateness of marriage as *the* vehicle for achieving equality for LGBT-Q people. However, as I sat in the audience, I listened to a two-sided debate unfold and felt increasingly uncomfortable about how my question might be received:

> **Director of 'Marriage Equality' campaign:** They know that the time is right. Three quarters of the country know that denying same-sex couples access to civil

> marriage is discrimination (audience clapping). It's time. Ireland is ready. People are ready for this we just need to catch up in terms of our legislation.
>
> **Catholic Comment Representative:** …They [same-sex couples] don't have that particular environment needed for children.

(Text of RTE (national broadcaster) current affairs debate on same-sex marriage, 2/4/2013)

In the end, I didn't ask my question and afterwards, when reflecting on my inaction, I found myself thinking of the bravery those who have taken up a position on 'the borderlands' by being critical of extending marriage to same-sex couples. For example, Rohrer (2009:107) describes how she felt like a 'bad lesbian — disappointing straight allies and gay friends' and reflects on being told to 'get with the program' and support gay marriage or the Right would destroy the chances of the Left. She existed on the periphery because she was 'neither "them" – homophobes who see gay marriage as the apocalypse, nor "us" – gays and lesbians whole-heartedly fighting for marriage' (Rohrer, 2009: 111). Similarly, Young and Boyd (2006) document how Kinsman's call for the abolition of civil marriage on the basis that it is patriarchal and discriminatory was met with either silence or confusion, demonstrating the deeply entrenched nature of the privielges associated with marriage. Unlike these commentators I wasn't brave enough to publicly articulate an existence on the periphery. A question such as the one I had planned to ask would have risked muddying the waters in the drive for equal access to marriage and playing directly into the hands of the conservative, religious Right. Instead, I opted for the comfort in silence.

This moment of discomfort serves as a useful starting point. It draws attention to how the legitimacy attached to marriage (and other legal relationship structures) is a powerful magnetic force that promises legitimacy and cultural change. It highlights how the LGBT-Q

political commitment to marriage commands and demands the support of all liberal-oriented individuals. It points to what is silenced and forfeited in the turn towards the promise of societal institutions such as CP and marriage. It indicates how, in the rush for legal recognition, certain voices are marginalised and heteronormative versions of marriage and the family are reinforced (Young and Boyd, 2006) And so, this paper inquires into the decision-making, discourses and silences around the emergence of CP and marriage in LGBT-Q and mainstream politics in Ireland.

This paper draws on a small scale study of in-depth interviews (approximately 70 minutes in length) with five advocates involved in the LGBT-Q political landscape during the emergence of CP and marriage in Ireland. The advocates held leadership roles in the following organisations: the Gay and Lesbian Equality Network (GLEN), Marriage Equality (ME), the National Gay and Lesbian Federation (NLGF) and Gay Community News (GCN). All advocates agreed to forgo anonymity and are identified by their occupation titles throughout this paper. In conversation with the advocates, the tension between representing a professional organisation and articulating personal opinion was palpable. I attended to this in my analysis by highlighting and drawing out these tensions. This paper also draws on an analysis of media representations, debate and commentary around CP and marriage in the Irish media from January 2010 until January 2014. This included perspectives from key sources such as the Department of Education and Skills, the CP debates and speeches in the Dáil (lower house of parliament) and Seanad (upper house of parliament), the Catholic Church and religious organisations. Analysis of data sets was multi-layered and cyclical. Themes were constructed following several readings of transcripts, identification and grouping of categories and ideas, writing memos, sharing of transcripts with participants for member-checking and a continuous analytical process of 'thinking with theory' (Mazzei and Jackson 2012).

This paper will be organised in the following way. Firstly, I provide an overview of central debates around same-sex relationship structures. Secondly, I present an overview of key features of the Irish context and trace key moments in the emergence of CP and marriage. Finally, anchored by the work of Michel Foucault, Judith Butler, Lisa Duggan, Joan Scott, Lauren Berlant and others, I discuss LGBT-Q political pragmatism and the culture of consensus and I explore the advocates' visions of 'real life' cultural change as normalisation.

**Same-sex relationship recognition: moving beyond the pros and cons**

As aforementioned, there are many arguments for and against same-sex relationship structures such as CP and marriage. For many, the 'marriage agenda' is part of neo-liberal and neo-conservative projects that use marriage to relinquish the responsibility of the state under the assumption that couples will take economic responsibility for one another. The politics of 'choice' that surrounds marriage masks its classed, gendered and racialised consequences. The economic implications of marriage are such that wealthier couples who are primarily dependent on one partner benefit from tax breaks while lower income couples lose state benefits and social assistance (Boyd and Young, 2003; Browne, 2011). There are problematic gender and race implications in that women tend to have less income and wealth (Young and Boyd, 2006) and marriage in many contexts stratifies normalised ideals of white citizenship (Kandaswamy, 2008). Furthermore, excluded from and stigmatised by marriage are those who lie outside the conjugal frame, non-monogamous and polyamorous relationships as well as those whose do not fit the lesbian/gay binary (Warner 1999; Butler 2004; Duggan 2008; Asher 2009; Barker, 2012). Some argue that structures such as CP are counterproductive in that they reproduce marriage as the 'gold standard' of relationships (Yep et al., 2003; Butler, 2004; Baird and Rosenbaum, 1997; Warner, 1999; Clarke, 2003; Bolte, 1998).

There is a range of arguments in favour of marriage and CP. Many argue that no one social institution should exist solely for one group of people (Bolte, 1998; Eskridge, 2002; Calhoun, 2000; Kitzinger and Wilkinson, 2004). Some assert that marriage will de-stabilise and transform conservative conceptions of marriage and the family (Calhoun, 2000; Stoddard, 1997) — a notion systematically refuted by Barker (2012) on the basis of the structurally embedded nature of 'the marriage model'. Others see marriage as 'the highest public recognition of personal integrity' and a desired 'maturing' from promiscuity towards monogamous commitment (Sullivan, 1995). While some proponents of legal partnerships such as CP include the idea that it is a stepping-stone towards full marriage, others see them as having transformative potential in that a space is created for conversations about alternative forms of kinship (Barker, 2006; Stychin, 2006). Alternative approaches to kinship have also been mooted in several contexts. For example, it was suggested that the category 'functionally interdependent' would supersede marital status (Law Commission of Canada, 2001) or that domestic partnership would replace traditional marriage (Minow in Kurtz, 2008). The notion of a menu of kinship options was also prescribed as a more equitable approach (DeFillippis, 2006).

While the various arguments presented above are a necessary grounding in coming to understand the variety of LGBT-Q political positions, they can appear to flatten the intricacies of the everyday living of LGBT-Q politics. A special issue of the *Sexualities* journal published in 2008 addresses some of the previously less-explored complexities. Smart (2008) documents couples' deliberations about CP and demonstrates a complex interplay between personal and political sensibilities, highlighting that those who choose to enter into them do not do so without critical reflection. Bonthuys (2008) critiques the assumption that state civil marriage offers a progressive future pointing out that 'custom marriage law is often less dogmatic than civil law and more likely to find ways of accommodating, rather than

excluding "unconventional" behaviour and relationships' (Bonthuys, 2008: 733). Harding's (2008) recognition/regulation dyad highlights the notion that relationship structures such as CP or marriage can create both equalities and inequalities simultaneously. She points out that heteronormativity, exclusion and neo-liberal regulation are entangled with the citizenship rights and 'ordinariness' that official recognition brings. This paper builds on these complexities to provide new insight into the discourses, silences and decision-making of advocates as CP and marriage have emerged in the Irish context. The following section provides an overview of key features of the Irish context and key political moments in the emergence of CP and marriage.

**Key features and moments as civil partnership and marriage emerged in Ireland**

LGBT-Q rights in Ireland have been shaped by a largely intertwined relationship between church and state. On one hand, anti-discrimination legislation has been introduced but, on the other, conservative opposition continues to be articulated in the name of religion and the protection of the nuclear family. Towards the end of the 1980s and the early 1990s there were several milestones in the lesbian and gay movement in Ireland. In 1987, the Irish Congress of Trade Unions (ICTU) launched guidelines for dealing with discrimination in the workplace. A 'Late Late Show' debate on the national broadcasting channel also put the equality issues of lesbian and gay people on a national stage (Rose 1994). In 1990, President Mary Robinson invited 35 representatives from the lesbian and gay community to Áras an Uachtarán (House of the President) in December 1992. Following many years of struggle and much campaigning by various groups, homosexuality was decriminalised in the Criminal Law (Sexual Offences) Bill of 1993 and employee dismissal on sexual orientation grounds was prohibited (Unfair Dismissals Act, 1993).

On the other hand, the language of the Irish constitution continues to interweave Catholic and liberal democratic ideology (Whyte, 2002). In 1998, religious exemption clause Section 37 (1), was enacted in the Employment Equality Act to permit differentiation on the grounds of 'ethos' in the recruitment and dismissal of employees in religious institutions (Employment Equality Act, 1998, 2004). This religious exemption and the concept of 'religious freedom' are made all the more complex by past Catholic Church teachings on homosexuality as 'morally disordered' (Ratzinger, 1986).Groups such as the Iona Institute (II) continually promote the place of marriage and religion in Irish society and promote freedom of conscience and religion (Iona Institute, 2012). In positioning equality law alongside the workings of religiosity in Ireland, I am not suggesting that Catholicism is the backward, conservative past to secularism's progressive future. On the contrary, I want to avoid such simplistic suggestions. Nevertheless, religiosity is an inextricable part of the fabric of (hetero)normative life in Ireland and so remains a central and pervasive presence in the backdrop of decision-making and discourses that circulate around the emergence of CP and marriage.

The following table provides a chronological outline of key moments in the emergence of CP and marriage in the landscape of LGBT-Q politics in Ireland. It outlines these moments in the following categories: 'CP', 'Marriage Equality' (ME) and 'Opposition to CP and ME'. This table should not be read as a simplistic representation of three separate and discrete domains. Indeed, key advocacy groups such as GLEN argue that while they pushed for CP, they continued to be supporters of gaining access to marriage. Equally, groups such as *Gay Catholic Voice* powerfully interrupt assumptions that LGBT-Q politics is secular or that having a Catholic faith equates to being homophobic. This table is an attempt to map key moments in the emergence of CP and marriage in Ireland to provide context for this paper.

| Year | Civil Partnership | Marriage Equality (ME) | Opposition to CP and ME |
|---|---|---|---|
| 2003 | | Zappone and Gilligan pursue having their Canadian marriage legally recognised in Ireland[i]. | |
| 2004 | David Norris introduces the Civil Partnership Bill but discussion deferred pending outcome of Zappone and Gilligan case. | ME campaign and advocacy group forms around Zappone-Gilligan case. | The Civil Registration Act 2004 is enacted and defines marriage as between a man and a woman[ii]. |
| 2006 | Civil Unions (CU) Bill introduced by the Labour Party[iii]. | Colley Report identifies 2 options: CP and marriage but marriage has constitutional difficulties[iv]. | |
| | Second reading of CU Bill postponed because fails to deal with heterosexual and non-conjugal couples. | Zappone and Gilligan lose case[v]. They launch appeal to the Supreme Court. | |
| 2007 | GLEN lobbies political parties to implement legal recognition for same-sex couples. | | |
| | Labour Party reintroduce Civil Unions Bill[vi]. | | |
| 2008 | CP legislation drafted, GLEN briefs politicians on the details. | ME and *LGBT Noise* advocacy groups vocal about inadequacies of CP. | Catholic Bishops Committee declare opposition to CP Bill. |
| 2009 | Civil Partnership and Certain Rights and Obligations of Co-Habitants Bill published[vii]. | NLGF identifies marriage as priority for LGB people[viii]. CP referred to as second-class citizenship. | II call for a freedom of conscience in CP[ix]. This is echoed by some in the Dáil (lower house of parliament)[x]. |
| | GLEN supports CP because it is only political option[xi]. | Ombudsman for Children advises CP Bill creates legal vacuum for children[xii]. | |
| | | CP Bill torn up on stage at Gay Pride. | |
| 2010 | GLEN argues CP is state issue so church views irrelevant[xiii]. | ME outlines the ways children are ignored by CP[xiv]. | Irish Bishops' Committee say CP is a threat to marriage[xv]. |
| | CP signed into law. | | |
| 2011 | First CP ceremonies take place in April. | ME highlights 169 differences between CP and marriage legislation[xvi]. | |
| | | Red-C Poll 73% support for marriage | |
| 2012 | | GLEN reiterates support for ME and assert that CP success means marriage is not a 'massive legislative leap'[xvii]. | II criticise politicians who publicly support equal access to marriage[xviii]. |
| | | Tánaiste (Deputy Prime Minister) announces marriage is 'civil rights issue of this generation'[xix]. | |
| 2013 | | 79% support at Constitutional Convention. Decision to hold referendum in 2015. | |
| 2014 | | Red-C Poll 76% support for marriage.<br><br>Ipsos MRBI Poll 80% support for marriage. | RTE (national broadcaster) pays compensation to II because of LGBT-Q activist insinuations of homophobia[xx]. National debate about homophobia ensues. |
| | | | Broadcasting Association of Ireland declare radio piece on ME unfair because no opposition included [xxi]. |
| | | | Irish Bishops emphasise marriage is between man and woman[xxii]. |

**Table 1: Key Moments as CP and Marriage Emerged in Ireland (References cited in endnotes).**

Table 1 shows that, as the terms of the CP legislation became clearer, there was a split between advocacy groups in Ireland. GLEN argued that CP was the best available political option while groups such as ME, NLGF, LGBT Noise and others advocated for equal access to marriage. Since the enactment of CP, the wounds of the various factions seem to have healed and there appears to be a united front for marriage (Rose, 2012). What is also evident is that, in recent years, marriage for same-sex couples has become a mainstream political issue with a constitutional referendum taking place in 2015. The current government — following the work and lobbying of certain LGBT-Q advocacy groups — has also taken certain other steps. An action plan on bullying outlined expectations for schools in relation to homophobia (Department of Education and Skills, 2013). The Children and Family Relationships Bill (Department of Justice and Equality, 2013) proposed legal measures to address guardianship rights for the diversity of families that exist and the Gender Recognition Bill (Department of Social Protection, 2013) proposed full legal recognition of transgender people.

This paper now turns to outline how, despite fissures over the introduction of CP, all the advocates adopted a politics of pragmatism and employed political strategies in line with how consensus politics prevails in the Irish context. However, these pragmatic, integrative political approaches have played their part in foreclosing any radical sexual politics and broader discussions about kinship and sexual citizenship.

**Pragmatism: 'Avoiding contention and highlighting agreement and consensus'**

Aligned with arguments for equal access to marriage in other contexts (Kitzinger and Wilkinson, 2004), the advocates who rejected CP believed that only access to marriage would symbolise equality:

> There is a need to fight this on the basis of exclusion from a very powerful institution which gives rights and statuses to the individuals in it and just, the exclusion from it, I think, is hugely symbolic and significant (Chairperson, ME).

On the other side, those who supported CP saw it as a very significant milestone in how it 'provided 95% of the legal consequences of marriage…and advances us enormously' (Director, GLEN). GLEN reiterated it was never a case of a choice between CP and marriage:

> The alternative was not CP/Civil Marriage, the alternative was CP now — which offered enormous rights and protections — versus marriage at some point in the future (Director, GLEN).

They pledged their allegiance to CP with the intention that guardianship and adoption rights could be incorporated either through amending CP or accessing marriage in the future.

The advocates were divided by their decision to make a political commitment to either CP or marriage. Those who supported CP advocated an incremental style of integrative politics. Those who rejected CP advocated an integrative politics built on equal access to marriage. Mirroring other contexts (Young and Boyd, 2006), and despite the 'upset' (Director of Education, GLEN) and 'extremely divisive' (Chairperson, NLGF) nature of this split, one advocate admitted that this debate helped to 'raise the stakes' for LGBT-Q politics in Ireland: 'I think what happened was quite useful…Instead of it being a debate about CP or nothing, the debate became almost between two entities in the gay community and it was marriage or CP' (Director of Education, GLEN). But the significant deficiencies in the CP legislation and the government's careful commitment to 'respect the special

protection' given to marriage (Ahern in Gay and Lesbian Equality Network, 2010a: 7) at the time might also be understood as evidence of how heteronormative 'wedge politics' pit groups against one another so that heterosexual privileges are preserved (DeFillippis, 2006). This idea was echoed by one of the advocates who argued that CP is evidence of the continued 'connection between the Catholic Church and our governments, between…Canon law and Irish law' and how this was 'highly influential in the drafting of CP legislation' (Editor, GCN).

Nevertheless, what is central to the argument here is that the so-called divide amongst advocacy groups was a 'false dichotomy' (Director of Education, GLEN). Those on either side might have differed in their approach but, crucially, they were aligned by a politics of pragmatism and by their integrative goals and strategies. Both sides viewed legal relationship structures as central in their vision of equality for LGBT-Q people and both sides fore-fronted a model of equality that is based on a politics of integration. And so, to return to the moment of discomfort at the beginning of this paper, effectively, CP/marriage became *the* collective 'progressive' counter-discourse to the 'conservative', religious Right. Because CP/marriage emerged as the *only* counter-discourse, it appears at first glance to constitute a radical challenge to conservative politics of sexuality in Ireland. However, the formidable legal force of CP/marriage played a role in closing down radical alternatives and opportunities for broader discussion about kinship and sexual citizenship in Irish society.

As is the case in many contexts (Ettelbrick, 2001; Baird and Rosenbaum, 1997; Warner, 1999) the positions taken up and decisions made by the advocates were motivated by pragmatism and a cognisance of the need for middle ground approval (Young and Boyd, 2006). They employed political strategies in line with how consensus politics prevails in the Irish context. However, echoing Harding's (2008; 2011) illustration of the ambivalences of LGBT-Q people in relation to CP and marriage, the commitments of the advocates were not

made without careful deliberation or sacrifice. Butler's (2002) reflection on 'taking a stand' on gay marriage helps frame the pragmatism of the advocates, illustrating how the personal and the political are entangled in complex and costly ways:

> To say that one is for or against gay marriage is not always easy to do, since it may be that one wants to secure the right for those who wish to make use of it even as one does not want it for oneself, or it may be that one wants to counter the homophobic discourses that have been marshalled against gay marriage, but one does not want to be, therefore, in favor of it. Or it may be that one believes very strongly that marriage is the best way for lesbian and gay people to go, and would like to install it as a new norm, a norm for the future. Or it may be that one not only opposes it for oneself, but for everybody, and that the task at hand is to rework and revise the social organization of friendship, sexual contacts, and community to produce non-state-centered forms of support and alliance, since marriage, given its historical weight, only becomes an "option" by extending itself as a norm (and thus foreclosing options), one which also extends property relations and renders the social forms for sexuality more conservative (Butler, 2002: 20/21).

The complexity emphasised by Butler was evident in the advocates' accounts. One advocate talked about the personal upset caused by the suggestion that their commitment to CP was 'selling out' (Director of Education, GLEN). Those supporting CP saw it as a significant milestone in their vision of equality. They were acutely aware of the strategies necessary for persuading certain politicians to implement CP. For example, GLEN had a

> trademark strategy of avoiding contention and highlighting agreement and consensus …GLEN started by framing gay and lesbian equality as something

> that everyone in Ireland could be proud of, rather than highlighting the controversy around such legal protections (GLEN, 2012a: 4).

GLEN's carefully considered strategic approach avoided controversy or conflict and maintained consensus.

The 'Marriage Equality' advocates indicated that the institution of marriage and its history ran somewhat counter to their own personal, feminist politics but they echoed Butler's quote above in deciding to secure the right for others:

> My own politics are, on the whole, a politics of challenge and protest…rather than the politics of negotiation. However, there's a certain amount of pragmatism always required so I will certainly work with and be part of an organisation which has more reformist approaches while I still reserve the right to make more challenging demands…Yes, we want to be the same so this has meant that it is more difficult to pursue a more radical, subversive and revolutionary politics within the lesbian and gay political movement. It is quite difficult to stand up and say, well… I really want to subvert all of these institutions which are heteronormative…it would be very very difficult to do that (Chairperson, NLGF).

Similarly, the Chairperson of ME said: 'I absolutely see that the whole institution needs to be, if possible, done away with, but…we're living in the real world'. Here, the notion of 'living in the real world' shapes a political approach which asserts that gaining access to the institution of marriage is a method of seeking equality for LGBT-Q people while more radical ideas about deconstructing such institutions are impractical. In this way, although their personal allegiance was to a more radical politics, this was rejected on the basis that

same-sex couples should have the choice to get married if they so wish. Their approaches echo a kind of 'queer liberalism' that attempts to reconcile the radical political aspirations of queer studies with contemporary liberal demands for rights and recognition (Eng et al., 2005: 10). Hemmings and Treacher-Kabesh (2013: 39) draw attention to how the notion of fighting for 'choice' is very difficult to counter in how it calls up consumerist tropes of individualisation and personal choice. Others argue that the notion of marriage as a 'choice' is political naïveté that conceals and (re)produces the selective privilege of marriage and the heteronormative family (Warner, 1999; Polikoff, 2000). It is clear that the costs of adopting pragmatic approaches were not lost on these advocates and that certain sacrifices were made for their current political strategies to take hold. Prior commitments to a more radical politics were put aside because of an immediate need for political pragmatism.

The concept of 'discourse' (Foucault, 1978) provides some insight here. Discourses operate as systems of knowledge that are moving and unstable. Discursive fields overlap and 'appeal to one another's "truths" for authority and legitimation' (Scott, 1988: 284) and in this way, discourse is productive in establishing 'a regime of truth' that works through a taken-for-grantedness with the familiar (Foucault, 1980). The power of certain truths 'comes from the way they function as givens or first premises for both sides in an argument, so that conflicts within discursive fields are framed to follow from rather than question them' (Scott, 1988: 285). Following Foucault, we can see how the current Left/Right divide in relation to equal access to marriage operates as a regime of truth in the Irish context. Mainstream political consensus around CP and now marriage also invites interrogation. In many contexts, the political elite have introduced relationship recognition changes ahead of grassroots activism (Weeks, 2008). These enthusiastic commitments have caused anxieties and suspicions that these efforts are 'little more than adjustments to the imperatives of neo-liberalism' (Weeks, 2008: 788). For example, Prime Minister of the UK, David Cameron,

advocated for same-sex couple access to marriage *because* he is a conservative not *in spite of* being a conservative (Lloyd, 2011). Foucault's (1982) concept of pastoral power facilitates an understanding of how mainstream political approaches operate through the 'care' and 'protection' of LGBT-Q people but have disciplinary, heteronormalising effects. The apparent homogeneity of the Left in Ireland alerts to how powerful, neoliberal political rationalities and mentalities (Miller and Rose, 1990) of consensus and pragmatism circulate and govern at a distance through organisations, networks and individuals (Gray, 2006b: 122) reproducing homonormative sexual-citizen subjectivities and through the legal weight of institutions such as marriage (Young and Boyd, 2006). The Left CP/marriage agenda is an integrative and assimilationist one but yet the Left, in this context, has come to signify the radical because of how it presents as a counter discourse to the conservative religious Right. Aligning with Young and Boyd's (2006) analysis of the Canadian context, the assimilationist approach has 'extended itself as a norm' (Butler, 2002: 21) and actually foreclosed broader discussions about radical alternatives or about definitions of equality.

The interviews with the advocates highlight some of these missed opportunities. One such opportunity was the potential for a broader discussion about equality. The Chairperson of the NLGF acknowledged the intricacies of attempting to 'be the same but at the same time retain your specificity' (Chairperson, NLGF), demonstrating an acute awareness of the tensions in seeking equality on the grounds of sameness as opposed to difference. However, a political pragmatism about 'real life' concerns and an awareness of how the politics of sexuality have worked in Ireland closed down discussion about the ramifications of employing integrative, assimilationist politics. Another missed opportunity is evident in a lack of critique of the institution of marriage. In the Seanad debates around CP, Senator David Norris alluded to previous approaches taken by LGBT-Q advocates to the politics of sexuality: 'instead of being the antagonists and opponents of marriage, gay people are turning

into some of its most effective and ardent advocates' (Gay and Lesbian Equality Network, 2010b: 27). The marriage advocates themselves acknowledged their past political commitments and their personal concerns about the institution of marriage. One advocate who supported CP showed a certain cognisance of marriage as selective privilege: 'the complexity of the issue for lesbian and gay families is that marriage wouldn't resolve the children's issues except for some people' (Director, GLEN). A final point to note here relates to the Colley working group set up to deliberate on the provision of rights for same-sex and heterosexual co-habiting and non-conjugal relationships (Colley, 2006), previously mentioned in Table 1. While it began with this remit, its agenda quickly became focused on same-sex couples only. Later, Minister McDowell (who had set up the group) halted the reading of the 'Civil Unions Bill' (The Labour Party, 2006) on the grounds that the Bill didn't deal with the three categories. It was assumed in the LGBT-Q political sphere that his decision was a smokescreen for political cowardice and this was most likely the case. However, the decision to focus on the narrow issue of same-sex couple relationship structures also signalled how quickly more radical alternatives and discussions about kinship were foreclosed. Each of these moments mentioned here can be read as the seeds (or remnants) of a more radical politics of sexuality that were suppressed by the commitment to a politics of pragmatism.

In what follows, I demonstrate how the advocates were motivated by 'real life' cultural change through normalisation for LGBT-Q people. However, I also demonstrate how mobilising a politics of change and a concept of 'equality' that is based on normalisation and sameness simultaneously forefronts and reproduces a certain model of 'acceptable' sexual-citizen subject while reassigning 'others' with peripheral status.

**'Real life' cultural change: 'Normalising is the way things work in this society'**

All of the advocates in this research displayed a similar vision of progressive change for LGBT-Q people. The advocates were adamant that CP and marriage provided significant rights and entitlements with the potential to change lives in real ways. But as Butler (2002: 32) reminds us, many LGBT-Q people 'are not simply struggling with rights that attach to persons, but "are struggling *to be conceived as persons*" [emphasis in original]. And so, their vision of cultural change involved 'making ordinary that which was once perceived as extra-ordinary… where being gay or lesbian is unremarkable' (Director, GLEN). There was a general acceptance that 'normalising is the way things work in this society' (Chairperson, ME). Marriage was seen as having particular weight and meaning in the Irish context: 'The rights and entitlements that flow from marriage and the status that is accorded to relationships where people are allowed to be married have a huge impact on how they live their lives, in Ireland in particular' (Chairperson, ME). The concept of 'normal' was a reference point to explain how CP marked out LGBT-Q people as inferior, as lower on the hierarchy of normality: 'Why should we be less normal?....I do feel that CP keeps us in that place….I think it makes some difference [but] it's still going to single [LGBT] people out as being different' (Chairperson, NLGF). Highlighted here is the symbolic weight attached to marriage (and CP) (Young and Boyd, 2006). CP and marriage were seen as 'ordinary' mechanisms in achieving cultural change and, thus, the perception of LGBT-Q people as 'normal' and not 'different'.

The advocates believed that CP and marriage would make cultural changes to the everyday lives of LGBT-Q people. CP ceremonies taking place all over the country and the various moments associated with CP were seen as new spaces of cultural change in Ireland. One advocate explained how this micro level change through CP ceremonies aligns with how change happens in Ireland:

> You don't label people 'homophobic' when, in effect, it's a cultural change that happens. People need information and support and vibrancy and everything else to understand it. And I think that's slowly counteracting people's sense of a fixed way of doing things. There have been 500 CPs this year and people are turning up with their mothers and fathers and aunts and second cousins-in-law and their neighbours and their milkmen and everybody else and all of them are understanding in a very different way about lesbian and gay couples and that is the shift that's going to counteract the…questioning of that identity (Director, GLEN).

These individual ceremonies were an integral part of their vision of normalisation:

> A lesbian couple from (rural village), been together for years…. and half of (rural village) were there [at CP]…..there was nothing we could ever do if we had all the money in the world that would ever achieve the equalisation of aspirations of love of commitment of relationships for lesbian and gay couples as that event did (Director, GLEN).

Familiar moments and practices in the normative wedding formula helped signal the ordinariness and sameness of a same-sex relationship: 'So we're the same as everybody else…'we've got the tuxes all lined up'…So, it just, I suppose it brings lesbian and gay sexuality in from the cold…we are people who have, in many ways, the same concerns as everybody else (Chairperson, NLGF).

Despite being seen by some as enacting a second-class status, all of the advocates saw how the institution of CP would still effect change in everyday lives of LGBT-Q people. For

example, some saw the legitimacy in being 'recognised by the state' (Director of Education, GLEN). Some believed CP ceremonies would provide new, ordinary opportunities for heterosexual people to vocalise their support:

> It gives…say… the heterosexual world an opportunity to affirm lesbian and gay people…Say somebody who goes into work and announces that they're planning their CP and… all of a sudden, people talk to him about…maybe before, they didn't know how to talk to him about it (Director of Education, GLEN).

Several advocates were hopeful that CP would slowly create a space for people to 'come out' and 'be able to be ordinary in themselves and not to have a closed off part of their lives that cannot be mentioned' (Chairperson, NLGF). Most advocates— even those who rejected CP politically — saw CP as instilling a new confidence:

> The one thing I think it can do…make people feel more confident. They've done that. They are legit somehow and I think that greater feeling of confidence empowers them and enables them to, by a flick of the eyebrow, prevent people from making homophobic comments (Chairperson, NLGF).

It is clear that advocates saw the potential of CP and marriage ceremonies as vehicles of cultural change that would bring about normalisation. Evident here is a concerted commitment to a particular kind of politics of change — one that holds normalisation, ordinariness and sameness as central.

The advocates saw normalisation as a beneficial consequence of CP and marriage. However, as was the case in the emergence of marriage in Canada (Young and Boyd, 2006), the advocates in Ireland demonstrated a concentrated effort to actively forefront a particular

'normal' image of LGBT-Q people, displaying a portrait of monogamy, fidelity and love.Reductionist and stereotypical ideas about LGBT-Q sexualities as deviant and illegitimate sat in the background as these decisions were made. The weight of CP and marriage events was intertwined with how they overcame the baggage of illegitimacy in the past: 'They're deeply moving experiences…you've been allowed something that you felt you'd never get' (Editor, GCN). There was also the expectation that messages in the media had the potential to be exploited by the Right: 'The amount of allegations that are made about people….there is just a sense of, that you are a target and you can be targeted and how things can be twisted' (Chairperson, ME). Some advocates noted the problems with how the act of 'coming out' is an immediately sexualising one: 'One of the complexities around sexual orientation is [that it is] perceived to be sexual activity' (Director, GLEN). Here, advocates were acknowledging the fear of being wholly determined and constituted by de-legitimising discourses of sexual identities. The acute awareness of potential illegitimacies evident here draws attention to those subtle dynamics of power and alerts us to the ways in which internalised gratitude might conduct LGBT-Q bodies in particular ways (Neary, 2014).

Nevertheless, many advocates were very clear about the need to get 'the right messages out about ourselves in the media' (Editor, GCN). Some were conscious of presenting images of stable, loving and committed same-sex relationships in the media:

> One of the brilliant things about Katherine and Louise taking the case, they are very 'telegenic', photogenic warm, loving couple who were critical in building public acceptance for the love and cherishing and honour that people would like of marriage…CP helps to shift the perception of gay and lesbian people — probably more gay men but anyway — from being about sex to being about love and commitment and shared lives and romance and those kinds of things (Director, GLEN).

This notion was echoed in the Dáil and Seanad debates on CP where the case for full access to marriage was presented by pointing out that 'the same values that lead gay people to seek commitment are those very values that are cherished in marriage' (Norris in Gay and Lesbian Equality Network, 2010b: 27). In the current context in Ireland, discourses of love and commitment are sustained by the ME campaign. Some of their slogans — 'Say Yes to Love' and 'Just Love' — exemplify how politically strategic decision-making involves presenting a particular sexual citizen-subject as the public face of LGBT-Q people. One advocate drew attention to this type of strategic decision-making, highlighting that the ME campaign was fronted mainly by women and suggesting there was a cognisance that 'gay men are somehow hyper sexual, incapable of commitment and damaging to children' (Editor, GCN). Their poster campaign might be read as an illustration of this idea given that children are pictured with women but not with men (See Figure 1).




**Figure 1: Marriage Equality Poster Campaign [www.marriagequality.ie](http://www.marriagequality.ie)**

The advocates' commitment to normalisation is intertwined with and inevitably set against a backdrop of past and potential illegitimacies. They shared a vision of change that saw CP/marriage as part of a collective move towards normalisation for LGBT-Q people in their everyday lives. From this perspective, it is easy to see how CP/marriage ceremonies provide opportunities to mark the sameness and ordinariness of same-sex relationships. They

open up silences and promise a 'comfort zone' (Gray, 2006a: 218) of belonging and a new legitimacy. There is also the potential for these institutions to be reshaped in ways that fundamentally change collective understandings of legal relationship structures: 'It [ME] is not seeking to change, to radically transform social institutions, it is seeking to integrate social institutions in the belief that integration will itself contribute to changing those institutions' (Chairperson, NLGF). While Barker (2012) warns against assumptions of such transformation, Harding (2011) draws our attention to the various modes of resistance that promise a stabilising, moderating or fracturing of the regulation and governance deployed through institutions such as marriage.

However, as Harding acknowledges (2011), resistance and power are always bound together and a fracturing of power can result in unintended consequences. While Berlant (2011) and Love (2007) warn against adding another layer of shame to the experiences of LGBT-Q people by denouncing the turn towards the comfort of ordinariness and normativity offered by societal institutions, Berlant nevertheless deems it important to ask of LGBT-Q politics: 'Is that all there is?' (Berlant, 2013). She (2011: 126) calls the fantasy of normalcy a 'stupid optimism' and cautions that 'conventionality…is not the same as achieving security'. For many, normalisation constitutes a 'drive toward respectability' (Rasmussen, 2006: 30) where ideals of 'normal, good citizens who are deserving of inclusion and integration into mainstream society' (Richardson, 2004: 392) are (re)produced. Butler (2004) sheds light on how LGBT-Q advocacy groups have adopted discourses of love and commitment. She asserts that they are leaving behind the promiscuous, unstable and irresponsible connotations (brought about the HIV/AIDS crisis) for a more bourgeois model to sanitise the public image of LGBT-Q people. However, as aforementioned, she and other commentators highlight the dangers of adopting such a framework and argue that it is used by the state as an 'instrument

of moral judgement' (Warner, 1999: 111) where all sexual expression outside marriage (or CP) is morally tainted.

The emphasis on normalisation and the notion that progressive change is about an 'eradication of the idea that we're in any way different' (Editor, GCN) signals a reliance a model of equality based on sameness rather than difference (Chasin, 2000; Richardson, 2004). It is rooted in the idea that sameness with heterosexuality is required in order to be considered legitimate grounds for equality. This equality rights framework forces rights claimants towards an essentialism that most often renders diversity invisible (Young and Boyd, 2006). It deemphasises sexual and political difference and advances 'a homosexuality which is modelled after a fictively normative and fictively apolitical heterosexuality' (Marshall, 2014: 135). Drawing on Scott (1988), one can see the impossibility of sameness politics. For example, the notion of 'coming out' — as articulated by the advocates as a step in progressive change — exemplifies the complexities present in equality as sameness. The process of 'coming out' is simultaneously liberating and limiting (Neary, 2013) but it is also a stating of difference that contradicts the very drive towards sameness. In this way, we can see how, in a model of equality that relies on sameness and normalisation through access to a conservative institution, the notion of passing as heterosexual might be an inevitable consequence. At the very least, as Barker (2012) argues, the possibilities of negotiating how sexual differences are framed, constituted and contested within this institution are constrained.

**Concluding Thoughts**

The LGBT-Q advocates' accounts leave no doubt about their commitment to 'real life', normalising cultural change for LGBTQ people. It is easy to appreciate how CP and marriage were attractive, pragmatic political options in an Irish context where marriage has

historically had such symbolic weight. As many of the advocates acknowledged, it would be very difficult politically to detach from 'life-building modalities' such as marriage (Sedgwick in Berlant, 2006: 23) or to argue for access to the institution while critiquing it (Young and Boyd, 2006). And so, incremental, integrative and reformist rather than radical or subversive political approaches were employed as the most effective way to bring about change. These approaches were designed to seek consensus and they aligned with mainstream politics in Ireland. These decisions underline the ambivalences that are revealed upon inquiry into the lived nature of LGBT-Q politics (Harding, 2011). Nevertheless, the alignment of advocacy groups with mainstream politics coupled with the missed opportunities for public discussion about a more radical politics of sexuality or kinship, alerts to the subtle workings of power and neo-liberal regulation through pragmatism and consensus. Given that Irish cultural identity has largely been 'secured through the thematics of heterosexuality' (Gray, 2006a: 218), the lack of debate around alternative kinship structures might also be understood as a fear to enter a potentially explosive debate that threatens the reproductive logic on which the notion of family and citizenship in Ireland has traditionally rested. This reiterates the necessity to ask: What might an alternative politics of kinship — that actually reflects and supports the relations of care that exist — look like in the Irish context? Furthermore, the advocates' commitment to integration, normalisation and assimilation might be understood as 'the new homonormativity' in action — not only is there a failure to critique the heteronormative institution of marriage in the public sphere, there is also a concerted reproduction of heteronormative, exclusionary institutions (Richardson, 2004; Young and Boyd, 2006). The emphasis on normalisation and the prevalence of discourses of love and commitment alert to how new boundaries of legitimacy/illegitimacy are redrawn where certain kinds of sanitised, 'normal', monogamous sexual-subjectivities are (re)produced as legitimate while others remain in the periphery (Warner, 1999; Butler, 2004; Rohrer, 2009).

Returning finally to the moment of discomfort described at the beginning of this paper: simplistic Left versus Right debates belie the complexity of LGBT-Q politics. Building from this moment, the paper has provided insight into the tensions involved in taking up a political position and how the pragmatism and the culture of consensus has conducted decision-making in particular ways. It has also shown that while there is no doubting the LGBT-Q political commitment to large-scale, 'real life' cultural change for LGBT-Q people, a model of progressive change based on normalisation and sameness has implicit heteronormative constraints and consequences.

**Acknowledgements**

This study would not have been possible without the participation of the LGBT-Q advocates. Thank you for giving so generously of your time and reflections. Thank you to Dr Breda Gray, Department of Sociology, University of Limerick (UL) and Professor Mary O'Sullivan, Department of Physical Education and Sports Sciences, UL for their advice, help and support throughout this study. Finally, I gratefully acknowledge the financial support of the Irish Research Council www.research.ie.

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**Endnotes (Table 1)**

[i] (Zappone,and Gilligan 2008)
[ii] (Civil Registration Act 2004)
[iii] (The Labour Party 2006)
[iv] (Colley 2006)
[v] (RTE 2006)
[vi] (The Labour Party 2006)
[vii] (Gay and Lesbian Equality Network 2009)
[viii] (Denyer, S., Howard, O., McEvoy, O. and Ó hUltacháin, C. 2009)
[ix] (Quinn 2010).
[x] (Gay and Lesbian Equality Network 2010a)
[xi] (Gay and Lesbian Equality Network 2012)
[xii] (Ombudsman for Children 2009)
[xiii] (Gay and Lesbian Equality Network 2010c)
[xiv] (Elliott 2010)
[xv] (Irish Catholic Bishops 2010).
[xvi] (Fagan 2011)
[xvii] (Gay and Lesbian Equality Network 2012b)
[xviii] (Quinn, D. 2012).
[xix] (Gilmore 2012)
[xx] (The Irish Examiner 2014)
[xxi] (The Journal.ie)
[xxii] (RTE 2014)