SELF-STORYING TO (DE)CONSTRUCT COMPULSORY HETEROSEXUALITY: A FEMINIST POSTSTRUCTURAL AUTOETHNOGRAPHY OF A SELF-WEDDING RITUAL

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By

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Amanda Lyn Baldwin, candidate for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Education, has presented a thesis titled, *Self-Storying to (De)Construct Compulsory Heterosexuality: A Feminist Poststructural Autoethnography of a Self-Wedding Ritual*, in an oral examination held on August 17, 2016. The following committee members have found the thesis acceptable in form and content, and that the candidate demonstrated satisfactory knowledge of the subject material.

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*Via Skype*
ABSTRACT

Written from the perspective of a white-settler, obese, bisexual, middle class cis-female graduate student in Canada, the wedding ritual and bride are explored as sites of ideal female/feminine formation of the subject. Compulsory heterosexuality is implicated. “Single” and “married,” like “woman,” are constituted in discourses. The author explores ways that she, as an unmarried and therefore “single” woman has been positioned as personally deficient as single-ness is produced as an illegitimate and undesirable position for female/feminine subjects to take up. This research uses an autoethnographic methodological frame augmented by feminist poststructural epistemology to open up, trouble, disrupt and interrupt the figuring of the bride in hopes of (re)signification and new practices of the female and feminine self for the writer.

The writer privileges story in the forms of narrative, poetry, theatrical vignette and photography; theoretical literature provides context and a methodological framework and adds a supplemental layer of analysis. The story is told from various temporal positions including past, present, and future, blurring the idea of chronological age. Practices of self and the limits of agency and resistance to dominant discourses are explored. Many accounts of a feminist self-wedding are presented to illustrate the opportunities for resistance, disruption and deconstruction of sociohistoric subjects and discourse, in this case, the heterosexual bride.
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The support of my family and friends during the process of this research was tremendous. My wedding party, officiators, and photographer were amazing and their contributions to the final version of this document are countless. Finally, my sister-in-love Vanessa Avramenko was an unparalleled endless stream of positive affirmations.
DEDICATION

First and foremost, for Kali, to whom I wish a future with less or at least different struggles for recognition and legitimacy than I’ve had as a body marked female and feminine. Second, for my Mom, who refused to blow out her initial flame in her wedding unity candle ceremony. Finally, for all bodies that are becoming female/feminine subjects through childhood, adolescence, adulthood and transition. This research is as much yours as it is mine.
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If we are going to truly push for a feminist, anti-racist, democratic-socialist society (my advocacy) - one that can forcefully push against the structures and ideologies that support and entrench patriarchy, white supremacy, and capitalism – I believe we have to address these questions honestly, rigorously, and as a critical education community. (Gottesman, 2016, p. 2)

How do we learn who we are, what we enjoy, how we wish to behave, and what perceptions of our selves we wish others’ to have? I remember, in my Adolescence, being obsessed with carving out a stable identity and making sure everyone knew what it was – what signs and symbols should be associated with me. I would decorate my body, my belongings, and my temporary spaces (desk; locker; textbook cover) with music notes and hearts; adding and crossing off names in the hearts to match the boy I was dating, wanting to date, or (not so) secretly building my future around.

My time in the formal school system was typical of the average white-settler student in Canada. I was a sponge, sitting quietly in my desk among the lines of other obedient students and their corresponding classroom furniture, unquestioningly absorbing the content provided to me by the authorities of knowledge – my teachers. I had many friends, many with white skin, and equally as many with brown skin. I innocently (naively) believed that all others had had the same experiences and opportunities for learning as I did.

As I got into higher grades, my friendship circle became less diverse – many of my First Nations and Metis friends disappeared, although, if I’m honest, it was many years later that I would notice this had happened. I recognized the large amount of time spent wasted in regular classrooms and sought emancipation. Why, I asked constantly, do I have to sit here and listen to someone else talk about things I could read in books? Why
do I have to suffer through assignments and lectures about topics that don’t interest me and will never be useful to me? I had, without academic language and conversational frame, began to resist my social conditions and subjectivation.

Education is the study of learning, in all of the places and spaces learning occurs. A large portion of literature and research in the field of education (the relatively small portion that I have read) is focused on the experiences of students in the physical school building. Within education we have explored how children navigate the educational system, reach various educational, social, and developmental milestones within the structure/system (Gottesman, 2016; Kincheloe, 2008; Kirylo, Thirumurthy, Smith, & McLaren, 2010).

The knowledge provided in schools, to students long thought to be passive recipients of information, is entirely socially produced, predominantly the ideologies of the dominant culture, class, and gender (among other intersections) (Kincheloe, 2008). These norms have been established in such a way that they seem uncontestable, politically neutral. Throughout history, schools have “served to categorize, punish, restrict, and restrain those students who failed to fit the proper demographic” (Kincheloe, 2008, p. 7) and functioned “as institutions that aim to produce, perpetuate and maintain ‘worthy’ citizens and do so in a manner that demands obedience and compliance” (De Saxe, 2016); schooling has been hurtful for many students. Schools reflect and extend the stratification of human bodies (Kincheloe, 2008). Joe Kincheloe (2008) goes on to say:

In no way do advocates of critical pedagogy blame teachers for this failure. They, too, have been victimized by the same social systems that have produced this situation. (p. 13)
In the past 30-40 years\(^1\), educational research has begun to look at the power produced by and within the education system, via the critical turn (Gottesman, 2016). Marxist thought introduced vocabulary and ideas for framing social justice; words such as *hegemony*, *ideology*, *praxis*, *consciousness*, and *critical* have become ubiquitous with leftist academia and scholarship (Gottesman, 2016). Critical pedagogy has called for the liberation and emancipation of education (Kirylo et al., 2010, p. 334). Nur Hayati (2010) identifies critique, dialogue, empowerment, and transformation as some of the key elements within critical pedagogy. Many others have written/expanded their own definitions of critical pedagogy, including the following:

Critical pedagogy challenges the social, environmental, and economic structures and social relations that shape the conditions in which people live, and in which schools operate…requires that people repeatedly question their roles in society as either agents of social and economic transformation, or as those who participate in the asymmetrical relations of power and privilege and reproduction of neoliberal ideology. (Kirylo et al., 2010, p. 332)

I am aware that education professionals have vastly different approaches to and perspectives of their practice; ultimately, those of us espousing a critical pedagogy align ourselves with its tenets because we are not accepting of the status quo in schools. Instead, we believe that it is imperative, as teacher educators, to instill an ethos of interrogation in and for those learning to teach: questioning the structures in and around which we function, as well as a critical interrogation of our own positionalities and praxis. (Berchini, 2014, p. 251)

The critical pedagogical classroom can only become a place where paradise can be created, which the hidden curriculum of an economically privileged, ethnocentric, chauvinist and homophobic social class formation, bolstered by rampant values of domestication, passivity and exclusion, is no longer concealed

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\(^1\) Gottesman (2016) contests the dominant narrative that Paulo Freire’s (1970, as cited by Gottesman) work launched the critical turn. Instead, Gottesman insists that Freire’s work was revisited in the 1980’s by Henry Giroux, from whose work critical pedagogy actually emerged. “While it is unclear who coined the term…Giroux was one of the first in the field to intentionally use it to describe a specific critical educational approach” (p. 90).
or tolerated but rather openly critiqued, challenged and transformed in the interest of a revolutionary educational praxis of everyday life. (De Saxe, 2016, p. 5)

It is difficult to pick one definition or to adequately describe what critical pedagogy is; critical pedagogy is not one unchanging and objective thing – they very idea is in constant flux; critical pedagogy lacks cohesion (Gottesman, 2016, p. 97). Elizabeth Ellsworth (1989) critiqued the ideas of empowerment, dialogue, critical reflection, and student voice as issues within the larger discourse of critical pedagogy that are based on rationalist assumptions and give rise to repression. She refers here, to the idea of the teachers as the intellectual, an “emancipatory authority” who has a privileged position of power over students who are not yet as learned as she.

Critical pedagogy has been used to humanize, domesticize, philosophize, revolutionize, intellectualize, and materialize (McLaren & Jaramillo, 2006). Additionally, like any idea on which we might be tempted to build an empire, critical pedagogy has been used to dispossess. It was feminists, like Ellsworth (1989), understandably suspicious of hierarchy, who criticized the transformative teacher of critical pedagogy as an individual who lacked self-reflection. Feminists insisted that teachers must unpack their own assumptions and analyze their own subjectivity.

In education, the work of poststructuralist feminist scholars was central to the emergence of placing the experience of the researcher in the forefront of the research process and moving the field toward thinking in terms of standpoint. (Gottesman, 2016, p. 109)

It is not coincidental that critical pedagogy emerged in the middle of what many considered second wave feminism and the civil rights movement. Although second wave feminism began around 1945, special consideration is often given to the period between
1960 and 1990, when the bulk of progress occurred (Burns & Chantler, 2011). Second wave feminism was of course preceded by first wave feminism, beginning in the mid-nineteenth century, cresting around 1900, and ending around 1945. The first wave won women the right to vote, the right to own property, and access to education and was an important and necessary foundation for the many feminisms to come. The first wave is sometimes referred to as liberal feminism as it “mobilizes a discourse of individual rights in order to gain access to the public domain” (Davies & Gannon, 2011, p. 312).

Second wave feminism includes the opening up of professions and equality in the workplace as well as payment for domestic labour (Burns & Chantler, 2011). At this point, a woman’s right to control her own reproduction was acknowledged. Feminist researchers began to establish gender as a social construct and feminist knowledge production became a point of emphasis. Second wave feminism is often referred to as radical feminism because it “celebrates and essentializes womanhood in order to counteract the negative constructions of women and girls in masculinist discourse” (Davies & Gannon, 2011, p. 312).

According to Davies and Gannon (2011), third wave feminism began in the 1990s. Here, both “gender” and “sex” have been established as social constructs and theorists are able to shift the focus towards deconstructing the sex and gender binaries. Davies and Gannon (2011) position poststructural feminisms in the third wave, as below:

Feminist post-structuralism makes visible, analyzable and revisable, in particular, the male/female and straight/lesbian binaries, which are, in turn, mapped on to other binaries such as adult/child, normal/abnormal, rational irrational. Through analysis of texts and talk, it shows how relations of power are constructed and maintained by granting normality, relationality and naturalness to the dominant
term in any binary, and in contrast, how the subordinated term is marked as other, as lacking, as not rational. (p. 312)

Today, feminist researchers pursue many social justice issues and interrogate power relationships and the production of knowledge (Jackson, 2004; St Pierre, St Pierre, & Pillow, 2000; Weedon, 1987). The category of “women” is seen as fluid, dynamic, and temporal. Feminisms that privilege intersectionality² have and continue to be used to resist grand narratives and dominant discourses. Burns and Chantler (2011) argue that feminist scholarship continues to be relevant especially where social divisions and patriarchy are prevalent/observable. Most common is the idea that there are many feminisms, with many influences from all waves (liberal, radical, poststructural, intersectional, indigenous, standpoint, etc.).

Feminist paradigms are developed by feminist scholars to counteract what has been an overwhelming male-centric approach to the study of our social world. Until relatively recent times, women were largely ignored in the social sciences, both as researchers and as social subjects. Women’s different experiences of social reality were essentially invisible in mainstream social science research and theory. Although feminist paradigms see gender as a fundamental social division and signifier of life chances, there exist a number of feminist paradigms rather than a single perspective. Thus there is no single feminist approach to social research, and feminist paradigms have been used as a theoretical frame for a diverse range of social research methods and projects. Rather, a feminist perspective is more likely to inform the social question that is posed and how the topic is defined. However, because of the feminist challenge to traditional social research paradigm claims of objectivity and reason, feminist paradigms are often associated with qualitative research methods such as ethnography, life histories and memory work (Walter, 2010, p. 21).

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² Intersectionality is “the notion that subjectivity is constituted by mutually reinforcing vectors of race, gender, class, and sexuality, has emerged as the primary theoretical tool designed to combat feminist hierarchy, hegemony, and exclusivity” (Nash, 2008, p. 2).
Central to most feminist methodologies is the idea of “voice,” meaning that lived and embodied experiences are as important as other ways of knowing and understanding the world. Personal narratives, such as autoethnography, are embraced, encouraged, and made necessary, by feminist research.

In addition to positioning autoethnography as a method(ology) within feminist research, Cann and Demeulenaere (2012) place autoethnography within the critical theory and critical pedagogy methodologies. Also, Denzin (2006) tells us that critical pedagogy is folded in and through autoethnography; disrupting and deconstructing practices with the aim of reconstructing a more egalitarian, democratic and just society. Kahl (2010) likewise describes autoethnography as a useful tool for engaging students with critical pedagogy; allowing students to examine their own positioning and production within society; autoethnography is both a process and product of discourse (Gottesman, 2016). “Critical pedagogy gives students the opportunity to study power and oppression in society” (Kahl, 2010, p. 222). Through the process of analyzing and writing personal narratives, people may become aware of the extent to which discourse holds power over and constrains us (George, 2012).

This certainly was the case for me, when, as a PhD student in Education, I was given the opportunity to complete an autoethnography as my doctoral thesis. I came to a wider and deeper understanding about my own entrenched and unavoidable discursive

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I wish to be clear that the borders between and hierarchical organization of theory and conversation is a failed endeavor, itself maintaining ideas about what constitutes “good” or “legitimate” knowledge.
production. I leave you now, to read through my autoethnography, which I submit to you as an example of critical (feminist) pedagogy in the field of education.
When we as women summon the courage to step out of romantic masculine hegemony’s cave and view wedlock in the illuminating light of historical fact, we can begin to perceive the difference between experience and social prescription. We can cast off oppressive definitions and view ourselves as neither wives nor old maids, neither married nor “single.” And we can discover our own potential in new ways...we must first become willing to view [weddings] realistically; to relinquish its conventional securities, to part with the pleasure of dramatic self-presentation that it affords. (Geller, 2001, p. 129)

Love of self for the female would thus require: detachment from what is, from the situation in which woman has traditionally been placed; love for the child that she once was, that she still is...an openness, in addition to that mutual love, which allows access to difference... a woman cannot place herself as an object for herself...she herself does not love herself as object. She may try to love herself as innerness...when she is placed as an object by and for a man, love of self is arrested in its development. (Irigaray, 1993, pp. 69–70)

It is essential that she no longer depend on a man’s return for her self love. Or at least not absolutely. But a whole history separates her from the love of herself. (Irigaray, 1993, p. 65)
CHAPTER ONE - INTRODUCTION

I wake abruptly to the loud chime of the doorbell. Sleep stays with me as I reach over to the nightstand and pick up my cell phone; it is 2:27 am. Who could be at my door at this hour? The bell rings again, twice this time, followed by fists on the door. I stumble clumsily out of bed and bang into my bedroom door, reaching for my robe. My left hand searches for the light switch and I am blinded as my right arm slips into smooth silk.

Flipping switches as I move through the hallway and down the stairs, the house is awakened from pitch-black slumber. If Tux were still alive he would be making such a racket. That defensive little toy poodle was always trying to protect me – especially when something unknown was on the other side of the door. I miss the black fur ball.

My eyes don’t wake up quite as fast as my legs; I squint as I pull back the cream burlap curtain to peer through the living room window to see who is here at this hour. Shocked, I rush to the door, quickly turn the deadbolt, and pull it open.

Kali stands there, eyes red from crying and dark black mascara smeared down her cheeks. She looks like she hasn’t washed or brushed her hair in days; strands of light blonde are stuck to her face. She thrusts herself into my arms and I hold her as she sobs; I am unsure what to make of this moment. What time did she leave campus if she’s arriving here, now? It’s a two-hour drive from Regina, so probably just after midnight? What was she doing up so late? Doesn’t she have classes in the morning? No, today is Friday… well, Saturday, now. My curiosities run rampant for what seems like hours more, while I hold her quivering body.

When she’s ready, she leans back out of my embrace, and looks me in the eye.
“Well, I’m just pathetic, aren’t I?” she chokes out, and a hint of a smile appears at the corner of her lips. She reaches past me for the box of tissues on the table beside the couch and I reach around and behind her to close the front door.

“Don’t you dare talk about my beloved niece in such a way” I chastise, teasingly, in attempt to lighten the mood. She's heard me say this before.

She smiles, full on, flashing me her glorious teeth, and continues to try wiping the mess off of her pale white face. Her resemblance to me grew stronger over the years and looking at her is often like looking in a mirror. “I’m not a little girl anymore, Auntie. I’m not supposed to cry like this.” With that, her sobbing resumes and she falls heavily into the corner of my white leather sectional. The thump of her hitting the couch sounds louder than it is, echoing in the open space and vaulted ceiling.

I take a moment to look at this young woman; I haven’t seen her in three months - since the start of her second year of university. She’s studying Kinesiology with a minor in Women and Gender Studies. Not a little girl any more is right. She’s taller than me, now, and athletic – she is as big around as I am but she is hard; she has muscles where I am soft. She has young, tight skin, white as snow, where mine has become wrinkled and marked, slightly yellowed with age. The football team must be training her well. I wonder for a moment what pressures she might feel as one of only four females on this relatively new co-ed university team. Maybe that is what this is about? Her sobbing continues.

“Tears are an important message from the body,” I reply as I always do when she laments her emotions. Her grin begins its return to her lips. I feel my own smile forming,
followed by an obvious and exaggerated eye roll that Kali knows well. “Besides, I don’t think we could prevent our tears, even if we tried. Now, tell me what on earth has happened that you’ve come all the way here. What is so upsetting that you couldn’t just call me, or text? And why couldn’t this wait until morning?”

A deep breath fills her body and she launches into a lengthy story about a guy named Chris who she’s been dating and the argument they’d had about Chris’s reluctance to meet our family over the upcoming Christmas break. Kali describes feeling confused and heartbroken and talks about how unfair it is to have to choose between her dating partner and her family, especially for Christmas. She wants both.

Our family is spread across two provinces. Kali’s parents (my younger brother, Kory, and his partner Vanessa), brothers (my step-nephew Cohen), and grandparents (my Mom Cheryl, stepdad Ray, and surrogate dad Robert) live in Alberta. Kali, my youngest brother Brendan, his partner Janelle, and I live in Saskatchewan. Christmas is always a big deal for us; the whole family usually comes to my otherwise very empty house and we spend many days eating and celebrating, telling stories and enjoying one another. I can see why Kali would want to share this with her dating partner.

“He says he loves me and he wants to be with me, and I think that being with me means being with my family, doesn’t it? I mean, if we ever get married, he’d be marrying my whole family, right? Isn’t that how it works?” Kali continues, expressing herself dramatically, with sighs and gasps for emphasis. I sit beside her on the couch, holding her hand in between exasperated gestures. “I don’t want to be with someone who doesn’t embrace my family.” Her crying resumes.
We haven’t talked previously about this partner of hers. His name is one of the only things I know - and that she met him last summer at football training camp. She made the team while he didn’t. I wonder what impact that had on their relationship? Why hasn’t she talked about him more? I re-focus on what she is saying and in my mind I agree with her, why hasn’t he met anyone in our family? Rather than fuelling her upset with questions and comments, I sit quietly and listen.

“I couldn’t stay there,” she says. “My dorm room felt like a prison cell, so I just got into the jeep and started driving. I didn’t intend to end up here, or I would have texted first, but here I am. I’m sorry if I scared you. I’m glad I’m here, though, thank you for listening.”

I smile. So many things about this kid make me smile. Even when she was a toddler, she was a mini-me. She looked just like I did at her age and had many of my dispositions and tendencies. Isn’t it funny how genetics works? Or maybe it’s a spiritual thing. There are a number of myths and legends…

I wonder - if I had had children of my own, would they have resembled my brothers? Amazingly, Kali, in her 19 years of life, still resembles me, her only biological aunt, more than anyone else.

I’m 47 years old. I have aged from the young woman who worried about men and dating… and love and weddings. Many things have happened in my life and although I feel wiser, this has not come without expense and sacrifice.

Time with my niece has grown more precious than ever. In addition to a relationship that brings joy and intimacy, Kali gives me many reminders of the girl I once
was. Without words, she invites me to ask myself: if I could start over, would I still become who I think I am and who I can remember that I have been?

“Since you’re here,” I say, “let’s get you cleaned up and calmed down, and you can get a good night’s sleep and we can talk more about this when daylight is with us. Is there anyone who would be worried about where you are? Do we need to call your Dad?” I ask.

It is her turn to roll her eyes. “I’m 19, Auntie. I live on my own – well, in my own dorm room, anyways. Dad doesn’t have to know where I am all the time. Besides, I have my cell phone,” she pulls the latest iPhone out of her pocket and waves it in the air. “If anyone is worried, they can just call.”

“Okay.” I smile some more. She really isn’t a little girl anymore. “You know where everything is upstairs, then. You go ahead and have a shower or a bath or just wash your face, or whatever you wish. I’ll set some of my pyjamas on the bed in the room you slept in last time, and you do what you need to do. If you need me, wake me up, but if you don’t – I really should get back to sleep.” I yawn and am unsure whether I’m yawning for real, or for dramatic effect.

“Goodnight, Auntie. And… Auntie? Thanks,” she says, some joy and comfort beginning to return to her. A wave of warm tingles passes through my body.

I give her a wink from the landing of the stairs, and make my way back to bed. She’ll turn off the lights, I tell myself. And if she doesn’t – well, it’s not the end of the world. I’ve missed the days when light warms this place at all hours.
A Letter from the Beginning

April 10, 2013

Dearest Kali,

You turned two just two months ago. I could not be at your birthday party because I was away at school. I’ve noticed over the past year that you are aware of it when I am absent from your life. You tell me you know I was gone with your behaviour. After being apart for a while you take some time to warm up to me again. I was home last summer for three months straight and we spent large amounts of time together and then I went away to school for 6 weeks and I returned for Thanksgiving. It took almost an entire twenty-four hours for us to rebuild our relationship. I wonder what you experience when I come and go as I do? If you had more words, what stories would you tell me?

In my mind, you are angry with me for leaving. I cannot describe the feeling I have when I think I have contributed to your hurt, pain and discomfort. My heart feels like butter being sliced in half by a red-hot knife. My stomach twists and turns into knots and it is as though it climbs up into my throat and tries to get out. I do find some comfort in this pain because I think it is supposed to be unbearable to have disappointed people. I have had many experiences with abandonment. Along with the anxiety about leaving you comes a gladness that you express this to me in your own way – it is important to tell people when they do things that hurt us; how else will those who love us know to stop?

I wish I could tell you that I will never leave your side again. This life requires balance and at times we cannot have all of the things that we desire – we make sacrifices in the present with the future in mind. Please know that no matter where my body goes, my heart is always with you; you are always on my mind.

Know, also, how incredibly worthy you are of love and respect, from yourself, others, and me. There are a great number of narratives that position us as illegitimate or invalid. With this, there is a possibility of living differently, to focus on a different story.

Perhaps one day you’ll read this work and we can have a conversation about it. For now, I will simply tell you that your presence in my life is one of the biggest reasons for and contributions to my work; I wish to story my life in a way that you will admire. I hope that one day I will live beside you and your stories and know that my research was one of many positive contributions to your understandings of yourself. I wish to be a model for dealing with our marginalization as women in this society. I hope that these stories can be one of many sources of hope and strength as you grow.

With Utmost/Absolute Love and Devotion,

Aunty Manda

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4 One of my readers pointed to this date as confusing. As such, I’d like to point out that the story in which Kali is 19 and Amanda is 47, is a future projection. An exercise in visioning (Cameron, 2002).

5 The word "society" here is intended to signify the present production of social context - material, ideological, and otherwise. It implicates white colonial and masculine hegemonies (Batters, 2011).
Through and Within, A Note on Language

I want to tell you a story. The story emerges under a condition of partiality; the story can only ever be incomplete. There is no way for me to know if I have provided enough information and context for you to “take up” my story in the way that I lay it down. I cannot give you the entirety of my story as there are pieces of my understanding that I will not know need to be shared and/or cannot be shared. This is described similarly by Carol Schick (2000):

My experience may or may not be typical, but the social practices in which I am produced are commonplace within masculine hegemony. In telling my own story, I am aware that it embodies the contradiction of any personal narrative: it is the story I know best, but I am unaware of the salience of the considerable amount that I have failed to include. (p. 299)

To give you the entire story, would be for you to have travelled with me/inside me, through the entirety of my life, to experience with me every single tiny nuance that has contributed (many without my conscious awareness) to my understanding of my story, and to have forgone all of your own understandings. To me, this is both impossible and undesirable. I can only give you pieces of my story that on the days preceding my final edit, I believe are important to articulate.

English is a signifying system that produces and is produced by Western values and ideals (Belsey, 2002, p. 11). Inga Musico and Betty Dodson (2002) understand the term Western civilization to signify “the destructive, competitive, capitalist, masculine hegemonic, filthy-rich, white, male social system which threatens to consume every other culture on the planet” (p. 201). I have consumed and been consumed by this system.

English is the language that I grew up and understand my selves with and within. “Language is the place where actual and possible forms of social organization and their
likely social and political consequences are defined and contested...the place where our sense of ourselves, or subjectivity, is constructed” (Weedon, 1987, p. 21). Wendy Shaw (2012) described how differentiation and division of women who are or are not available for marriage produces and is produced through language (Miss, Mrs.):

The marking of this difference implies a distinction which is in some way essential between married and unmarried women, while men remain Mr. whether they are married or not...in a society in which men have been conventionally responsible for taking the initiative in selecting a marriage partner [this] is easily overlooked in favour of its naturalness. The introduction of Ms. has ideological implications, as well as the advantage of saving time or embarrassment in addressing women whose marital status is not known. (p. 79)

My ability to tell you the story both emerges from and is limited by the English signifying system and the values and ideals that come to life within it (compulsory heterosexuality⁶; the heterosexual imaginary⁷). Through and within the system of language and the telling of story, I perform my subject position(s); language is required for the creation and re-creation of selves. In my work I take language to be pragmatically necessary in and for our explorations/understandings of relationships and experiences between humans, the world, and meaning making/reproduction (Belsey, 2002; Weedon, 1987). What we perceive as reality is constituted through and within language.

The resolve expressed in my writing is not to achieve singular, objective, or universal truth, but rather, to challenge that very idea. “Beneath these reversible meanings a structure is forming which does not resolve ambiguity but determines it”

⁶ Within the institution of heterosexuality, heterosexuality is constructed and taken-for-granted as natural and inevitable of which it is neither. Rather, compulsory heterosexuality serves masculine hegemony and dominance (Ingraham, 2008; Rich, 2003).

⁷ The invisible and illusory power of heterosexuality in the organization and structuring of gender along lines of sexuality, class, and race (Ingraham, 2008).
I “relate to the real by signifying it, that is, by employing language” (Kongkham, 1997, p. 1). Language sets the limits of reality; it constrains what it is possible to think, write, say, and know – particularly how we understand our selves as a human beings (Belsey, 2002, p. 5). Michel Foucault (1980) called these constraints of knowledge the general politics of truth 9.

Heterosexuality is much more than a biological given or the fact that someone is or is not attracted to someone of the other sex. Our sexual orientation or sexual identity is defined by the symbolic order of that world through the use of verbal as well as non-verbal language. How we come to understand what it means to be heterosexual is a product of ruling interests, a culture’s symbolic order, and its organizing practices. (Ingraham, 2008, p. 7)

In order to think my story or attempt to tell my story, I am always obedient/compliant and restricted to the signs of language. Signs are comprised of signifiers (words, symbols) linked to signified(s) (meanings) that are continuously deferred (absent) and the possibilities for each are endless and always changing. We cannot lay claim to single authorized meaning for anything (Belsey, 2002, p. 94). As the author (person assumed to have authority) of this story, I use words (signifier) and concepts that do not have singular/inherent/universal meanings (signified); the meanings are an effect of production and re-production, that is, the meanings are dependent on their repetition, the context of their use, time, and place, among other factors (Belsey, 2002; Jackson, 2004; Weedon, 1987). Julian Henriques et al., (1998) offered that “the process of signification itself gives shape to the reality it implicates” (p. 73).

Words outlive people, institutions, [and] civilizations. Words spur images, associations, memories, inspirations and synapse pulsations. Words send off

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8 Lacan’s concept of the real is understood by some as a foundation of individual subjectivity (Bell, 2011; St. Pierre, 2000).
9 Foucault’s concept of power/knowledge (Foucault, 1980).
physical resonations of thought into the nethersphere. Words hurt, soothe, inspires, demean, demand, incite, pacify, teach, romance, pervert, unite, divide… words be powerful. (Muscio & Dodson, 2002, p. 8)

Pure translation from me to you or from one language to another is impossible; our words are not transparent windows onto a world (Belsey, 2002). We can say this because different languages and signifying systems, used in different times, have divided the world in different ways (Jackson, 2004). Language is not an effect of the things or differences it attempts to signify, it is a technology used in the production of differences/categorization (Belsey, 2002, p. 70); it is an effect and exercise of power (discourses and performance) and precedes our familiarity with it.

What/who/how could I be without words? My existence/understandings of my selves emerge continuously within and through a system of signs that is in constant flux. Burman and MacLure (2011) write that our interactions in the world are entirely through text and that this is unfortunately a pragmatic necessity and thus requires us to understand and analyze text in order to become more conscious and mindful of the self, other, and context.

I entered the world in the midst of many conversations that had been happening and unfolding prior to me and I use various parts of these conversations to understand my surroundings and my selves with and within them. The parts of these conversations that I can use/reproduce are limited to those I have had access to and in many cases are limited

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10 I use the word discourse as particular types or groups of stories or narratives about our social world. Discourse refers to the power/knowledge (Foucault, 1980) that is bound to a specific sociohistorical context (Bacchi & Rönnblom, 2014). Discourses are a reflection of political interests; they constantly vie for status and power and achieve such through reproduction and performance.
to those offered or prescribed by the dominant discourses and narratives of western (white) culture and society in the particular time that I live. I can use ideas with meanings that are familiar to me and you can read them inasmuch as they have been made familiar to you (Belsey, 2000, p. 5, 13). This is why a combination of words such as *compulsory heterosexuality* or *performance of the bride* may not be familiar/meaningful for you or may not signify for you the way that they do for me.

Although I will attempt to make clear the meanings I intend of the words and concepts that I am using, I cannot overstate the importance of understanding that any attempt to do so entirely/completely is a failure before it begins. The meanings of the words/concepts I choose and use are not purely or simply at my command; rather, I can resist and reaffirm preceding meanings (an act, exercise, or performance of knowledge/power) through the use of language. According to Belsey (2002), signifiers always preserve the secret of their final signified; there is no way to know that this final signified exists. Therefore, there is no “correct” (real/authentic) way to read or write any sign or text (Belsey, 2002, p. 15, 18).

As I write, I will ask myself about meanings of the words I choose and I will attempt to demonstrate a refrain from inflexibly holding to any particular understanding/reading; I will try to shed light on (illuminate) the flexibility of meaning. I ask that you, reader, do the same, particularly in places where you might feel discomfort. Through this document, I draw attention to particular ideas (self, agency), performances (gender, heteronormativity, race, class, beauty), subject positions (bride), and rituals (wedding) with the aim of exposing the discourses that attempt to fix, naturalize, or
essentialize certain (dominant) meanings, subject positions, and performances. I aim to open these signs and subjects with critical and analytical understanding (Jackson, 2004).

It is very important to tell you that I am speaking/writing only from the position of the self I know as mine. Although many others are likely to identify with my experiences, in no way am I speaking for anyone else or insisting that all other women in Canada think and feel as I do about the ideas and experiences I describe. I ask that you keep in mind that although people are categorized similarly (e.g. as women, as bisexual, as obese), this does not mean that they are the same. I can and do only speak from my position as a white-settler, bisexual, obese (and able-bodied) woman who grew up lower middle class and struggled to obtain a graduate education and to achieve what might be considered success within the current organization of society.

So, again, I want to tell you a story. The story can only ever be partial and incomplete. I am, and hope that you are, aware that some things are not (yet) possible to say, think, articulate, or know (Belsey, 2002, p. 5).

I tell the stories not to play on your sympathies but to suggest how stories can control our lives, for there is a part of me that has never been able to move past these stories, a part of me that will be chained to those stories as long as I live… For once a story is told, it cannot be called back. Once told, it is loose in the world. (King, 2003, pp. 9–10)

(Re)Discovering this Thesis

I wake again, this time at 8am, to warm sun shining through my open curtains. I stay in bed for a few moments, contemplating the day ahead. There are so many things I wish to know about Kali’s partner, however, I don’t want to pry and push. I wonder if her parents know… I wonder if my parents know… I wonder why he doesn’t want to meet our family…
I contemplate what it is like for me as a bisexual female/feminine within a heterosexual relationship… The pressure is often too much: trying to be a good woman, a good partner, a good Aunt, and a good sister and daughter alongside trying to be a good feminist, academic, employee, writer, friend, and so much more. To this day, I have yet to comfortably navigate the idea that others view me as heterosexual due to my long term partnership with a man despite my own identification as bisexual. Tears surface with the sad memories of struggling to reconcile my sexual orientation and femininity. I lay here, frozen, like I have so many times.

I have chosen an unmarried self and this has meant “missing out” on a lot of the things that bring others’ joy and to experience people around me often recognizing me as illegitimate…unmarried…childless… At other points, I’ve passed as heterosexual, married, entirely taking for granted the legitimacy and recognition achieved by (conferred on)\(^{11}\) women in monogamous hetero-relations with men.

The distinct sound of a door opening down the hall pulls me out of my tangent and immediately, feeling foolish and embarrassed, I wipe my eyes. Kali is awake. I hear her descend the stairs quietly and a few minutes later, the strong smell of brewing coffee penetrates my nostrils. When did she start drinking coffee? Shaking my head to dismiss the past from my mind, I pull on a pair of black yoga pants and an oversized dark green University of Regina sweatshirt, from my days as a student, and hurry down the stairs, eager to know what new hope and revitalization this day will bring.

\(^{11}\) At many points in this document, I question my own use of various words. To demonstrate the instability of a signifier’s meaning, I add additional signifiers in parentheses behind the unstable term.
She isn’t in the kitchen. The coffee has stopped dripping and I fill a grey ceramic mug. I call out for Kali.

“I’m in here, Auntie!” I am grateful to hear that her reply seems absent of the heavy sadness she arrived with earlier this morning.

Following her voice, I go down the hall to my office. Standing in the doorway, I relish in the sophistication of this space I crafted as a private counselling practitioner in my early thirties. I built and installed a large desk and wall shelving out of plumbing pipe and salvaged barn wood. The space is adorned with my many accomplishments: pictures and artefacts from my long ago feminist self-wedding and framed documents attesting to the many years I spent as a university student.

Kali is seated cross-legged on a faded brown faux suede love seat that is almost forty years old. She shifts her body to face me and the wooden frame creaks beneath her the way my bones often creak beneath my flesh. In her lap, she has a large bound text open and her finger is scrolling through what looks to be a Table of Contents.

“What have you got there?” I ask.

Kali puts her right hand to the center of the pages and folds the book over, to reveal the cover. “Your doctoral thesis,” she says, smiling up at me. She opens the book back to the spot where her hand was resting in the spine.

“My goodness! I don’t think that book has been opened in years.”

She pauses, looking up at me with concern, “Is it okay if I read it?”

“If it pleases you, I have no reason to object.” I reply, curious and trying not to make assumptions about what her interest is. I move from the doorway, into the room,
and pull my brown leather office chair out from under the desk. Does she sense my

curiosity?

“I think I’m interested mostly in the stories,” she says. “I don’t remember much

about your wedding, Auntie, and it seems relevant to my thinking about what to do in my

own relationship.”

“Okay.”

“Will you tell me the stories?” she probes, looking up at me from her little nest.

That face. That innocent, pale skinned, hopeful, reflection of me. I swallow hard and my
coffee feels solid in my throat.

“Well…” I try to respond so that she doesn’t wonder why I don’t answer

immediately. I sit in the chair facing her, and place my mug on the natural stained wood

beside me.

I close my eyes and think for a few minutes. There are so many stories of my life

that are painful. Was this one of them? Would I be opening up a wound and letting out

anything that would be too much work to contain? Will telling this story, from where I

am now, hurt me or Kali, in any way? It is important to check in with myself.

I think back to the day of my wedding and to the process of writing my thesis. I

feel warmth, comfort, and harmony radiate from my chest and through my body. I recall

the love and support of my friends, family, and academic committee surrounding me as I

“stood up” to do something transgressive, to interrupt the trajectory of the heterosexual

bride that had been intricately and extensively laid before me…no…imposed upon me…. long before my birth and through my adolescence and young adulthood. I remember the
joy… the exhilaration… the anxiety… the excitement of challenging the dominant discourses of who I was supposed to be, what kind of subject, what kind of woman I was expected to become… how it was assumed and imagined that I was to be behave and perform and how I used to consent to this requirement of femininity. I remember the rebellion of turning that upside down… right on its head, in a solitary wedding ceremony that I crafted myself and performed with many other people participating and witnessing. The warmth in my body surprises me. Had I forgotten these memories? Put them on the shelf with the bound copy of my thesis and disremembered them? Surely not.

I open my eyes and look at Kali, whose attention has returned to the pages in front of her. “You know” I say, “That might actually be a refreshing thing to do, today.”

That smile… Her smile… My smile…

“Great” she exclaims. “I have so many questions! What did it feel like and what did it mean? What did other people think?”

“Oh?!” I feel my head pull back and my eyes open wide. I am surprised, again. “Well, I think it meant something different for everybody,” I say. “My intent was not to tell people what they should or shouldn’t take from it. I did not want to give a prescription for how to live or not to live or to criticize how many people do live. It was about opening up space for myself to be whole without needing a male or masculine partner, or any partner for that matter, for legitimacy, and also, about giving you a different story - so that you and I, and whoever else benefitted from it, would know that a monogamous romantic (male) partner is neither sufficient, necessary, nor required to ‘complete’ us,” I hold both hands up in the air and curl my first two fingers down with
each syllable of the world complete, the sign for quotation marks, to show Kali that I question the entire idea that human completion is achieved through hetero-marriage. We are, each of us, always already complete.

“I always knew that you’d married yourself. Grandma, and Dad, and Vanessa talked to me about it a lot, especially when I started dating. I think they wanted me to know that I didn’t need a boyfriend to make me happy. I don’t remember the wedding, though… I was only four.” She rolls her eyes. “I have a few pictures of me as your flower girl that Vanessa put in a scrapbook for me, but, I don’t know what it all meant to you. How did it all start? Tell the story from the very beginning!”

She closes the book and sits straight up, staring at me intently. She has grown up and I am glad that she has not lost her childhood desire to hear, read, know, and live stories. She respects the stories we live by (Clandinin & Connelly, 1998).

“I’ll tell you what,” I respond, “I’m going to go back to the kitchen and make us a big breakfast. Why don’t you look through that book a bit longer and then we can talk
about what you’ve read or seen? There isn’t really a ‘beginning’ to the story, and I can
tell you more about that, later. In the meantime, I need to think about where and how to
begin.”

“Okay,” she responds, enthusiastically.

I stand from my chair and leave her alone in my office, the bound pages of my
thesis open once more on her lap.

As I prepare a vegetable and egg white scramble for Kali and me, I think through
my academic journey and the writing of my doctoral thesis. Once more, I wrestle with the
words and struggle to find and use language to describe the epistemology and
methodology that informed my research.
CHAPTER TWO – EPISTEMOLOGY, METHODOLOGY, METHOD

Epistemological Frame: Feminist Poststructuralism

Contemporary feminism asks what it is to perform gender and acknowledges that we live in a social world that defines gender and sexuality (who we can and cannot be) for us. Feminism, when combined with poststructuralism, brings material focus to the discursive field and questions how we might begin to define our own selves (Weedon, 1987).

The combination of feminism and poststructuralism is used to show how the production of social structures (St. Pierre, 2000) has impacted female/feminine subjects in real, material, harmful and detrimental ways. Materialist feminism, for example, argues that:

The nexus of social arrangements and institutions that form the social totalities of patriarchy and capitalism regulate our everyday lives by distributing cultural power and economic resources unevenly according to gender, race, class, and sexuality. Within this framework, rape and domestic violence, for example, can be seen as the effect of social structures and processes that situate men hierarchically in relation to women. (Ingraham, 2008, p. 29)

Through the combination of feminism and poststructuralism, topics of discourses, power/knowledge, and the formation of the subject become infused with critical intersections of gender, race, and class. The struggle of feminism to enfranchise undocumented populations (Aránguiz, Fuentes-vásquez, Mercado, Ramay, & Vilches, 2011), adds a particular flavour to the use of poststructuralism, insisting on a politics that crosses the public/private\textsuperscript{12} binary. In a performance of freedom, feminist

\textsuperscript{12} The private sphere has historically been the space female/feminine bodies are relegated to (sexuality, domestic labour, childcare, and food).
poststructuralists count, re-count, name and re-name bodies, making sure they matter, are
grieveable, and continue to live on (Aránguiz et al., 2011; Judith Butler, 1993).

When the performance of gender is viewed through the poststructural lens of the
subjectivity, important information is revealed about the self-formation and subject
positions made available to be taken up by women. As individuals can only take up
subject positions as they are made possible (positioned as natural and inevitable) by
discourses (Bronwyn Davies, 2000; Shaw, 2012), we are entirely socialized into
womanhood or manhood and discursively embedded in flesh marked as either male or
female (Susanne Gannon, 2004).

**Vignette One**

*(Scene: Two women, standing in a parking lot, deep in conversation)*

Amanda: You know, I’m really not even that sad about him moving out,
he had been quite terrible to me these last few months. What makes me sad is
that I won’t get to wear a wedding dress any time soon. I hate that I wasted
so much time in this relationship when I could have been available to someone
who might have actually married me. I feel worthless. I pushed too hard to
get married and he couldn’t handle it.

Theresa: This is the 21st century, Amanda. You don’t need a man to have
a wedding. You could marry yourself.

Amanda: *(Face expresses intrigue and thoughtfulness).*

*(Stage lights slowly turn up to full brightness, silent pause, and then
darkness—scene ends).*
Deconstruction

Acknowledging discourse is not enough; researchers must engage in continuous deconstruction of discourses. Deconstruction points to discourses, locates the particular texts that are produced with fixity and attempts to pry it loose; deconstruction disrupts dominant discourses through intentionally reversing and dismantling hierarchies and binaries produced in language (performance; practices of the self).

One of the most significant effects of deconstruction is that it foregrounds the idea that language does not simply point to pre-existing things and ideas but rather helps to construct them, and by extension, the world as we know it. In other words, we word the world. The ‘way it is’ is not ‘natural.’ We have constructed the world as it is through language and cultural practice, and we can also deconstruct and reconstruct it. (St. Pierre, 2000, p. 483)

Knowledges are opened up and myths of finitude are shattered; new concepts are reconstituted and can always undergo further deconstruction (St. Pierre, 2000). For example, Foucault (2011a) discussed some of the differences in how “knowledge” has been conceived in different places and different times: (a) the Greeks viewed knowledge as concepts relevant to justice, (b) Aristotle viewed knowledge as ideas relevant to sensation and pleasure, and (c) Nietzsche viewed knowledge as entirely invented, disharmonious, dependent, and servile, particularly in its attempts to pass itself off as truth.

13 Archaeological texts are items, objects, rituals, or practices that uncover the discursive organization of knowledge and social structure (Foucault, 2011b). Texts reveal the ethics (technologies and practices) of the subject (Foucault, 1986). By looking at them, we can better understand the various truth claims that impact our positions as subjects; deconstructing texts and claims to truth in this way are opportunities to change our formation as subjects (Foucault, 2011b).
Through deconstruction of texts, we uncover seemingly fixed, naturalized, stable, and essentialized discursive claims to truth, such as essentialized gender, compulsory heterosexuality (Rich, 1983), the heterosexual imaginary (Ingraham, 2008), and the way the romance and allure of weddings disguises the maintenance of heterosexuality. Underneath the spectacular emotional performance, weddings work to normalize sexual regulation (Ingraham, 2008). Many times, I have been caught up in the glamour and splendour that is the wedding and lost sight of the sociohistoric conditions of the ritual’s emergence. However, as the institution of heterosexuality is in a constant state of crisis\textsuperscript{14}, there is space to deconstruct the wedding ritual as text and expose it as a primary site for the operation of heterosexuality and gender structuring across race, class, and sexuality (Ingraham, 2008).

Although my research tells the story of my feminist self-wedding; the study is not of weddings. Rather, the story is a depiction of the larger social interests served by weddings and an attempt to interrupt the use of the wedding ritual for the purpose of reproducing organized heterosexuality. Weddings, serving heterosexuality, are positioned as an eventual and necessary rite of passage (Ingraham, 2008) for women to perform; a compulsory milestone to mark the proper and natural existence of the female/feminine subject. By considering the wedding ritual as a text (utterances, literatures, images, words, rituals, selves), my research uncovered the interests being served and thus deconstructed compulsory heterosexuality and the heteronormative structuring of my

\textsuperscript{14} “Because of its central role in society, heterosexuality is in a continual state of crisis and contradiction as pressures from a range of historical and material conditions shift and change” (Ingraham, 2008, p. 20).
particular formation as a female/feminine subject.

In Foucault’s most recent work, he began to take up ideas of the self as a subject constructed by and within discourse of power (Cappello, 2012). Foucault (1982) uses the word subject in reference to how people become tied to various identities through constructed self-knowledge (practices of the self) and submitted to others in this way, or rather, how we take up various subject positions, within discourses (p. 781). Judith Butler (1987) conceptualized the subject as different than the given, pre-constituted, or definitive identity postulated by science and psychology. Instead the subject is an “ideal or fictive precipitate of a process of assimilation and appropriation” (Butler, 1987, p. 5). The subject is an effect of discourses or social norms, on which “the viability of our individual personhood is fundamentally dependent” (Butler, 2004, p. 2). Recognition and legitimation of our selves is conferred based on whether and how well we perform the identities (subject positions) prescribed to us.

**Application to this Research**

My subjectivation as a woman was and still remains subject to masculine hegemonic discourses in which females and femininity are physically and psychologically inferior. Despite claims (official stories) that I grew up in an age and society of individualism, I was not permitted to identify as an individual in and of my self, rather, as a body that was or would eventually be in heterosexual partnership to a man. Evidence of compulsory heterosexuality (Rich, 1983) and the heterosexual imaginary (Ingraham, 2008) are prevalent in the majority of my childhood stories. This represents a point of departure and resistance in my quest for validity and legitimacy.
Deborah Tolman, Renee Spencer, Myra Rosen-Reynoso, and Michelle Porche (2003) wrote the following, citing Adrienne Rich’s (1983) concept of compulsory heterosexuality:

Rich conceived of heterosexuality as a universally pervasive institution organizing male and female relationships, not simply as attraction to and engaging in sexual behaviour with the opposite gender. This institution of heterosexuality is comprised of unwritten but clearly codified and compulsory conventions by which males and females join in romantic relationships. Rich posited that heterosexuality is political in nature, rather than natural, functioning to serve the needs and desires of men within patriarchy, and therefore require various forms of male coercion of women for its production. She outlined how seemingly discrete social processes actually work synergistically to oppress women, including the socialization of women and men to feel that male sexual ‘drive’ amounts to a right, the denial and denigration of female pleasure or agency, and the objectification of women. Violence against women and the constant threat of it (including sexual harassment and rape), coupled with incitements for women to devalue their friendships with other women, sustain and perpetuate this institution to insure that it functions unconsciously and imperceptibly for most individuals. (p. 160)

The social world of which I am a part is organized by male hegemonies15 (of which compulsory heterosexuality, heterosexual imaginary, and femininity are part) that require women to take themselves up as subjects in particular ways, one of which is the silencing or invisibility of a relationship with one’s selves in favour of much more “natural” and/or “preferable” heterosexual relationships. Of the heterosexual imaginary, Ingraham (2008) wrote:

We hold up the institution of heterosexuality as timeless, independent of relations of ruling, devoid of historical variation, and as ‘just the way it is’ while creating social practices that reinforce the illusion that as long as one complies with this prevailing and naturalized structure – “it’s just the way it is” – all will be right in

15 Hegemony refers to an exercise of indirect power (rather than formal or government control) and can be found in the “common sense” beliefs people hold about the way things are (Engstrom, 2008). The addition of masculine in front of hegemony refers to the often invisible ways that our social world is organized to maintain male dominance over non-males.
the world. (p. 26)

Michel Foucault and the emergence of poststructuralism called for “liberation from commonly accepted notions of what it means to be human and the promotion of new modes of subjectivity” (O’Grady, 2005, p. 109). Later, feminist poststructuralism promoted/provided alternative discourses with tools and opportunities for the formation of the (female and feminine) subject and practices of gendered selves through the storied deconstruction of compulsory heterosexuality and the heterosexual imaginary.

With autoethnography (self-storying; a practice/technique of the self), I attempted to understand and describe how compulsory heterosexuality and the heterosexual imaginary were incorporated into my selves and desire to become the bride. I explored how I could engage with my wedding desire in a more critical, disruptive, and deconstructive way, interrupting the heterosexual imaginary and dependence on a romantic heterosexual partnership (and wedding) to “create and maintain the illusion of well-being and oneness” (Ingraham, 2008, p. 26).

My hands are slow and steady as I slice through a large green pepper. My left fingers curl slightly to protect my fingertips from the sharp blade. I continue to recall my research, elaborating on the characteristics of my autoethnography.

Methodological Frame: Autoethnography

Carolyn Ellis (Bochner & Ellis, 2001; Ellis, 2006; Ellis, 2000; Ellis, 2004; Ellis, Bochner, & Boylorn, 2013) is a leading writer and methodologist of Autoethnography. Like Ellis, I have probably been an ethnographer for most of my life. Growing up, I was usually interested in what other people were doing and why. “Common sense” led me into the study of psychology as a means of understanding people. I listened and watched,
and grew frustrated with incongruence between the stories I saw and heard on television, movies, music and literature and my lived experiences and stories of the people around me. I've come to understand this as the difference between lived stories and official stories: the latter are usually productions or performances of dominant discourse.

Ellis’ methodological novel, *The Ethnographic I* (2004), is an instructive text and shining example of the methodology applied. Through the telling of a story about teaching a course in autoethnography, Ellis describes the importance and value of four characteristics: (a) putting selves into research; (b) writing therapeutically; vulnerably, evocatively, and ethically; (c) recognizing that life informs research and research informs life; and (d) writing as inquiry/research.

**Putting Selves into Research**

Autoethnography is characterized by an intention to bring the self to the surface of the writing, making the culturally engaged self the subject and/or object of description, interpretation, and analysis (Chang, 2008, p. 35, 43). Robin Boylorn (2008) portrayed autoethnography as writing from the self or talking to the self, for the self. Drawing on literature from Ellis and her life partner, Art Bochner, (Bochner & Ellis, 2002; Ellis, 2004; Ellis & Bochner, 1996), Amber Esping (2010) offers that autoethnographies "are usually written in first-person narrative form, combining a strong aesthetic sensibility with the theoretical and methodological tools and lens of social science" (p. 2002). I read some fascinating and engaging examples of autoethnographic scholarship (Ellis, 1996;
Tillmann-Healy, 1996; Ronai, 1996) that accomplish the goal of putting the self\textsuperscript{16}, or rather, exposing the self, in research.

**Self as Social Context**

The practice of autoethnography is a subject’s attempt to derive understanding or make sense of social context; it is a performative and productive act of self-making in interaction with readers as well as the sociohistoric context of the narration (Daskalaki, 2012, p. 439). The self doesn’t live in a vacuum devoid of other people or of social context. Rather, the self emerges through and within context and discourses – to look at a self is to unavoidably and simultaneously look at society and culture. This does not mean that one self is representative of an entire society or culture; rather, each individual is a derivative of larger culture that is derived from many individuals. Self and culture are at the very least reciprocal and more accurately inextricably mutually coexistent. My story reveals as much about society/culture as it does about me.

William Pinar (1988) combatted allegations of narcissism with the idea that self-understanding is a precondition or a concomitant/coexistent/simultaneous condition for the understanding of others. The self (senses, bodies, feelings, entire being) is a tool in all types of research to learn about the world, even those forms of research that imagine the self to be non-existent for the purpose of objectivity. Experiences in the world are useful for critical reflection on the self, and conversely, experiences of the self are useful for critical reflection on the world (Ellis, 2004). Personal experiences illuminate the culture

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\textsuperscript{16} For a deeper theorizing of the concept of “self” see Appendix A – Theorizing the self.
being studied; one can’t study one’s self without the already implicated and simultaneous study of society. Heewon Chang (2008) takes up the process of actively interpreting an individual as a necessary and fundamental “unit of culture” (p. 44); society is comprised of many individual units that are always already a part of society.

Autoethnography is an illumination of social and cultural stories (dominant discourse; grand narratives) of our places and times, community, culture, humanity, and survival on Earth (Parry, 1991, as cited by Jago, 1996). Raya Abigail Jones (2010) wrote “having a self requires belonging in a community of speakers” (p. 549). Actual stories and self-narratives can be understood as a type of social accounting/discourses with each constructions always open for continuous change and revision (Jones, 2010).

Even if you consider self and society to be separate and mutually exclusive concepts there is inevitable and inescapable reciprocity between the I (writer) who does the writing or researching and the we (society) that the writer is positioned within (Adams & Holman Jones, 2011). When an autoethnographer undertakes writing for what may appear as only selfish or even narcissistic reasons, there is something to be learnt about the social context - she cannot not write her self as absent or outside of context.

Autoethnography refers to writing about the personal and its relationship to culture. It is an autobiographical genre of writing and research that displays multiple layers of consciousness…back and forth autoethnographers gaze: first they look through an ethnographic wide angle lens, focusing outward on social and cultural aspects of their personal experience; then, they look inward, exposing a vulnerable self that is moved by and may move through, refract and resist cultural interpretations. As they zoom backward and forward, inward and outward, distinctions between the personal and cultural become blurred. (Ellis, 2004, p. 37)

The content of individual stories is derived from selves that are embedded in culture (Averett, 2009), subjects that can only ever be constituted within and through discourses.
As a result, the small, meaningful, and intensely personalized truths uncovered in autoethnography both affirm (they have to, in order to be intelligible) and discredit dominant discourse and official stories.

**Writing Therapeutically, Vulnerably, Evocatively, Ethically**

**Writing Therapeutically**

To write therapeutically refers to writing selves and lives in ways that might lead to positive transformation, either in the construction of past/present/future selves, performances of discourses, and/or relationships with others and/or the world we live in. Autoethnography has a tendency to take on topics that are often considered negative or heavy, even controversial and sometimes uncomfortable, in the same way that topics are presented for therapy. Bochner and Ellis (2001) talk about the parallels (and differences) between autoethnography and therapy; more than once, autoethnography is described with a metaphor of self-therapy. This makes great sense to me; writing the self is a means of working through or reconciling something – a process that is not normally utilized for happy or positive experiences which are easily accepted and understood (Ellis, 2004, p. 43) or otherwise taken-for-granted.

Both therapy and autoethnography emphasize the importance of relationships as a large part of the process and as a goal of the work. In therapy, the space between therapists and clients provides unparalleled information about how both people and (simultaneously) society construct relationships. In addition, relationships with others are more often than not explored as a presenting concern in therapy. In autoethnography, the same can be true; we illuminate many relationships including but not limited to: (a) writer
and reader, (b) writer as reader, (c) writer and characters, (d) characters in the story, (e) readers and characters, and (f) readers and their personal and professional relationships.

In considering therapy and autoethnography, relationships can be thought of as vessel for and example of personal transformation(s). The key, for me, is to be open to possibilities for transformation and experiences of selves and relationships.

Autoethnography is not unlike therapy in that both require vulnerability and relationship in the pursuit or process of transformation. I want my writing to change me. I want to be able to respond to myself, therapeutically, for the purpose of experiencing growth and transformation. This is true also of my wedding – I want to create and celebrate transformative relationships with my many selves and loved ones. I wish to write selves that are credible without, before, or alongside heterosexual monogamous partnerships. I wish to write selves that privilege community and entire social networks at least as much as romantic, monogamous, heteronormativity.

**Writing Vulnerably**

To be vulnerable is to acknowledge a lack of certainty; for the body that writes to reveal or admit (to the self and the audience) that one does not know or understand. Vulnerability might also signify a position of being open to injury or otherwise unprotected. Tessa Muncey (2010) tells autoethnographers that “vulnerability should be acknowledged, and a period of unknowing [should be] recognised as the precursor or discovering of idea” (p. 145); vulnerability is unavoidable and inescapable as well as important. Vulnerability implies that the writer is taking some risk(s); that she is abandoning comfort, protection, and/or authority and embracing a sense of not knowing
or being lost. “It leads me to wonder about the extent to which resolution, knowing, certainty, and familiarity may be enemies of the creative process” (Muncey, 2010, p. 141).

Further, I recognize that putting my experiences on paper, and in my thesis no less, means I opened myself up and became vulnerable to the scrutiny not just of friends and family, but to my committee, to my peers and colleagues, and the academy more generally. I am fortunate that my journey included supervisors and committee members whom I trust and respect; who have responded to the many drafts of my thesis with honesty and loving kindness as well as valued guidance and critical feedback. I am grateful for this provision of safety which contributed to my willingness to be vulnerable and provided a model for which I could relate more respectfully to my self.

**Writing Evocatively**

Ellis (2004) encourages autoethnographers to write in such a way that the story evokes (suggests, induces, arouses, reminds, conjures) the reader’s personal experiences (p. 117). Evocative writing allows readers to experience the experience I am writing or have written, as if it might be their own story and in relationship to their own lived experiences. I believe that I have written in a way that invites readers to think and feel my life as well as their own lives and stories in relation to mine. I have included emotional and embodied experiences and descriptive details for the purpose of bringing my story “to life” for you. You, reader, can form your own judgement(s) about whether I have accomplished this.
Writing Ethically

Autoethnography comes with its own ethical guidelines. For example, the previous discussion on the therapeutic quality of autoethnography speaks well to how a writer might care for the self in the process of autoethnography; careful attention to experiences of the selves allows for recognition of problems and often prompts positive change and transformation. Autoethnographic ethics flows from the idea that the self-evacuated academic voice has been a perpetration of violence against the humans/objects it claims/attempts to give voice to (Dauphinee, 2010, p. 807). Giving voice to the self, to persons marginalized by dominant discourses and to the inextricable relationships with context and culture, are important components of writing/doing/living autoethnography. In autoethnography, many often competing or incoherent voices are accepted as truth.

When composing our selves and characters that are based on or inspired by (constructed in relation to) people in our lives, it is important to write knowing the possibility that those on whom our characters are based, will read what we have written (Ellis, 2004). It is important to treat characters responsibly, with love and respect.

Responsibility, ethics, and love are not the same. But they often enable one another. Of equal significance is the fact that love is not always something that emanates from the expectations we grow to have of one another (of our spouses, siblings, children, parents, and so on). Sometimes, love is a surprise that animates our research. Sometimes, to love is to be answerable for our actions – for our words about others, who cannot respond from within the confines of our disciplines. (Dauphinee, 2010, p. 819)

My intention was to embrace my many selves and constructed characters with loving kindness and respect, much as my colleagues and committee have treated me.

For example, I received permission to use the names of my loved ones in my lived experiences as characters and conversations in my story. I ensured that those for whom
characters are named have had opportunities to read the drafts that were produced for this project, particularly sections that may pertain to them. I talked with each about how these characters are not static/stable or direct depictions of the real people in my life but rather imaginative and composite characters that are based on my perceptions of interactions with them. The stories could have been presented in many different ways and incorporating the feedback of the living bodies for whom the written characters are named ensured my writing communicated my love and admiration for those in my life. This is important to me.

At the risk of being redundant, I cannot stress enough that even though the characters I have written are named and inspired by friends, family, and colleagues, they were as much extensions or representations of me and my many selves as they are representative of real people in my life. Just as the story I am writing can only ever be partial and incomplete; so too are the characters in the story – only a partial and incomplete snapshot of the people and relationships I encounter in my lived experiences.

The way that I have constructed my many selves, for example, shows that there is no one stable, objective, “real” or “authentic” Amanda. I am limited/restricted, in writing, to the I who tells the story and nothing more (or less). In reality, I do not have access to a single coherent and non-contradictory self (I am, in each second, always becoming; the idea of who I am continuously re-signified), or subject position from which I can tell the story in a linear and uncontested way. The authority over self and characters that I seem

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17 The text is the text (George, 2012). The text is not the person.
to have as the writer, is an illusion\textsuperscript{18} – that the characters are in writing and once submitted in their “final” version are forever stable and unchanging is one of the limits of privileging written knowledge – it does not reflect the fluid and contradictory ways that subjects are always in the process of becoming.

And so, although I aim to be truthful in my story-telling and my character creation(s), and nothing that I have written is untrue, this apparent truth is entirely contestable, both related to and (not) a reflection of the lived experiences and people alluded to. The entirety of this document is limited to my entirely faulty memories and interpretations. The story and the characters both are and are not real\textsuperscript{19}.

\textbf{Life Informs Research, Research Informs Life}

Robin Boylorn and Mark Orbe (2014) do not draw lines between doing research and living life. In autoethnography, life and research blur together, existing simultaneously and inextricably (the appearance of boundaries between them produces and is produced by humanist discourses).

I describe how my way of being in the world hindered or advanced my research and why the kind of research I do pushed me to live my life differently, personally, as a teacher educator and as a researcher. (Conle, 1999, p. 9)

Kathy Carter, (1993) wrote that “knowledge represented by stories can't be reduced to logical propositions, scientific laws or explanations, or even abstract rules.... rather, story

\textsuperscript{18}Coia and Taylor (2013) refer to truth as a destructive illusion. They seek rather, a collaborative understanding, experienced through writing collaboratively.

\textsuperscript{19}Pardon my redundancy, here, as I fail entirely at trying to convince you that everything and everyone you know are not “real” but rather, entirely produced by language and discourse.
accommodates ambiguity as a central figure/theme” (p. 6). This opens lives and selves, already entirely ambiguous, for (re)signification.

Dynamic social conditions mean that people's interpretations are continually in flux. This suggests that the repertoire of stories still waiting to be told (and studied) is practically limitless. What better way to grapple with making sense of our rapidly changing world than through the study of stories? (Casey, 1995, p. 242)

Just as the life of a writer is a source to be mined for stories, so too “the story of our lives becomes our lives” (Rich, 1978 as cited in Ellis, 2004, p. 117); if we somehow imagine a division between life and research, there will remain a reciprocal relationship between them.

Researching lives. Constructing selves. Life as self; self as life. Research is life. The beautiful blurring of constructed categories fills me with warmth and comfort. I don’t have to be anything other than I am to be successful, here. I don’t have to force myself, unwilling and uncomfortably, into a box…rather, I can find ways to dance with methodology and epistemology that feel better. I can live, and dance, and sing, and swim with academic narratives instead of constructing a singular academic self. I can breathe — breath is research, research is breath.

**Writing is Inquiry; Stories are Epistemological Spaces**

Tom Barone (2007) asks what forms of negotiation are possible between story and analysis, between narrative and theoretical or academic discourses. Can this be reconciled? Is it possible for narrative to be theoretically aware (p. 458)? I would argue that, from my position as a doctoral student, steeped for years in methodological and epistemological literature, it is impossible to write narrative that is not already analytical
or theoretically aware; for example, theory informs my choice and arrangement of words, details and stories - any stories are always already analytical.

The Carolyn Ellis variety of Autoethnography uses stories to do the work of theory and analysis (Ellis, 2006). Rather than focussing on how we know things (this privileges analysis and generalization), autoethnography foregrounds lived experiences through emotion and embodiment. Ellis (2006) points to Hannah Arendt (1973), who conceived of storytelling as an activity that reveals meaning without defining it (p. 438).

The difference between stories and traditional analysis is the mode of explanation and its effects on the reader. Traditional analysis is about transferring information, whereas narrative inquiry emphasizes communication. It’s the difference between monologue and dialogue, between closing down interpretation and staying open to other meanings, between having the last word and sharing the platform. (Ellis, 2006, p. 438)

The boundary between narrative and analysis, like all boundaries, is discursive (Hendry, 2009); produced by and simultaneously producing humanist discourses. Boundaries privilege certain ways of knowing over others; this is done through the alienation and or estrangement of “other” knowledges or ways of knowing (Hendry, 2009). Petra Hendry (2009) tells us that research is all the same thing; calling research different things and taking different paths is all an attempt to find meaning. All knowledge is incomplete…

Like life and research, narrative and analysis can be understood as simultaneous and inextricable. You can take the story as already “complete” without having to go beyond it; you can experience my story as impacting your life and with it, uncover some of your own truths (Carter, 1993; Ellis, 2004).

Privileging or emphasizing analysis can be very dangerous. It can be risky and problematic in that it overshadows the analyses already inherent in and inextricable from
stories.

Stories can be used to explain, explore, illustrate or prove. But when we use them as such, stories risk losing their connection to lived experience and can become rhetorical instruments… from the point of view of narrative inquiry… it is important to keep experience and temporality in the foreground of experiential narratives. (Conle, 1999, p. 21)

As Ellis (2006) expressed, I do not wish to sacrifice my story at the “altar of traditional sociological rigor…[to] transform the story into another language…[to] lose the very qualities that make a story a story” ( p. 440). I aim to analyze evocatively - to embed/include traditional analyses with and within the stories. As such, privilege, in this document, is given to story over overt or separated abstract analysis, as much as possible. However, consistent with the requirements of a doctoral thesis, the story is supplemented with an additional layer of critical analysis accomplished by considering the story alongside and with epistemological (feminist poststructural) literature and ideas. As an academic, steeped for a long time in the educational tradition of theory, I’ve found that my personal experiences contain a lot of thinking (consciousness; cognition; rationality) about and with theory. This is “common.”

Writing in layers reflects the structure of consciousness. As each layer of text is superimposed on the others, each layer contributes to the understanding of the other layers as well as to the overall picture of social life that the text conveys. (Ronai, 1999, p. 116)

In this way, we interpret the content and themes that might hold across stories. I hope to write so that you, reader, can experience the story, and that together we can think with the story (narrative analysis) as well as think about the story (analysis of narrative) (Ellis, 2004, p. 197). I have consumed (incorporated) the writings of Rambo Ronai (1998, 1999) as models for how theory can dance with the personal in pursuit of "autoethnographic
writing that is powerful, evocative, and theoretically sophisticated" (Gannon, 2006, p. 476).

There are inextricable connections between story and theory; spaces for story alone, for theory alone, space for joining story with theory through analysis (Ellis, 2004, p. 45) and spaces where story and theory can’t be consciously (rationally; cognitively) separated. Use of story alone, leaves the meaning of the work entirely open. In this document, I engage in all of the above, and want you, reader, to know that even when my interpretation appears to be fixed/stable/objective, it isn’t.

My analysis of narrative weaves throughout this document to minimize (although impossible) any overt and explicit juxtaposition; it demonstrates how the story: (a) is analysis on its own, (b) can be analyzed, and (c) that these components overlap and coexist in messy/incoherent, complicated/complex, and complementary ways (Boylorn, 2008). Narrative analysis and analysis of narrative become more fluid in this way; weaving story with interpretation blurs the line that humanist research imagines to exist between them. It demonstrates the impossibility of a pure or objective separation of theory and story.

**Amanda’s Research Method**

I recall Kali’s request. What is the beginning of the story? How did it all start? Where did it come from? And …. what happened?

**Purpose of the Study**

My purpose was to pay attention to, explore, and write my experiences and stories of struggle within and deconstruction of compulsory heterosexuality and the
re)production of the wedding ceremony as a milestone or rite of passage reflective of female legitimacy. I sought an alternative to the dominant heterosexual wedding stories.

My research provided a better (different) understanding of the ways I practice a self within the dominant discourse of compulsive heteronormativity\textsuperscript{20} and related discursive fields. Through the telling of the story, I made a number of things visible to myself: (a) the (il)legitimacy of the single (unmarried) woman; (b) the presence of multiple incoherent selves; (c) the danger of (re)producing single/married categories, dichotomies and binary oppositions (including the traditional heterosexual wedding ceremony); and (d) an example of resistance to dominant discourse(s). Through this, I hoped to make a significant contribution to academia as well as the broader social world\textsuperscript{21}.

There is much to be said for leaving the meanings and interpretations open – it allows you, reader, to make your own sense of what I have written. I will share with you the links and connections I have made and I hope that as you read, you continue to remind your selves that my interpretations are neither the best nor the correct versions – they are some of many options.

**Rationale for the Method**

As an epistemological lens, feminist poststructuralism was a good fit for my topic; it provided me the tools and knowledge to analyze my own historical condition as

\textsuperscript{20} Compulsory heterosexuality is taken up further in Chapter Three.

\textsuperscript{21} I have reserved discussion of significance for the final chapter of this document. The linear layout of this document is illusory and you are free to flip to the significance section, if you wish.
an unmarried bisexual cis-woman resisting compulsory heterosexuality as well my own complicity in producing this as an illegitimate position for women to take up.

Autoethnography was a good fit for this topic because it put the self into research in a similar way that my feminist self-wedding was intended to privilege relationship to self and carve space for the visibility of non-heterosexuality. Writing from my body in the creation of all forms of field text (see below) illuminated my many selves and helped me to recognize and deconstruct the ways that I am subject to, both produced by and producing, compulsory heterosexuality.

I had a lot of difficulty formulating research questions for this project. None of the autoethnographies I read had actually set out research questions that would be answered in the reading and/or writing process, so it was uncomfortable and awkward, albeit somewhat helpful, to frame the research this way. In my final draft, I decided to delete the research questions that guided my storying as they greatly limited the possible interpretations that those who read my drafts might come to. My intention, as stated at the very beginning of this research, was to make meaning for myself and beyond that, to leave significance and interpretation entirely open for others.

**Amanda’s Research Process**

Kali joins me at the kitchen table as I set our breakfast plates down between the cutlery. “I squeezed some fresh orange juice,” I tell her.

She sets the open thesis text on the table to the right of her glass and picks up her fork.

“What was your research method?” She asks.
“Feminist Poststructural Autoethnography.” I reply.

She smiles big and rolls her eyes at me. “I can read the title for myself, Auntie.” We both laugh. “Tell me what you did – describe it to me.” She prompts.

“Well… I spent more than four years of my life collecting relevant literature that I believed was significant to my topic. I divided the literature into three broad categories: (a) epistemological literature for feminist, poststructural, and feminist poststructural theories; (b) methodological literature for autoethnography, poststructural autoethnography, and other types of narrative based inquiry; and (c) literature to do with weddings, including traditional, contemporary, and gay/lesbian weddings22. This literature informed the choices I made both while I was in the field and while I was constructing that document you’re reading. I continued to collect and read literature while in the field and while constructing the research text23.”

I continue…describing my research process out loud, for Kali.

Living in the Field

My fieldwork began in the late summer of 2014, after I passed my comprehensive exams and moved forward with my self-engagement24. I ordered my wedding ring set, had engagement photos taken, and announced to my friends and family that I would be living in the field...
marrying myself in a feminist self-wedding in early May of 2015. I completed these tasks by early December and moved quickly into the more detailed planning of my wedding. The time spent planning and executing of my feminist self-wedding is what I refer as *living in the field* and field work (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000).

I arranged the vast majority of the wedding from a distance as I was living here in Saskatchewan and the wedding would be home in Alberta. I had already chosen the six members of my wedding party\(^{25}\) and obtained their verbal desire to be involved in my wedding many months prior to my engagement. They were chosen from my circle of closest friends based on their consistent and overwhelmingly positive responses to my ideas about “marrying myself.” I selected six attendants in total as I wanted each of their outfits to be comprised of one color from the pride flag – a symbol of sexual orientation diversity (or heteronormative divergence) and a banner under which I have lived for many years as a bisexual cis-woman.

Once my rings arrived, I started a private group discussion with the members of the wedding party using the inbox function of my personal Facebook account. The conversations here as well as through cell phone text messaging and phone and video calls helped me to discuss my feminist self-wedding ideas and intentions with others and also to obtain significant input, feedback, and preferences from my wedding party that I wanted to incorporate it into decisions about the wedding (i.e. favours, music selections, scheduling, outfits, etc.). I intended to ensure that everyone had substantial contributions

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\(^{25}\) The meaning and significance of my relationship with each member of my wedding party are also illuminated further in Chapters 5, 6 and 7.
to the planning and execution of my feminist self-wedding. I wanted everyone involved having a sense of ownership for their role and contributions to the wedding; to have fun and engage with me in the continued creation of lived stories and memorable experiences.

I had been thinking about marrying myself for nearly a decade before the planning started. When the idea was in its infancy, a male friend and former sexual partner had indicated that he wanted to officiate the wedding in which I would marry myself. I contacted him to make sure this was still the case and as it was I moved forward with other details including creating, ordering, assembling, and mailing out invitations.

I chose a photographer who self-identified as a feminist and a member of the gender and sexually diverse (GSD) community. Her website and weblog talked about rainbow families and a future in which potential clients don’t have to seek rainbow friendly vendors because diversity and acceptance will be the norm. I knew quickly that this was the type of photographer I wanted for my event, because, with her, I wouldn’t have to struggle as much against traditional heteronormative notions of weddings and brides – she made clear that she would accept me exactly as I was and create a set of artistic photographs to capture, validate, recognize, and legitimate my feminist self-wedding. Her enthusiasm upon hearing my plans was obvious. The price of her services and decision to contract with her was a domino that pushed forward a chain of higher than anticipated purchases that I justified by telling myself to “go big or go home.”

The next large purchase was the venue (a ballroom) that required me to use them for catering (an hors d’oeuvres buffet). From that moment on, I spent large amounts of
money on objects and services I later regretted purchasing; expenditure that didn’t contribute in any significant way to the “success” of my wedding day. I went shopping online and spent thousands of dollars on: (a) my dress and accessories; (b) favours for the wedding (ceremony and reception), stagette, and bridal shower; and (c) gifts for my family members, wedding party, and officiator.

Research to date has largely focused on the wedding as an extreme case of consumerism, involving the purchase of large quantities of goods, including some very expensive goods, in a short period of time. This ‘binge’ is justified and exacerbated through the ‘marriage’ of consumerism with romantic love; advertisers often employ the language of love to market their product. Couples can then more legitimately over-consume in the attempt to buy happiness and romance. (Carter & Duncan, 2016, p. 5)

During the six months that I used to plan the wedding, I spent a lot of time thinking about what parts of the event needed to be recognizable to guests and onlookers as well as the participants in the wedding and which parts it was important to resist or disobey established norms. Dispossession: The Performative in the Political, a conversation between Judith Butler and Athena Athanasiou (2013) encouraged me to contest the rules of weddings produced by and that (re)produce masculine hegemonic heteronormativity. In order to contest them, I would have to engage with them as a necessary part of uncovering possibilities for agency and resistance in the wedding; I needed a better grasp on what exactly I was struggling against. Wendy Leeds-Hurwitz (2002) wrote that:

Ritual always involves a performance; it is not a ritual if you simply read a description out loud. A wedding requires what Austin (1999) called

26 I wish to acknowledge this practice of complacency and complicity in the (re) production of discourse of capitalism, consumerism, and materialism (Arend, 2016; Boden, 2001, 2003; Corrado, 2002). However, a fuller discussion of these discourses is beyond the scope of this document.
‘performative’ utterances; that is, speaking specific words serves as an action, into that the words cause a change in status...uttering the ritual phrase ‘I do’ actually performs an activity turning two individuals into one publicly acknowledged couple... As Hymes (1981) put it, ‘performance is a mode of existence and realization that is partly constitutive of what the traditions is’ (p. 86). It is through performance that people make such intangibles such as identities visible. In other words, any ritual is a performance when it does something, changes something (p. 101).

In order to reappropriate the wedding ritual as a practice of legitimation, parts of the performance and specific utterances would need to be retained/maintained.

In order to be intelligible as a bride and thus credible as a woman, what practices and utterances could stay and which could go? How far could I deviate from the required performance and still be able to use the term wedding? How much of the traditional ritual did I have to maintain to retain recognisability and legitimacy? How could the ceremony/ritual be usurped by radical strategies of resignification and destabilization?

Sometimes, I made choices without thinking. I often got excited about the possibility of an opportunity and followed through before I had taken time to practice patience and mindfulness and view the other options and their implications. These spontaneous choices and decisions, impulsive though they may have been, offered great information about conflation of consumerism (Arend, 2016; Boden, 2001, 2003; Corrado, 2002) with weddings.

In hindsight, I planned a lot of the wedding “on a whim.” I fell hard and fast into all of the marketing traps and performed as an obedient consumer of the monstrously lavish white wedding. Being a good bride was inextricably tied to being a good consumer.
The only thing I intentionally attempted to exclude from my wedding was the required heterosexuality (the groom). I wanted the wedding to feel somewhat traditional or contemporary and I assumed that this was the only way the wedding might be powerful and emotional (as if a drastic deviation from too many norms would compromise all).

I travelled to Alberta ten days before the wedding, to attend a stagette arranged by one of my wedding party (Kari) and bridal shower arranged by another wedding party member (Liz) as well as my sister-in-love (Vanessa). These events were discussed and organized as an attempt to resemble the wedding experiences of heterosexual brides-to-be, as much as possible because it seemed to fit with the legitimacy and validation I was attempting to procure for my unmarried non-heterosexual subject position.

I stayed in Strathmore for the remainder of the week before the wedding and utilized this time sorting out the smaller wedding details (seating plan, centrepieces, ballroom layout, etc.) as well as meeting with my two officiants to work on an actual script for the wedding ceremony. I kept a daily journal of how everything was coming along and have fond memories of sitting at the small desk in my hotel room, writing about what I was experiencing.

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27 I want to acknowledge here, before you develop any assumptions that I was successful in eliminating heterosexuality from my wedding, that I failed drastically in this endeavour. Although there was no actual groom in my feminist self-wedding, the presence of my current male life partner often undermined my disruption. This is explored further later in the document.

28 The stagette and bridal shower are not discussed/described in this document as a complete analysis of either would require a separate thesis.

29 My brother’s female life partner; they are happily and voluntarily unmarried.
On the Tuesday evening, I met with my officiators over dinner and spent a few hours discussing the many options for the ceremony. Our ideas were based on wedding encounters we’d each had previously, all weddings of heterosexual couples. We recalled the most moving elements of the ceremonies as we remembered them and twisted (queered) them to suit the purpose of my feminist self-wedding (valorizing the single, solitary woman).

At this time, I was made aware that my female officiator’s mother had been re-diagnosed with cancer and that my male officiator had recently lost his job and would be quite busy working two physical labour jobs to make ends meet. Both re-affirmed their commitment, with special requirements; she needed a reduced role and he would take the larger talking pieces but could be present only for the ceremony as he would have to work night shifts before and after the wedding - not sleeping at all was not an option. I was relieved and very grateful that both were able to keep their commitments, especially being five days away from the wedding.

With their feedback, I took on the responsibility of writing the script for the wedding ceremony and sent it to them for their review and approval. Their feedback would be as important to me as their initial contributions to the draft I created; I wanted to make sure I didn’t write anything into the script that either would feel uncomfortable saying or that didn’t resemble their previous expressions of support for the wedding. Their responses to the script were positive; no additional drafts were required.

The night before the wedding, I met with the wedding party and we worked together with the hotel staff to prepare the ballroom for the following day. We assembled
centrepieces and set out favours, orders of ceremony and reception, “meet the wedding party” flyers, and place cards.

Field Text(s)

While living in the field (planning and executing my wedding), I created, assembled, and collected a number of different kinds of data which I refer to as field text(s) (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Although all of the data informed the construction of the final research text, only some of the data is included within it. I kept a detailed journal of my every day experiences. The content of the journal was mostly emotional, psychological, and physical descriptions of the tasks I had completed and my engagement to my self (inner dialogue) as well as the responses of and interactions with others.

In addition to the journal, I collected artefacts that I thought might be helpful or relevant when I would eventually turn my experience into a research text. I amassed numerous relevant artefacts including: (a) wedding invitations, save the dates, and information cards; (b) favours from the stagette and wedding shower including wine glasses, lip chaps, water bottles, tank tops, a straw hat decorated with flowers); (c) items from the wedding ceremony including bubble wands, ring pops, sweet tarts; personalized notebooks, pride pens, order of ceremony, “meet the wedding party” flyers, my (comm)unity candle, and my framed and signed wedding vows; (d) items from the wedding reception including favours (treble clef shaped bookmarks and bottle openers),

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30 I would be remiss to include, here, a discussion of the wedding day. The stories and analyses of the day form the bulk of this document and so I will end this section here.

31 The creation of the research text is discussed in the next section.
vases, hand-made table numbers, orders of reception, masquerade masks, and a seating chart; (e) two USB drives containing videos of the wedding ceremony and reception; and (f) a large digital album with various photographs from guests, members of the wedding party, and two hired photographers (Leftboot Photography, 2014; TD Photography, 2015).

Additionally, I utilized my personal Facebook and twitter accounts as well as email and cell phone text message history as mines of data. I had posted, shared, and discussed a lot of information relevant to weddings and feminist practices generally and the planning and execution of my wedding particularly. Inclusion of each of these forms of text (or data) helped to augment my understandings of the particular sociohistoric moment(s) and context that was produced by and producing my many selves and will be discussed as they are relevant through the remainder of this document.

**From Field Text to Research Text**

About a month after the wedding I began constructing my thesis document, the full draft of my thesis, which I referred to as the research text (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). The wealth of data I collected provided many sources for stories, writing prompts, and themes. My decisions about which pieces of field text to include, allude to, and exclude as well as my post-hoc analyses were informed by the various theoretical literatures as well as the most salient and personally important of my experiences. The research text creation was guided in large part by the theoretical themes that struck and resonated with my experiences and purposes. The main threads of narrative that I deemed important to illuminate include: (a) heterosexual subject formation (chapter three),(b)
wedding (de)construction (chapter four), (c) the feminist self-wedding performance (chapter five), (d) my embodied experience of the feminist self-wedding (chapter six), (e) social recognition (chapter seven), and (f) legitimacy and significance (chapter eight). All of these topics were arranged through an autoethnographic lens that served to narratively frame each as part of the selfing and/or self-storying process(es).

“Am I in the stories?” she asks.

Actually, the main storyline was an imaginative interaction between you and I, fifteen years in the future (hindsight is hindsight)\(^\text{32}\). I created a 19-year-old Kali and 47-year-old Amanda for a number of reasons. First, I thought my research was most applicable to bodies marked as female and feminine who are somewhere in adolescence or very early adulthood; it is around this time that women are likely to be struggling with their positionings in relation to men (considering dating, sex, and possibly marriage and motherhood). Choosing a 19-year-old Kali gave my potential audience a character they may (or may not) relate to.

Second, the 19-year-old Kali character was named you when you were four and resembled me, but is more accurately a character that represents me – when I was 14 through 24 years old. Your character is an imaginative extension of my selves (perhaps my inner adolescent) more than it is a depiction of you. Rather than writing detailed stories and narratives illuminating the things that I thought and the ways that I thought of my self (as a woman) in relation to men, it was more comfortable for me have a different

\(^{32}\) For further discussion of the literature underlying my decision to frame the main storyline in this way, refer to Appendix B – Verisimilitude.
character do these things so that the imaginative (possible) future self I was writing could be different. Writing my selves in this way encouraged me to treat and regard my selves with the same love that I hold for you. This practice of self-love was lacking prior to my research; in many ways I inherited and incorporated misogynist self-hatred from the masculine hegemony in which I live but did/do not choose.

Third, the “fact” that the 19-year-old Kali and the 47-year-old Amanda didn’t actually exist (although both were entirely possible) gave me some freedom to construct them as women who have resisted masculine hegemonic discourse in their own unique ways. For example, Kali is a cis-female University football player (I still dream that feminism will change professional sports) and Amanda is a woman living within a rich social network of which her male life partner is a very small (almost invisible) part - she practices and performs a self that is strong, and somewhat sovereign although still hetero-passing and socially embedded.

Finally, Kali serves the purpose of speaking the compulsory heterosexuality that characterized my interactions with other people, regarding my feminist self-wedding. The things you say in the story were informed by the things I heard (positive, negative, and otherwise) during the planning and execution of the wedding. Again, having these voices speak to me through a character that resembles you was a good way for me to reframe and deconstruct the comments and respond to them with love and respect (feelings that always overflow with even the smallest thought of you).

In my thesis text, you’ll find feminist poststructural literatures discussed alongside the various narratives of planning, experiencing, and remembering the wedding.
ceremony. This weaving of narrative and theory was indispensable for engaging the experience in a multi-layered and deconstructive way. The goal of my analyses was to make visible the processes (and technologies of power) through which creations such as the self, gender, and the bride figure assume status as “real” and thus become the structures which order our material bodies (Jackson, 2004). Exposure of these processes opened my awareness of compulsory heterosexuality. The story serves the purpose of illuminating importance of remembering that the constructions and structures of humanity are mutable; with this acknowledgement, we can make feminist change agendas more feasible (Bacchi & Rönnblom, 2014).

The theory and story informed one another (and me) and were placed together in ways I thought either made the greatest sense or ways that revealed and illuminated the most about discourse production and the formation of the subject. I moved the pieces around a number of times and positioned them in many different ways until they settled together (like puzzle pieces) in a way that was comfortable for me and seemed as though I had accomplished or achieved my purpose.

In no way does the written text give you the whole of the wedding story nor does it give you an entirely complete or systematic analysis of themes derived from the data I collected. Rather, after four years of reflection on and with the literatures and field texts, the final document contains many carefully constructed and creative accounts of what it was and what it meant to marry myself in a feminist self-wedding and the implications this may have for other bodies marked as the female/feminine, or in relationship to a woman as friend, family member, partner, professional, counsellor and/or educator.
I can see she is contemplating all of the things I have just told her. We sit silently and easily for a few minutes. I take the opportunity to eat some of my breakfast and notice that she has finished her own, her plate replaced with the open text. She is flipping through, stopping only to look at the pictures.

When I am finished eating, she asks: “What was the hardest part?”

“It was important for me to draw on a number of supportive and encouraging others during the process of building the research text. I often found myself feeling discouraged and disconnected and questioning whether my story and research was legitimate, significant, valid, or would matter. I reached out on a number of occasions to people who were willing and available to encourage and support me; some wanted to read and talk about my writing (which was pleasantly surprising as well as helpful in my numerous revisions) and others were content (equally supportive) with encouraging words.”

“I’m not sure why, but I feel it important to tell you that I drank many cups of coconut mocha flavoured coffee and ate a lot of cake during the construction of my research text. Most of the cake was chocolate with chocolate buttercream frosting, both made from scratch. Sometimes I topped the cake with a large dollop of raspberry jam. It was delicious. Coffee and cake, along with cuddles from Tux, was the context of the majority of my all night reading and writing sessions. When I struggled and grew frustrated with the all of the apparent impossibility that I was trying to either surmount or ignore, these comforts improved my mood.”

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33 Tux is my little black poodle; my fur-baby, who at present is alive and well.
“You do make the best chocolate cake,” Kali tells me. “I always get so many compliments when I use your recipe and make one the way you taught me.”

A few minutes pass by as Kali flips through to the end of the book.

She looks up at me and breaks the silence. “Can you tell me about the actual wedding, Auntie? Why did you marry yourself?”

“Well…” I take a deep breath, “I had a lot of personal conflict around the idea of weddings when I was just a bit older than you are now. I recognized wedding rituals as a technique of power in the subversion of female and feminine bodies. Yet, I couldn’t extinguish my own desire to be a bride, or my pleasure in attending weddings and enjoyment of all things wedding depicted in the media. When I was a little girl, I had ached to wear a white princess gown, carry flowers, and have my fathers - your three grandfathers - walk me down the aisle. I waited impatiently for the right man to come along and wake me up from the deep miserable sleep of my life and carry me off into happily ever after – wherever that might be located. When that didn’t happen, I tried to convince myself that I didn’t want it anyways. I started to spend more time getting to know myself better, and found that for brief moments, I didn’t actually need a man; that I existed as a real person without one, at least until I went back out into the world and had compulsory heterosexuality shoved down my throat some more34. Underneath it all, I still wanted a wedding. So…I guess I married myself as a way to both publicly and privately reject the idea that I was illegitimate without a man; the idea that I wasn’t good enough

34 Pardon the pun.
on my own.”

“Grandma Cheryl used to tell me that all of the time,” she says, “that women don’t need men to get what they want out of life. We can get jobs, buy houses, and have children, friends, travel, and all kinds of things. Gone are the days when we need permission or an allowance from a man to buy groceries or to go out for a night with the girls.”

“Do you believe Grandma Cheryl?” I ask. “Does what she’s said feel like the reality that you live in?”

“Well… no.” She replies. “What good would my life really be if I didn’t get married or have children?”

I
want
to die.
Can I even
bleed if I am not
alive? No breath. No love.
No life. I press a blade against
my flesh, sure that nothing will happen.
Too afraid to try. I am alone. He left me,
here, to rot and die, alone. I am miserable,
pathetic. Can’t even catch and keep a man.
Fat, unlovable, stupid, angry, nagging. Vomit
surges up from somewhere inside. Poison
aching to get out. I cry myself to sleep.
Broken-hearted little girl.

The silence is jolting for us both. She looks up and sees the tears falling from my eyes. I’m not upset with her; I’m sad at the words that came out of her mouth. I’m sad that single, unmarried, non-hetero women remain illegitimate, incomprehensible positions to be taken up by women, that the song that breaks so many hearts remains the
only one we learn and sing. That her/my worth is entirely owed to men.

“I’m so sorry, Auntie.”
CHAPTER THREE – SUBJECT FORMATION

I grew up in various small towns in rural Alberta. We lived in a trailer (mobile home) until I was 16 years old. I had a lower class upbringing and often experienced prejudice because of this. However, it is important to note that the education and employment experiences I had are owed entirely to white privilege. My class struggles as a child were entirely mitigated by the color of my skin, a benefit non-white persons are far less likely to experience.

I attended public education until that time and switched to Catholic virtual education for my last two years of secondary school. My first university degree (a Bachelor of Arts with double majors in English and Psychology) was completed through distance education and I did full time paid work throughout. I worked as a receptionist/secretary for a small office, as a behaviour therapist at a residential facility for children and adolescents with what was then referred to as “low functioning” autism, as a teaching assistant for students with “learning and behaviour problems” in my hometown junior high school (alongside the teachers who had taught me), and as a nursing attendant on the long term care unit in my hometown hospital.

My first graduate program (Master of Counselling Psychology) combined online education with traditional face to face classroom experiences along with two counselling practica; I did the first practica with the Corrections Services Canada Parole Board and the second with a small walk-in counselling clinic, both in urban Alberta. I did full time paid labour alongside my Masters as well. I provided live-in support for at risk youth in a transition program from group homes to independent living, outreach counselling for an
organization for First Nations Seniors (many who identified as former residential school students), and employment counselling for persons self-identified as having hearing loss.

At the age of 27, I moved north to a small community in the territory of Nunavut and spent 18 months working as a community wellness counsellor and running a family violence prevention program that included coordinating a women’s shelter. This experience provoked me to better understand the sexism and racism that many would deny exist in a place like Canada where the official stories of freedom, multiculturalism, diversity, and democracy are entirely taken for granted (Regan, 2010).

Vignette Two

**Scene:** A dark pub, two female-presenting bodies sit at a table, sipping red wine, appearing exhausted. Both wear name tags and have conference passes attached to lanyards around their necks.

**Amanda:** I don’t understand why feminism still exists. Women are equal, now. I have never been discriminated against for being a woman. I have been discriminated against for being fat and for growing up poor and living in a trailer park, though.

**Tanis:** It’s important to understand that men generally don’t have that experience, or don’t have many of the experiences that others’ have for that matter. Look at the funding for your shelter, for example. We shouldn’t have to fight so hard for the basic needs of women fleeing violence perpetuated by men.

**Amanda:** But women are already receiving more funding for front-line programs than men are, aren’t they?

**Tanis:** I’m not sure what the actual numbers are, and even if I did, that wouldn’t change the reality that women face more barriers to their wellness, success, and survival than men.

**Amanda:** I don’t know. I’ve talked with a few Inuit men who would probably disagree – that they have less adequate access to support than the women in their community do.

**Tanis:** That might be true for your community. Race is an important and complex intersection for gender. “Race and class
I returned to the southern provinces at the age of 29, to begin my doctoral work in Educational Psychology and at that point I believed my research would be about the impact of trauma on the education experiences of Inuit children. In my first doctoral course I learned the term colonization; my research interest quickly shifted towards a self-study. The best way to fight racism (systemic and internalized) is to first turn an inward lens to understand my race and class privileges as well as my gender and sexuality oppression. I recognized a gap in my understanding of self and self in relation to others that would need to be addressed prior to potential research in the cross-cultural (de) colonial field.

My relationships with First Nations, Metis, and Inuit (Indigenous) people and ways of knowing surfaced many times throughout my research process and within my research text. Not coincidentally, there are many parallels between the colonization (dispossession; systematic genocide) of Indigenous lands, languages, epistemologies, cultures, and bodies and the hegemonic domination and ideological control of bodies marked female/feminine. These issues, however, would require numerous theses to appropriately and respectfully address and unpack and unfortunately, this is beyond the scope of this thesis. So, for the sake of avoiding further dispossession, I offer reference to

35 (Tolman et al., 2003, p. 161)
these relationships only as acknowledgement that I am aware of them and ask your trust when I tell you that I consider these issues, alongside the unearned privileges I take for granted as a white settler Canadian, in every other area of my life and practice. In many ways, my quest to first better understand myself and my own social conditions is a responsible and intentional step towards becoming a stronger advocate for decolonization and many other feminist and social justice issues.

My work with female targets of male-perpetrated violence continued during my doctoral work. Once my coursework was completed, I returned to Alberta and worked at a family violence shelter near where I grew up. A year later I again returned to Saskatchewan, and worked in a domestic violence prevention program. At present, I work as a school counsellor at a reserve school and have a small counselling practice out of my home office, as well. Through reflection on my many experiences, I have come to understand more about how compulsory heterosexuality (Rich, 1983) and the heterosexual imaginary (Ingraham, 2008) work to organize our social world in such a way that non-male bodies are always vulnerable to the desires, needs, wants, and violence of men.

The lived reality of institutionalized heterosexuality is, however, not typically tranquil or safe. The consequences the heterosexual imaginary produced include, for example, marital rape, domestic and sexual violence, pay inequities, racism, gay bashing, femicide, and sexual harassment. (Ingraham, 2008, p. 27)

The history and brief curriculum vitae I have provided in this section of the document is a scrawny narrative account. “Although any academic’s CV could be regarded as a site for self-narration…it is more likely to be a rather skeletal autobiographical construction of a working life than a rich account of the self”
(Humphreys, 2005, p. 843). The things that I have done, professionally and the experiences I have had are important, yet, they do not constitute or complete me – I refuse to be totalized by them. I am so much more than the social categories that I do and do not fit into; who we are is much more complex than the labels or titles ascribed to us. What these labels and descriptions attempt to accomplish is the construction of static and essentialized identities – single stories (Adichie, 2009) or narratives about who we have been, are, and must continue to be – especially when these categories are maintained to serve and justify the unequal distribution of material and social resources (such as legitimacy). Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie (2009) explains that the danger of these single stories is not that they are untrue – I will confess to fitting into all of the categories and labels that might be used to define me – rather, these single stories are incomplete.

Not coincidentally, I have felt at many times in my life as though I were incomplete. This “incompletion” is exceptionally devastating during inevitable times of rejection or threat of rejection; break-ups of romantic relationships have been intensely excruciating for me.

This leads me to a piece of creative writing - my first poetic undertaking in relation to this project. The poem below illuminates three layers of my experiences of selfing in a society that expects me to become wife and mother. The poem is written in three columns: (a) the right aligned column signifies the messages I received (regulatory and disciplinary norms) from other people, particularly women; (b) the left aligned column signifies the things I did, thought, or experienced relevant to the regulatory and disciplinary norms in the right column; and (c) the center text signifies my selfing and
practices of self, relevant to the surrounding signs. The poem illuminates some of the
struggles I had, navigating compulsory heterosexuality.

**Navigating Compulsory Heterosexuality**

You’re a girl, here’s some dolls.  
It’s important for you to learn how to take care of dolls.  
Play with dolls, pretend they’re real people.  
When you grow up, you’ll take care of a husband.  
And a house.  
And a baby.  
Or two.

I don’t like to play with dolls.  
They are everywhere.  
I love to sing; love all music.  
Life, like music, is about heterosexual relationships.

You will have  
one  
monogamous  
heterosexual  
relationship.

I love to dance.  
Girls and boys dance together;  
Mom only dances with men;  
I must dance with a man.

I swam like a fish.  
Smart as a whip.  
Only a 98%? You’ll do better next time.  
Do you have a boyfriend yet?  
Are there any cute boys in your class?  
I’m not enough.  
I’m never going to be enough.

I play four wind instruments.  
I am top of the honour roll.  
I am a drum major in a marching band.  
I travel North America and Europe.

Relationships with boys/men are important.  
Marriage is important.  
When you grow up, you’ll meet a boy, and get married.

The things I have done and am doing are not enough.  
I’m not enough.

Are you dating, yet?
That boy is so cute!
Who are you crushing on?
Can I date your brother?

Struggle to fit in.
Strive to feel accepted.

Does anyone really love me?
I’m not like anyone else
I need to get a boyfriend. Then, I will be popular.
By myself, I’m never going to be enough.

Got a job at an office.
Work hard.
Graduate from high school.
Moved out of my parents’ home, and
for more than four years,
I parent my boyfriend.

It’s been four years, when are you guys getting married?
I want grand children.
You’ll get married and have children before we will.
You’re the perfect couple.
You look great together.

I’m nothing without him.
He is everything.
I’m not enough.

I believed we would get married and have babies.
We fought, constantly.
I gave up music,
got behind in my coursework,
gained more than 100 lbs.,
didn’t sing, didn’t dance, didn’t swim.

I’m so proud of you.
You’ve become a beautiful woman.
You have a wonderful life.

It doesn’t matter how many times he says he loves me,
I don’t believe him.
Why would anyone love me?
I’m never going to be enough.

I’m worried about you.
You’re miserable. No one wants to be around you anymore.
Something is wrong.
Is it him? Are you guys okay?

It broke his heart when I left.
His love, real or not, was not enough.
   I’m not enough.

OMG, What happened?
   Are you okay?
   That’s so sad!

I didn’t see this coming. You guys were perfect.
   I’m sorry to hear that your relationship is over.

I could not pick up the pieces of my shattered self.
I could not even find them.
Did they even exist?

   I’m not enough.

   Why are you crying? You’re the one who left.
   It’s been months, when are you going to let it go?

Fourteen undergraduate courses in four months with two full time jobs.
No sleep.
Maybe I found myself?

   I’m proud of you.
   Look at everything you’ve accomplished!
   You’re going to make a good wife and mother some day.
   You're going to make your husband very proud.

I’m never going to be enough.
   I need a husband to love and complete me.
   I need to have children.

Masters Degree
A new man-friend.
We sing.
We dance.
We swim.

   I am complete when he is with me.
   He completes me.
   Alone, I am not enough.

   This one is forever.
   He really loves you.

A move across the province.
   …to find out he had lied
   …about everything
   Did he know?
Did he do it on purpose?
I gave him everything he asked for, and more.
Did he know that I would?
Could he see my emptiness?

I’m never going to be enough.

You must feel terrible.
I can’t imagine how much that hurts.

I break a glass on the nightstand beside my bed,
Hold the shards up to my wrist…
Spend three days in bed wondering if life is worth living…

What a jerk.
There are plenty of fish in the sea.
You’ll meet the right man some day.
He’s out there, just be patient.
When the time is right, you’ll find him.

You are nothing without a male partner.
As a woman, you only exist in relation to men.

I am nothing without a male partner.
As a woman, I only exist in relation to men.
I’m not enough.
I’m never going to be enough.

I have heard similar ideas of self and experiences of incompletion described by friends, family members, and counselling clients; mostly cis-gendered females living post-loss of a male partner.

During the final semester of my doctoral coursework, a close friend of mine experienced the death of her husband by suicide. The weeks following the initial event remain a blur, for me. However, one thing she told me pierces through the fog clearly and sharply: “I don’t know how to be me, without him” (Personal Communications, 2016). Although I have not experienced anything in my personal life even remotely similar, these words resonated in my deepest parts (body, soul, self) and I identified with her apparent absence of self.
Living in Dominant Discourses

I was born with a vagina and assigned/marked the corresponding gender of female. Photos of me as an infant and child depict a body established in a gendered world; white lace, pink dresses, headbands, flowers, stuffed animals, and dolls. There was nothing, in the early 1980s, indicating that anyone did anything different to socialize their children; all other options for producing gender were invisible to my white, lower-middle class, and college-educated, cis-female, heterosexual, often single, mother – as they probably were for the majority of people.

No matter how gently an infant is treated, the handling is always to some extent unwilled, since what we might call a ‘will’ has not been formed. No infant has entered into a contract with an attending set of adults, even as there are crucial contracts at work in the law that seek to protect infants against harm. Even the most attentive and loving modes of handling the infant are impingements that can come from several directions. (Butler in Bell, 2010, p. 136)

My Mom could not have prevented my gendered socialization. Humanist and compulsory heterosexual discourses establishes itself as the only possibility (choice; selection) and when there might be a competitive discourses, the dominant discourses reproduces itself as the superior (preferred, desirable, ideal) position. Other options are unfathomable, invisible or undesirable.

Our bodies are a direct target of power and repression (Foucault, 1977). Although most (white) women are no longer forced or required to marry36, there remain technologies designed to control and discipline our bodies (schools, for example). Weddings (from the desire for them and pleasure experienced through them, to the

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36 See Appendix C - History of Weddings
physical organization of bodies during the ceremony) function as a technology of power, keeping bodies (and minds) in line with the status quo and ensuring the maintenance of compulsory heterosexuality.

According to Foucault, the late 18th and early 19th centuries were characterized by a shift in the execution and mechanics of discipline; where torture and physical punishment (a public spectacle) were retired, laws and restrictions on what the body is “allowed” to do have taken their place as described here:

The body now serves as an instrument or intermediary. If one intervenes upon it to imprison it, or to make it work, it is in order to deprive the individual of a liberty that is regarded both as a right and as property. The body, according to this penalty, is caught up in a system of constraints and privation, obligations and prohibitions. Physical pain, the pain of the body itself, is no longer the constituent element of the penalty. From being an art of unbearable sensations punishment has become and economy of suspended rights. (Foucault, 1977, p. 13)

The execution of power effects the practices of self through the slackening of the hold on the surface of the physical body and tightening of the hold on the individual’s production of the self. The new hold is on the subject, who must perform in particular ways (for example get married) in order to access the rights (legitimacy and recognition) and resources distributed in accordance with dominant discourses. We have come to incorporate techniques of power (via discourses and ideology) into our selves as discipline has shifted from a focus on controlling bodies to formation of the subject (Foucault, 1977). On the surface, we are “free” to be whom we wish. To what extent does such an idea of freedom imply whiteness? Are persons of colour as likely to recognize freedom as fallacy?

The more you allow freedom to thought, the more sure you will be that the people’s mind will be shaped to obedience. And in this way we see taking shape transference of political benefit from the free use of reason onto the domain of
private obedience. (Foucault, 2008, p. 45)

“Freedom” is illusory; technologies of power still maintain their hold on the body through the formation of the subject. Our formative experiences, the process through which we are turned and turn our selves into subjects by and through discourses and the effects to our practices of self, are imbued with power that wasn’t or isn’t obvious until we look directly at it - until we have some tools to recognize how power was and is exercised in the formation of the subject. Carol Schick (2000) wrote:

Although on first recollection, my formative experiences seemed completely unremarkable and commonplace, further examination reveals highly regulated social practices in regard to hierarchies of gender, race, class, ethnicity, sexuality, ability and all other identities by which [bodies] may be known. (p. 301)

Similarly, I had never examined my childhood nor took into account any masculine hegemonic discourse, including compulsory heterosexuality (Rich, 2003) and the corresponding subjectivities made available for women (me) to take up. I assumed that people got married because they wanted to, because this was a good and important rite of passage to being a whole person and responsible adult, and that the desire to do so was experienced by men and women, alike. A closer look reveals the ways that dominant masculine hegemonies were taken up in my formation as a subject and were incorporated into my practices of self.

**Violence Against Women**

When I was an infant and my brother was a fetus, we had a couple of stays in family violence shelters. Shortly after I turned two, Mom initiated the long process of getting a divorce from my biological Father. My brother and I were not aware of my Mom’s reasons for divorcing my Dad. I remember pining and struggling for my Father’s
love and affection, believing that some day he would love me enough to stop drinking and would show up in my life in the way he always promised - in the way other girls’ Dads showed up and in the way Dads existed in stories and on television. I believed that being a good person and working hard would eventually earn me his love and without his love and the eventual love of a husband, I was worth less.

I saw myself as a tragic figure, abandoned at an early age by the man who should have stood by me throughout my life. Since he left, I unconsciously believed every other man would leave too. Intellectually, I knew my fear of abandonment was ridiculous - all men are not my father. But on a deeper emotional level, I was convinced that I would always be alone. (Jago, 1996, p. 514)

While many of the girls reported that boys viewed girls in predominantly negative (i.e., disrespectful, exploitative) and sexual ways, it was also made clear to us that any attention from boys or men – however disrespectful or controlling or potentially dangerous – was better than no attention at all. (Tolman et al., 2003, p. 170)

At the age of 27, while I was coordinating a family violence program in a small community in the territory of Nunavut, I shared some of my work experiences with my Mom. In return, for the first time in my life, she shared my early experiences of violence against women with me. This new information shifted my perspectives substantially. I could now see my father’s many years of absence and neglect, his alcoholism and abuse, and a love that was entirely conditional (on how good I made him feel). His choices and mistakes were not and had never been a reflection of my worth.

I began to erect stronger personal (physical, emotional, psychological) boundaries between my biological father and me. Likely aware that something had shifted and he

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37 This is the fallacy of discourses of meritocracy; people earn their way in life and success and validation are afforded to those who have earned the merit. Those without merit simply need to work harder.
was losing his grasp on “his daughter,” he lashed out in a number of ways, including acts designed to publicly deface and humiliate me through social media. My boundaries grew stronger, thicker, and higher; today, my biological father no longer has a welcome place in my life. I often wonder how I might have become a different subject if less importance had been placed on this relationship.

The Hetero-Paradox

My Mom had significant romantic and monogamous heterosexual relationships with three other men (Robert, Henry, and Ray) during my first ten years of life. I came to understand that women required these relationships with men and that they were an important part of what womanhood was. I watched Mom struggle with the negative opinions of others, including her family of origin. This, combined with what I saw happening in other families, communicated the social expectation that while finding and keeping a husband was important, exploring too many options was socially unacceptable; a proper woman is selected by a single man to whom she stays married to, “for better or for worse.”

Mom remarried when I was nine; I was the maid of honour in our wedding. Ray married our whole family; he gained a wife, three children, and Robert (my surrogate Dad, my little brother’s biological Dad, and my Mom’s best friend). Mom, Ray, and Robert were a three-person-parenting team for Kory, Brendan, and me. This, combined with exposure to Disney films as well as other media (music) communicated to me that

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38 The paradox, that women were damned if they did and damned if they didn’t, was not apparent to me, as a child. Like most children, I soaked up the “rules” of my environment like a sponge and unquestioningly/happily performed conformity.
women’s lives have “happy endings;” that with time, effort, and hard work, we eventually earn the ultimate reward of being a bride, wife, and mother and that this position is worth aspiring to and admiring/celebrating in other women. It is a milestone with no equal; no other celebrations (graduations for example) are as important as weddings. I did not fully consider what this unequal valourization meant for women who never married, women who divorced, or women who were widowed; I expected that I would never be one of “those women” because women would not or could not choose those positions voluntarily. I would work very hard to ensure I was a good wife.

Acknowledging Bisexuality

As a child, I experienced sexual attraction to and involvement with other girls. It did not even occur to me at that time that I might be a lesbian or bisexual. Rather, I accepted these experiences as part of normal sexual development; practice of the skills I would need once I was chosen by a boy.

During my adolescence, I was obsessed (preoccupied; fanatical) with boys, romance, and dating. I managed to maintain a focus on my schooling, something my Mom told me many times was incredibly important – “you won’t even be able to get a good job if you don’t finish school” and “the world is changing and an education is now required.” I filled my options and extra-curricular time with pursuing music; I played the clarinet and French horn in my school band program as well as Calgary’s various marching bands. Boys and dating remained the most pleasant distraction and underlying motivation for success. Although I was overweight (chubby) when I was a teenager, I was not obese (fat). At 16, I was 5’7” and I weighed about 180 lbs. I was incredibly fit; I
marched the entire Stampede Parade route (3-4 hours), no problem.

At 16, I was entirely consumed (taken over) by my first long term, committed, marriage-bound, heterosexual relationship. I totally immersed/enmeshed myself in the relationship, abandoning things I had previously found pleasurable. We did everything together, had joint bank accounts, and put our relationship on a pedestal. He was my best friend and my everything.

I ended that relationship when I was 21; I woke up one day and realized our committed relationship was more like a platonic friendship. We lacked the intimacy and passion that I wanted and thought I needed from a partner. I absolutely refused to “lie in the bed I had made” when I arrogantly came to believe that I could “do better.” The things that I was attracted to initially became irrelevant and unimportant. He hadn’t finished high school, had been fired from numerous jobs, and wasn’t able to provide for me the way I “deserved” (and was entitled) to be provided for. I was nearing completion of my first university degree and merited more. I weighed close to 300 lbs. on the day I moved out of our apartment.

My next two relationships failed miserably. I blamed myself, believing I was or had become deficient; I worried that I had missed my chance at love and happiness by wasting five years of my life with the wrong person. I’d thrown myself desperately into each subsequent relationship, dreaming of the day that I would receive a marriage proposal and get to make plans for my wedding. When these relationships ended, each man did his best to make sure I understood that they had ended the relationships because I was damaged, broken, and otherwise unlovable. I was fat and unattractive; men were
threatened by my education, opinions, and strong uncompromising personality. I no longer deserved my happy ending. I was neither good nor legitimate as a woman. For a time, I believed these things.

Suicidal ideation became regular and prominent in my mind. I often wondered if anyone would notice if I just disappeared – how long would it take before someone would discover my dead body in my apartment? I engaged in many risky behaviors, telling myself that I was already broken and unworthy of “the ultimate happiness” and so why shouldn’t I recklessly experience all of the thrills life has to offer. Eventually, the despair wore off and I regained a desire to live my life, this time on my own terms.

I struggled to constitute myself as liberated woman, an individual independent of romantic relationships with men. In rejecting what I didn’t then understand was compulsory heterosexuality and the positioning of weddings as a necessary rite of passage gendering me as the female/feminine, I fashioned myself publicly as a single, autonomous, self-governing woman, one who did not “need” men in her life, seeking interaction under the premise or justification of merely “wanting” company. I began a process of undoing the male requirement of my female gender and abandoning compulsory heterosexuality.

I lived my mid to late twenties and early thirties with lingering negative and resentful ideas about dating and marriage. I was sure that I wasn’t yet “ready” for a partner and that through furthering myself as an individual, I was preparing to either be content living in the unmarried (single) state forever or to have a strong/healthy long term relationship (not necessarily with a man) that would neither define nor
consume me. I sure as hell was never going to be a man’s bride and the suggestion of engagement from a man would be evidence that he didn’t know me and wasn’t “the one” (compatible) for me. Rejecting the institution of marriage on this basis wasn’t really as simple as I thought.

I very much enjoyed the freedoms of “being” single and I quickly grew frustrated with watching women around me being granted validation and social status through relationships, weddings and marriages that it seemed as a single woman, I would never receive. I had celebrations of my own, of course, graduations from an undergraduate and my first graduate degrees, birthdays, etc. Those celebrations were different, though, less “momentous” and always accompanied by questions about when I would get married or if I had a boyfriend, yet – my education became an irrelevant or “counterfeit” celebration in comparison to the wife and mother roles I would inevitably and eventually ascend to. One of my uncles even asked me once why I was bothering with education when I wouldn’t be able to use it after I had children. “Maybe one day,” I said, and I believed it as I said it because, simultaneously, secretly, and privately, I was still waiting to wear a wedding gown.

In my late twenties, I began to embrace other women as potential partners in life and love – I told no one for fear of being labelled and ostracized as a Lesbian. The heartache when two significant relationships with women ended was substantial – different, yet, akin to the grief and loss experienced with men. I struggled with feelings of betrayal and abandonment, inadequacy and illegitimacy.

Once I acknowledged myself as bisexual and began talking about it with
particular trusted others, I became acutely aware of and subsequently frustrated, angry, and righteously indignant about the pressure to marry a man. Similar to the grey area occupied by those who identify as gender queer or gender fluid (neither male nor female), my “identity” was neither homo nor heterosexual. Marriage to any man would negate or make invisible my desire to continue relationships of intimacy and love with other women. But, gender, sex, and orientation can’t be minimized to two sides of a coin; these binary oppositions are socially constructed – produced by compulsory heterosexuality in the maintenance and service of the heterosexual imaginary and other masculine hegemonies.
CHAPTER FOUR – WEDDING (DE)CONSTRUCTION

My arms are elbow deep in a sink full of soapy water. When I was a teenager, I hated doing dishes, especially by hand. Now, I love how this short task gives me a sense of accomplishment – that I have completed something without spending time spinning my wheels and going nowhere. There was a time, in a past relationship, when I refused to do dishes simply as a means of rejecting the prescription of femininity and performance tied to nothing other than my vagina which didn’t give me any advantages in terms of quality dish doing. I mowed a lot of grass that year. This morning, preparing breakfast and doing the dishes are acts of service to my niece who has other things on her mind. It gives me some time and space to sort out the things on my own mind, as well.

Out the window I see my four raised garden beds, long wooden boxes placed dead center of the backyard. It is late November and although snow has fallen a handful of times, it hasn’t yet remained. The trees are bare and my boxes, like my uterus, are barren. Kali has returned to my office with the thesis text and I am once again alone with my thoughts and memories about my wedding and research.

Compulsory Heterosexuality

Historically, women have been positioned as powerless objects; neither entitled to power nor existing within the discourses of power (Shaw, 2012). Jaclyn Geller (2001) describes the heterosexual wedding as a “primary emblem of female achievement” (p. 2); the principal mechanism through which personal fulfillment, economic solvency, and social prestige are reached (Carter & Duncan, 2016). The wedding ritual as a gate to heteronormativity is thought to be exclusive; it is the most highly valued social
arrangement of bodies and lives (Butler, 2004). The wedding, a celebration of fairy-tale romance, is thought to be universal – this depends on an ideological belief that everyone experiences heterosexuality in the same ways (Ingraham, 2008). As such, it is produced as a milestone or rite of passage that marks a transition from girl to woman (Currie, 1993).

Wendy Shaw (2012) and Valarie Mullholland (2006) both explored and used the discourse of the good woman in their doctoral research. Although good woman discourses are very important to recognize, disrupt, and deconstruct, they don’t capture or describe the feelings of social illegitimacy that I have experienced. I’ve never felt as though I were a bad woman…I’ve felt as though I am an illegitimate human being (to be bad implies visibility; I was invisible, uncounted, unrepresented).

The word legitimacy, for me, is better utilized and implicated in descriptions of compulsory heterosexuality (Rich, 2003). The “legitimate woman,” in this document, refers to the heterosexually married woman as the only subject position made available, preferable, and legitimate, for bodies marked as female and feminine to take up. The wedding ritual and bride subject act as the primary gates (milestone; rite of passage) through which the female/feminine body is legitimated.

**Vignette Three**

*(Scene: The inside of car. Two women, deep in conversation)*

**Amanda:** You won’t accept a scholarship and take a post-secondary course, even if your boss offered to pay for it? Even if it would help you do your job and get more money for doing it? I’d kill to have a boss who wanted or could afford to pay for some of
MY COURSES.

KRISTINE: It would be a waste of time. I already do my job and I’m not interested in getting better at it or getting paid more, because I won’t be there forever.

AMANDA: The courses could help you to get a better job, then!

KRISTINE: I don’t want to be a secretary. That’s not what I want to do with my life.

AMANDA: No? Why are you doing it?

KRISTINE: I have to pay my rent somehow, don’t I? At least until I get married and have kids.

AMANDA: Oh. Right. Because your husband will do all of that and you’ll just stay at home with the kids? (sarcasm in her voice)

KRISTINE: Exactly.

AMANDA: What if one day, you get divorced? Or he’s abusive? Or he dies? What will you do, then? How will you provide for yourself and your children?

KRISTINE: I’m going to marry the right guy and that’s never going to happen.

AMANDA: (rolls eyes) Okay, what if you get bored? I want to have children, too, but I don’t ever want them to be my everything – I always want to have work that lets me do what I love and be myself in addition to being a Mom.

KRISTINE: Not me. I’m not interested in doing anything else.

(END OF SCENE)
The “decision” to reject weddings and marriage didn’t resonate with every part of me – with every self. I understood that getting engaged and being the bride would unlock social advantage and validation (justified existence) that seemed necessary for a good life and I longed for this experience. At the same time, I didn’t want to live my life in this way, being dependent on and defined by a man.

Because of the heterosexual imaginary, weddings are viewed as innocuous, fun-loving, and as signaling membership in dominant culture. As such, they give people significant cultural capital and an advantage in the workplace. Under these conditions, beliefs about weddings work to give one worker and unspoken advantage over the other. Our prejudices regarding people who hold the status of ‘single’ – that is unmarried (by law) – have critical consequences socially and economically. Weddings are anything but benign. (Ingraham, 2008, p. 29).

Proposal and Engagement

I have finished with the dishes and returned to sit with Kali in my office. The book in her lap is open to a page with a photograph of my ring set. I sit quietly, thinking about engagement while Kali silently reads the words on the page.

Research has found that relationships usually progress from initial meetings to casual dating, to cohabitations, to marriage and the transitions and movement from one status to the next is controlled by men (Bogle, 2008; Sassler & Miller, 2011). Recent research utilizing feminist analysis continues to “highlight the lingering male privilege in intimate relationships, both in social expectations and material reality” (Baker & Elizabeth, 2013, p. 32). This requirement of male initiated transitions is perceived as both necessary and romantic; (re) producing traditional gender roles of male dominance and female obedience or subservience in a way that seems pleasurable to the subjects involved in the performance of engagement.
Engagement is thought to be courtly sentiment whereby a man feigns powerlessness – he bows before his future bride and simultaneously lays claim to her (Geller, 2001). Proposing marriage to a woman is the ultimate gesture of “romance.” During my wedding planning, I came across an entire “theme” of engagement announcement materials that utilize the words “the hunt is over.” I saw numerous options and photographs that use the hunting/camouflage motif to announce engagement. In one, a woman was hanging upside down from a tree, confined by ropes, with a man beside her holding a shotgun. Other announcements reversed the genders (tied up the man and gave the woman the gun) and the message attempted to be “hilarious.” This is neither funny nor romantic to me; rather, I think it is evidence of the invisibility of compulsory heterosexuality and the masking (or glorification) of how dangerous this arrangement is for women.

The act of accepting a proposal, being engaged, and becoming “his fiancée” is a performance of power and redemption for women who are not deemed credible until this happens; his proposal makes her legitimate (Geller, 2001). As such, engagements and

Figure 2. Photo of Amanda’s ring set.
Photo credit to Leftboot Photography (2014)
their subsequent announcements romanticize compulsory heteronormativity, masking the regulation of male-female bodies, relationships, and gender performance.

Engagements remain exciting and fun, pleasurable and important to me and to many of the women in my life. Unable to resist, I’ve scrolled through countless engagement photo albums on Facebook – people I know only as acquaintances as well as many of my closer friends. My emotions while looking at these (as well as the later uploaded wedding photos) were usually mixed. I felt happy for my friends in some ways; they were following through on the things they believed would make them happy which I did and do believe is the best anyone can do, in life and of course, “she was a beautiful bride.” I also felt jealous; the happiness I had chosen for myself was not celebrated in the same way. I felt sad; I had somehow failed at life in comparison to their beautiful photographs. I longed to have beautiful photographs of my own. I both did and did not have marriage envy (Leonard, 2006). The contradiction was frustrating and caused turmoil amidst the celebration of many of my friends’ engagement and wedding celebrations. One particular memory comes to my mind…

**Vignette Four**

(Scene: Two women sit on a couch, in a coffee shop)

**Corrine:** He proposed! Isn’t it wonderful? (She extends her right hand, clad with a ridiculously large engagement ring on the third finger)

**Amanda:** (Face expresses shock). Two days ago you were getting ready to break up with him because he wouldn’t commit. I’m confused.
CORRINE: I tried to. I told him that if he didn’t want to get married or buy a house with me that I would find someone else who would. He cried and begged me to stay, and said he’d do better. I couldn’t stand his pathetic whimpering, so I let it go. Then, yesterday morning, he came home from work with my ring! We’re going to look at houses next weekend.

AMANDA: I don’t know what to say. Congratulations, I guess?

CORRINE: I know. I wish I didn’t have to give him an ultimatum. He wouldn’t have done it if he didn’t want to, though, right?

AMANDA: I don’t know.

CORRINE: I think our relationship is going to get better, now. We’re committed, in the biggest and best way, and that’s a good thing.

AMANDA: If you say so.

(END SCENE)

I was 28 years old when this exchange happened. I remember feeling very angry with and scared for my friend during and shortly after the above conversation. I thought (and would have been “rude” to tell her) that she was making the biggest mistake of her life. Why was “getting married” so important to her? Why would she attempt to push her male partner into an out-dated ritual that he didn’t freely and willingly want to be part of? Why was it imperative for him to propose? Why didn’t she propose to him, herself?

“What do you remember about your engagement, Auntie?” Kali’s question brings me back to the present moment.
I am quite happy to tell you that my self-engagement was entirely uneventful. Once I received a pass on my comprehensive exams and was conferred into the category “doctoral candidate,” I began looking at rings sets on Etsy and eBay. I had never been a ring person (I preferred necklaces and earrings), so I contemplated not having rings at all (this was hardly an act of rebellion). Wanting to get as close as I could to a traditional wedding experience, I purchased an inexpensive sterling silver set with black and white stones.

After purchasing my ring set, I made arrangement with a colleague who practices photography, to take engagement photos. He was enthusiastic about my project (being an unmarried individual, himself) and agreed that we should wait for my rings before nailing down a date for the photo shoot.

Putting the engagement ring on my own finger for the first time was the only sort of “engagement” I really had. It happened while I was alone, in the privacy of my car, immediately after I retrieved the box from the post office. I’d grown more excited about wearing the rings during the time I spent waiting for their arrival. Later that night, while reading books about wedding planning in the comfort of my bathtub, I put both rings on, took a photo with my cell phone, and sent them to my wedding party and a couple close friends. It was a sign that we were really going to do this – we were really going to proceed with my feminist self-wedding: I was engaged to my self. The responses I got were encouraging. People said that the ring set was beautiful and that it suited me. A few said that they were excited for the wedding and asked how they could be helpful through my planning process.
For months, each time I looked at my ring, warmth radiated inside me. The ring reminded me of my insurgence against what was expected of me as a woman. It stood, for me, as a tangible symbol that my “failure to conform” was my choice to rebel and that it was an incredibly wonderful decision. Looking at my ring today, I feel the same.

Kali reaches across the space between us and grabs my left hand. She looks at the sterling silver ring set. It has lost its shine with time and some of the stones are missing from their settings. They remain on my finger and I have chosen not to have them repaired to remind myself that aging and change (what some might interpret as deterioration) is the blessing of a long and lived life. Things don’t always remain as bright and shiny (or young and able) as they once were and that is another kind of beauty.

After a quick look at my feminist self-wedding ring set Kali’s gaze and touch shifts to a tiny silver band, also faded and worn, that I wear on my right pinkie finger.

“What’s this one?” she asks.

“That’s the commitment ring Gary gave me after I moved out here to live with him.”

“It is very small.”

“Yes. It is.” The smile extends from my mouth and right out the window. “It was meant to symbolize that our relationship, although good and strong and wonderful, is just one very small part of who either of us are.”

“Interesting.” She smiles and returns once again to the book.
I pull a binder full of mandalas off of my shelf, open my case of art supplies, and begin to color as we sit silently together. I continue my journey of remembering while I fill the black and white page with affect and expression.

**The Wedding Ritual**

One can consider the process of the wedding, that is, the ‘making’ of the bride, as a disciplinary practice that creates ideal feminine beauty. The special attention given to the application of makeup on the female face further emphasizes the unpainted female face as ‘defective’ and in need of correction. (Engstrom, 2008, p. 70)

In the examination of any ritual, performance, or text, Butler & Athanasiou (2013) encourage us to ask the following questions: (a) what is made visible, or apparently transparent, who can appear? (b) Whose space is this? And (c) what is performed (p. 195-197)? O’Grady (2005) encourages us to ask similar questions:

[Ask] who is authorized to speak, what are the circumstances in which they can speak, which ways of speaking are recognized and which disqualified, whose voice is privileged, what are the effects of this privileging, and so forth (p. 106).

Looking at the wedding itself as a performance allows for a unique understanding of the ritual as text… Therefore, elements of style, femininity, personal expressiveness, convention and conflict all contribute various readings towards an understanding of this performative text. The wedding ceremony is a living, breathing, changing thing that can be read differently with each individual situation. (Walsh, 2005, p. 240)

The wedding ceremony is an unparalleled example of the heterosexual organization of bodies (Ingraham, 2008); they are heteronormative performances. Masculine hegemony is produced and elaborated every time the wedding is invoked/anticipated (Butler & Athanasiou, 2013). “Gender is ‘done’ in weddings via the performance of rituals that convey messages about what it means to be a man or a woman, and the relationships among men and women” (Fairchild, 2014, p. 382).
Weddings are traditionally male initiated and performed, marked by and productive of masculine hegemony and symbolic of the kinship system on which our society remains based; marriage\(^{39}\) is central to this kinship system (Rubin, 1975; Rubin & Butler, 1994). The wedding is a celebration of family formation based on and outdated heterosexual model of patriarchy; “weddings reinforce traditional, unequal assumptions about gender” (Fairchild, 2014, p. 365).

The female/feminine body is the “centre of the show;” yet, she is positioned as powerless in performances that are supposed to be hers. She is a visible object of beauty, signifying the female/feminine. She cannot stand on her own and is dependant on the assistance of her father and then her new husband; she may not speak unless spoken to. The tradition of female obedience to men is nowhere more obvious than in traditional wedding vows in which a woman unquestioningly pledges to “love, honour, and obey” her husband.

Erika Engstrom (2008) views weddings and masculine hegemony as aimed directly at unmarried woman to reproduce the requirements of femininity; weddings demonstrate the creation of the “woman.” Citing research by Currie (1993), Lowry and Otnes (1994), and Smith (1997), Humble, Zvonkovic, and Walker (2008) wrote:

Research on heterosexual wedding experiences has focused on gendered individual outcomes, demonstrating that women do more wedding work than men do, that women and men engage in different types of wedding work, and that women and men are expected to have different emotions prior to weddings. (p. 5).

\(^{39}\) “We can’t talk about weddings without talking about marriage. Given that weddings and marriage have been historically central to the institutionalization of heterosexuality, to overlook the significance of that institution to these practices is to miss the point entirely” (Ingraham, 2008, p. 5).
Through her content analysis of popular wedding television shows, Engstrom (2008) observed two major themes pertinent to the endorsement and reinforcement of femininity performed by the bride. First, the bride was merely a physical object; this was evidenced by obsessive focus on her dress and the attention given to her physical appearance and preparation. “[T]he reward for adhering to a hegemony of femininity is a temporary status of being a celebrity” (Engstrom, 2008, p. 68). Second, and paradoxically, the bride is positioned as the manager – controlling and overseeing all of the details of wedding planning and execution; she creates a wedding consistent with her own ideal of perfection.

Regarding the wedding, Engstrom (2008) found two themes consistently used to characterize the wedding day. First was the idea that both minor and major problems are normal and always resolved – the result of which is a “perfect” wedding. Second, Engstrom observed that the wedding is a social event – an excuse for consumerism that is much more significant than the celebration of relationship, which seems to be a mask for the maintenance of the white, capitalist, heterosexist status quo.

The subtle, and not so subtle, messages that associate happiness with consumption and perfection with femininity… the resulting cultural work points to an image of the successful woman as fulfilling the role of the beautiful consumer. (Engstrom, 2008, p. 79)

Men escort women who appear as too fragile to escort themselves. Women remain all but silent speaking only when spoken to; she invokes the traditions that came before her (white dress, veil, particular utterances, etc.). Completely unspoken of but seen almost every time is the transfer of title, the deed to the woman, from father to husband – weddings are a financial transaction from man to man and the bride subject is consigned
and continues to consign her self as object in the transaction. These performances have been framed and analyzed “within social construction of reality, and men’s continued greater access to power, positions of authority and material resources” (Baker & Elizabeth, 2013, pp. 32–33).

Despite the manifestation of weddings in numerous, often individualized ways, weddings maintain a degree of consistency and conformity to the traditional/white/lavish wedding, across variations (Bambacas, 2002).

While many embark on an individualized search for distinctiveness, most weddings remain structured around a given set and timing of ‘traditional practices, and so end up looking remarkably similar. These normally include some or all of the following: walking down an aisle, wearing a bridal gown, attendants in matching finery, giving wedding rings, exchanging vows, a wedding kiss, cutting a magnificent cake, flowers in abundance, and a reception with set speeches from given players – the groom, bride’s father and best man. Such traditions are rarely enforced…rather they are chosen. (Carter & Duncan, 2016, p. 3)

Many couples choose to perform the wedding without explicit reference (and ignoring the unavoidable implicit reference) to the initial patriarchal domination of the tradition. The erosion of older forms of patriarchy has given way to “normative femininity” – the invisibility of female personhood through the privileging and centring of the bride’s appearance (Bartky, 1988).

Weddings are a single day event that takes months of planning prior to execution. That it is all gone in a single day resembles the fleeting or ephemeral positioning of women’s work, more generally. Like domestic tasks, wedding preparations are mundane and repetitive; relegating women to the domestic sphere (Engstrom, 2008). The wedding is “a disciplinary power that inscribes femininity in the female body” (Bartky, 1988, p. 74). Christyana Bambacas (2002) points out that regardless of when or how the wedding
tradition appeared and how it is executed, the wedding ritual positions the bride in relationship to embodiment, sex, marriage and motherhood. Further, we consent to the reproduction of masculine and heterosexual hegemonies, taking ourselves up as female/feminine bride subjects.

Hegemony exists not by state-imposed force but by consent, women who wish to marry correctly, then, adhere to the rules… Fear of deviating from the correct wedding script thus leads to what Landy (1944) termed a ‘convenience of conformity,’ wherein brides follow the rules set by the experts… [re-establishing] the big intricately planned wedding as the ideal and the image of the beautiful and beautifully dressed bride as the pinnacle of femininity. (Engstrom, 2008, p. 78).

Gender display and compulsory heterosexuality do not originate in the wedding ritual. Rather, the ritual functions as a vessel, or lightening rod that illuminates the display of heterosexual ideology (Humble et al., 2008). When heterosexual conventions within the wedding remain unchallenged, the pervasive institution of heterosexuality is reinforced and consistently reflects dominant and shared assumptions about what the wedding is (Fairchild, 2014).

Nearly a year after my feminist self-wedding, Julia Carter and Simon Duncan (2016) published the results of qualitative interviews exploring wedding discourses. They cite four: (a) the couple project, (b) relationality, (c) re-traditionalization, and (d) romanticized consumption. The couple project refers to the privileging of the couple relationship above individual interests as a means of fulfillment. Relationality refers to the centrality of input from family and friends in terms of wedding plans and participation. “De-traditionalization involves re-traditionalization, as ‘tradition’ becomes both re-invented and freely chose. This is what we call ‘individualized conformity’” (Carter & Duncan, 2016, p. 17). Lastly, Carter and Duncan found that while weddings
utilized a considerable percentage of couples’ disposable income, “the influence of the industry does not seem as commanding as claimed by earlier research” (p. 17). Each of these discourses re-produce compulsory heterosexuality and other masculine hegemonies. In 2016, despite many official stories that non-hetero lives, relationships, and weddings are equally valid, compulsory heterosexuality remains especially relevant.

**Memory Box: Specific Archaeological Texts**

When I lift my head from my artwork, my eyes are drawn to a box at the far right of the bookshelf, hidden behind the rows of literature. My head tilts to the right as I consider this object. It is black with white polka dots - a shiny cardboard gift box, with a lid; I got it from the dollar store fifteen years ago with the intention of using it to wrap a Christmas gift. Instead…I used it for...

“Whoa,” I say out loud…remembering what I put in the box.

I pull Michel Foucault and Judith Butler off of the shelf and set them in piles on the desk. I stretch up and onto my toes to reach the back of the shelf. My fingers touch the sides of the box, pulling it slowly and gently towards the front of the shelf and down into my arms. I wave my hand in front of my face to protect my lungs from the dust I have unsettled. I sit on my office chair, facing Kali, with the box balancing on my knees.

“What’s that?” Kali asks, looking up.

“If my memory is any good, this is one of the boxes that I put wedding stuff in. Like the bound copy of my thesis, this box hasn’t been opened in more than a decade.”

She stares at me, excitement showing on her face. “So, it’s kind of like a time capsule?” There is a sense of adventure in her voice. There is always a sense of adventure
in her voice; she probably got that from her dad. Adventure makes me anxious. At least, 
this one does.

I use the dishtowel that I had draped over my shoulder and wipe the dust off of 
the outside of the box. I remove the polka dotted lid. There is no dust inside. The stack of 
objects and papers looks just how it did in 2015. The box has done its job of preserving 
the items and protecting them from age and time.

**Wedding Invitations, Seeking Social Recognition**

On the top of the pile, face up, is a copy of my wedding invitation. I wipe my 
hands on my pants and take the first thick piece of paper out of the box, turning it over. 
The invitation is both classic and modern. There is a picture of me; I’m wearing a black 
and white dress leaning with one arm up against a wall in what appears University or 
school hallway. All of the words on the front page are white, set against the darker 
background of the image I selected from my engagement photos. Across my upper thighs 
is the word “love” written in artistic cursive. Bold text announces:

**Amanda Lyn Baldwin**

**Feminist Wedding**

**May 2, 2015**

At the bottom of the page are the words:

...for the love of the self...

The back of the page, on faded sheet music that I chose for a background, in black 
text, is the following information:

with the loving support of her parents, 
Cheryl Payne, Raymond Payne, and Robert Dufour,
And her life partner, Gary Block

Amanda Lyn Baldwin

Requests the honour of your presence on the day of her

Wedding

Ceremony will begin at approximately 3pm,
At the Heritage Ballroom, Travelodge Hotel,
Strathmore, Alberta
Cocktails, Dinner, and Dancing to follow

Figure 3. Photo of front of invitation
Figure 4. Photo of back of invitation

The bottom of the page gives the information required to RSVP and where guests can find up to date information regarding event times, venues, registries, accommodations, pictures, etc. Like most brides, I tried to announce my wedding with “a tone of social victory that [anticipated] the regal production of [my] wedding procession in which [I would appear] at centre stage, bathed in ethereal light” (Geller, 2001, p. 122). I requested
the honour of each guest’s presence… “as if we were distant acquaintances or members
of the aristocracy” (Geller, 2001, p. 131).

Kali’s curiosity is bubbling over; her demeanour reminds me of her typical,
uncontrolled, contagious excitement on many Christmas mornings.

“What is it, Auntie? Can I see?”

“Are your hands clean? I don’t think I have extra copies of these….”

She exits the office, for
the bathroom. I hear the tap
running as I flip through the
papers at the top of the pile.

The front of a “Save the
Date” magnet boasts an image and
aesthetic style that complements
the invitations. I wear the same
dress and am sitting on a chaise lounge. The words “Save the Date” extend across my
body, from elbow to knee, in the same white, artistic cursive. The magnet contains the
date and location of Amanda’s Feminist Wedding, in addition to an email address where
guests can RSVP, or get additional information.

The third artefact is an information card, intended to give a little bit of
information to those who may not have talked to me previously about my wedding. The
front of the card, in black and white, boasts additional pictures from the engagement
collection: (a) me, outside in the snow; (b) my hands, adorning with the ring set I
purchased for myself; and (c) Tux and I, cuddling in the cold. The card asks: “why a ‘Feminist’ wedding?” and at the bottom explains, “you do not have to agree or understand in order to attend. Guests only require an ‘open mind’ and ‘loving heart.’”

The text on the back of the card reads:

_This is a very personal and very public (academic and activist) event. My wedding has always been my dream. The fantasized execution has changed..._

_Weddings, in this society at this time, are experienced/understood by many women as a rite of passage and a ritual for accessing recognizability and intelligibility as a woman. Many place the importance of weddings above that of self-knowledge and self-care, which can/often undermines our personal health and wellness._

_This wedding will unequivocally foreground self-love and self-care. It will explore my SELF, not as a narcissistic vessel of self-importance, rather, as constructed by and embedded in the inescapable WE._

_This wedding will challenge the dominance of heterosexuality and further, narratives that the female/feminine is not understandable as legitimate until/unless she is validated by a man through the wedding ceremony. We will explore/disrupt/queer the gender binary (the idea that bodies are marked as either male or female and always in opposition and attracted to one another) and celebrate a diversity of non-heterosexual_
lifestyles (LGBTQ, Asexuality, Poly, and Single lives, among more).

I am reconstructing the wedding ritual so it fits for me and creating space for it to be understood or considered differently/fluidly. I hope that you are willing and able to join me, friends, and family, to celebrate.

Analysis of the Invitations

Wedding invitations announce the standards of companionate marriage: romantic love and the primacy of biological family. Traditional invitations advertise uniformity within an age of individualism; they declare the permanence of marriage at a time when divorce rates are high; they sanction heterosexuality at a time of gay liberation. Wedding invitations (the entire wedding ritual, really) are wrought with contradiction.

While creating my wedding invitations, I intended to make clear my refusal to uphold the traditions of compulsory heterosexuality of preceding generations. When referring to my parents and my partner, I use the word support to take my own agency; to
establish one bride as the protagonist of the wedding story, relegating all others (including the life partner that many assume to be exalted) to supporting roles as interlocutors. By including my biological mother, my step-dad, and my third dad I demonstrated that I am embedded in a relational system that already resists “tradition” - a life partner who is not and will not be the groom and a three person parenting team of whom I was related biologically only to my mother.

What’s Wrong with “Normal?”

Kali returns, showing me clean dry hands. I offer her the three artefacts I had been looking at. She handles each item as if it is fragile, taking seriously my comment about not having copies. I watch her face as she explores and reads the package of literature that comprised my wedding invitations.

“What do you think,” I ask.

“Well, I like the pictures of you. And, I think it was really important to explain things for people. But…they don’t look anything like other wedding invitations I’ve seen. When Miranda and Mackenzie, or Fayt got married, their invitations were very girly. They used lace and burlap and different craft materials to personalize their invitations. Of course, they didn’t use the word feminist or have to explain what they were doing, because everyone just understood, I guess.”

I wasn’t going to send invitations, initially. I was going to send a magnet as a save the date, requesting an email address to which further information could be sent. As I browsed the many wedding related pages on the internet, I quickly and easily started to feel that my event would look insignificant in comparison to the hand crafted and
individualized materials that other brides sent out. I picked an invitation that matched the
save the dates that I had ordered weeks before. And then I picked an information card to
go with it. And matching labels and stickers for the envelopes.

I reply to Kali: “that’s what I’d call the ‘taken-for-granted’ part of compulsory
heterosexuality and traditional weddings – no one ‘needs’ to explain it - there is no room
to question it, because it is…”

I pause… to see if she’ll fill in the silence with her own thoughts…

When she doesn’t, I raise my hands into the air and give her air quotations whilst
saying, “normal.” I smile, facetiously.

I continue, “weddings are thought to be ‘normal,’ without considering their
regulating functions.”

“What’s wrong with normal?” she asks, unaware that I have an entire arsenal of
reasons that the dominance of hetero-weddings in the formation of the female/feminine
subject is dangerous… unhealthy.

“Well,” I reply, “What is thought to be ‘normal’ still very much informs how we
perform gender. As you’ve likely learned in your studies, we are socialized as male or
female and this informs the things we do or do not do as well as our enjoyment, or lack
of, for many activities, including weddings.”

“In what ways are weddings bad for women?”

Pleasure/Power

Women come to seek and rely on satisfaction through “constantly deferring to
men and to men’s definitions of what they should be” (Weedon, 1987, p. 40). Pleasure
and power reinforce one another (Foucault, 1978) and sexuality (a performance of gender) becomes a problem of the subject; the truth of selves perceived by women being always dependent on and vulnerable to the desires and power of men.

That law is not literally internalized, but incorporated, with the consequence that bodies are produced which signify that law on and through the body, there the law is manifest as the essence of their selves, the meaning of their soul, their conscience, the law of their desire (Foucault quoted in Butler, 1990, p. 183).

The claims of the law are used to frame political strategy, for example, the push for the legalization of same-sex marriage (Nicol & Smith, 2008) which resists heteronormativity and activates or produces discourses of equality. The law (derived from dominant discourses and idealization) and the performances and practices it prescribes, are often uncritically incorporated in self and the formation of the subject.

If I am always constituted by norms that are not of my making, then I have to understand the ways that constitution takes place. The staging and structuring of affect and desire is clearly one way that norms work their way into what feels most properly to belong to me. (Butler, 2004, p. 15)

Weddings are produced as one of very few spaces in which women can exercise power and/or achieve social validation, legitimation, and recognition. Masculine hegemonies are (re)produced in this space rendering female and feminine bodies as secondary to those of men (Rich, 2003). It is via the social instrument/institution that women become tied to (‘pleased by’) heterosexual monogamy, marriage, and weddings; this constitutes the sexuality of the woman in a masochistic way limiting her to only ever being the object by which male desire is satisfied (Weedon, 1987). Weddings thus function as masculine hegemonic heteronormative space and are embraced too often by bodies seeking to experiences the greatest pleasures in life; weddings simultaneously empower (temporarily) and disempower women. Davies (2003) sums this up:
The romantic mythology of princes and princesses…is a potent force in the construction of feminine patterns of power and desire. It provides an imaginative vehicle through which a girl can become someone, if only briefly, who is eventually given a place where she belongs, safe from the fearful things that happen to a woman who has no place. I have shown some of the characteristics of girls’ experience that allows the romantic myth to go on being so powerful, despite their occasional experiences of power and of agency. These included the development of a sense of self as object rather than active subject, and the fragility and inhibited intentionality that go with that, combined with the fearful results that can follow the positioning of oneself as powerful, as a potential actor in the male domain. Girls will need more than new discursive practices to break this pattern. They will need to learn to want to use their bodies powerfully in self-defence, and they will need to develop a new set of metaphors that undo the potency of romantic love and replace it with something equally viable and rewarding, if not necessarily ‘safe’ (p. 90).

Many of us live much of our daily encounters with people and things in total oblivion of their historical dimensions (Conle, 1999, p. 17).

“I hadn’t thought of it, that way before.” Kali says. “If weddings have such dangerous consequences or possibilities… I don’t understand why people still have them? Women especially! We fought so hard for our liberation, why do we keep using it to hurt ourselves?”

Weddings are sentimental; they make us feel good. Chrys Ingraham (2008) conflates the romance of weddings with the heterosexual imaginary; we imagine the completion of our selves is accomplished through the ritual. Weddings are emotion-focused experiences, invoking warm, fuzzy and pleasurable feelings for most people involved.

Derrida (1972), writing about language and productivity, describes power as always derivative and not a function of original will. That is, will or desire does not originate with a single individual subject but rather is incorporated into practices of self
from the larger discourses (embedded socially and historically). So, wedding rituals and the desire or pleasure produced by them (elicited with them) are derived from discourse.

Desire is the desire to be recognized by another desire, by the desire of another who limits the subject's claim on autonomy or who, at least, stands for the requirement that the subject become alienated from itself in order to be recognized (Butler, 1987, p. 5).

Weddings are imagined to be a great (un)equalizer among female and feminine bodies; a ritual around which women dream/fantasize and bond with other women. This new bond is built on an assumed mutual experience of social completion.

In the case of heterosexuality, social affirmation is so ingrained in the fabric of everyday existence that it can appear invisible to those being affirmed. To those whose sexuality it silences, however, it is highly visible (O’Grady, 2005, p. 19).

I experienced a new kind of bonding I hadn’t had previously while talking to women about my wedding: hairdressers, nail technologists, vendors, clothing retailers, strangers in my life and many others were very keen to talk about my wedding and weddings more generally. People were “dazzled” (Geller, 2001) by the “fact” that I would be a bride in a wedding and they wanted to know all of the details. Everyone - those to whom I had passed as heterosexual (allowed them to assume I’d be marrying a man) as well as those who knew my disruptive act of marrying myself - had the same and similar comments to the effect of “congratulations!” Weddings are a goal or milestone to inevitably be attained by women, a necessity to moving forward and having a family, a pathway to success, status, popularity, attention and validation as well as supposed safety and security.
In order to understand why women so willingly take on the role of wife and mother, we need a theory of the relationship between subjectivity and meaning, meaning and social value, the range of possible normal subject positions open to women, and the power and powerlessness invested in them… the positions of wife and mother, though subject to male control, also offer forms of power – the power to socialize children, to run the house and to be the power behind the throne (Weedon, 1987, p. 19).

Politics and the biopolitical are at the heart of fantasy and desire (Butler & Athanasiou, 2013). Desire is compelled by the power exercised through occupying various social/political categories. We have urges/desires to embody the ideal even though this is paradoxical and impossible because desire is not ours/mine, exclusively – it is produced in discourses (Butler & Athanasiou, 2013).

To answer the question “why do we still have weddings” or “why do we enjoy weddings, I like Jaclyn Geller’s (2001) perspective: “perhaps an institution so drenched in sexist cruelty demands the support of a strong sentimentalizing ideology” (p. 31).

It is odd, that in an individualistic society with a high divorce rate offering evidence that the wedding ritual is not a representation or guarantee of a happy or healthy life or relationship, that weddings have not been abandoned entirely as an outdated and somewhat meaningless tradition. “The growth of the (reflexive) individual has not necessarily signalled the demise of romantic love, intimate companionship or, indeed, the family” (Boden, 2003, p. 17). Both Sharon Boden (2003) and Andrew Cherlin (2009) point to kinship relationships as required by the individual; the increase in individuality requires an increase in conformity to the taking of a “significant other.” It seems that the production of an individual (man) requires the production of (his) mate.

Digging Deeper

“You’re getting all academic, Auntie. Can we get back to what’s in the box?”
I dig deep. As deep as one can, in a box that is twelve inches high. I pull out a couple of masquerade masks, some more wedding literature, and a cake topper and place them on the desk beside me.

“What’s all this, Auntie?”

“Most of it speaks for itself, I think, kiddo. You have a look and I’ll be right back, I’ve got to go to the bathroom.” I set the box on the desk and leave the room.

**Heterosexual Masquerade**

When I return, Kali has the black masquerade mask up to her eyes and is trying to tie the ribbon tight enough to keep it in place.

“These are very pretty choices, Auntie. I bet your wedding was very classy, sophisticated, and elegant, just like you.” Yes, there are times that I perform femininity quite well.

I turn a bright shade of red, as she knew I would. “Thanks, kiddo.”

The choice of masks and a masquerade reception was neither trendy nor accidental. I made this choice for a few reasons. First, to initiate an activity whereby my wedding guests were to practice their selves in some way. The choosing of colours and embellishments followed by affixing them to one another gave guests the opportunity to show/tell a bit about who they believe they are.

Second, the mask is symbolic of my understanding of the poststructural conception of a self. Just as our faces are hidden beneath the masks we wear, so too are our “true selves” our authentic identities, or our souls (if they even exist), inaccessible to our consciousness.
Third, the mask symbolically speaks to the selves we know as dispossessed. I cannot lay claim or ownership to a self that is purely mine; selves are always constructed by/within social fields (Butler & Athanasiou, 2013). Guests could create masks, but only inasmuch as the supplies were made available by the event organizers; the masks were all of the same shape and material, restricting (and enabling) creativity. It was very interesting to me that Kali (who was four years old, recall, and not steeped for nearly as long in the practice of mask making) used the glue gun and sparkles from the craft table to decorate her arms and dress.

Fourth, masquerade balls are events typically housed/hosted by the upper classes. Masks speak to capitalism and our culture of property and ownership; the masks we wear (our clothing, etc.) claim to display our value or worth. Human bodies are materialized and dematerialized through histories of slavery, colonization, apartheid, gender/sexual normativity, etc. (Butler & Athanasiou, 2013). Identities are governed and understood by self and others as if they were tangible objects, such as masks. How we can practice the self is tied to our positions in the economy – an effect and creation of a culture of property and ownership. “The normativity of the economic in its neoliberal guise is inevitably and fundamentally linked to the reproduction of gender, sexual, kinship, desire, and biopolitical normativity”
It provokes the question: how does the mask I wear represent my value or worth? In the same way that we must ask: how do the finances associated with funding a wedding become a representation of worth?

Fifth, the decision to constitute the reception as a masquerade was a play at how various narratives and truth claims conceal the impossibility of their authority. Distinct configurations masquerade as the only serious/robust arena for understanding.

Finally, on my wedding day, I wore the mask of the bride. I knew, somewhere in my body, that I was not a legitimate bride – without a groom, I couldn’t be. The bride, a signifier of legitimate female and feminine gender, will only ever be a mask, donned temporarily.

**Becoming the Bride**

Culture installs meaning in our lives from the very first moment we enter the social world. All aspects of our social world – natural or otherwise – are given meaning. Our sexual orientation or sexual identity – or even the notion that there is such a thing – is defined by the symbolic order of that world through the use of verbal as well as non-verbal language and images. (Ingraham, 2008, p. 25)

“There’s something I don’t understand about this glass heart thing. It has a different date than your wedding was.”

“That was my cake topper.” I smile at Kali as I remember that the cake was absolutely terrible – the baker used liquorice-flavoured fondant on top of a black forest cake…. I laugh at the memory and crinkle my face in disgust. I remember throwing the whole bottom layer of the cake into the garbage the next day.

“What about the date, though? Isn’t this your birth date?”

“Yes. That’s my date of birth on there. That was the day I started becoming a bride.”
My first doll was a baby that nursed a bottle
  It peed in its panties.
  It was a gift from Grandmother.
  I set the dolls
  and stuffed animals up in chairs
  Around the table
  We will have some tea.
  “The boy bear asks Suzie
  if she wants to get married”
  “Give her the ring, bear”
She moves the objects around the table,
  ideas coming to life before my eyes.
  “Now kiss the bride!”
She is giddy with excitement.
The dress she wears is pretty,
  white and lace.
  What beautiful flowers.
  “Now we all live happily ever after!!”

“Oh. I see,” She says.

Does she? Can she? Does she feel the same way? Perhaps she needs to sit with all
this stuff for a while longer? It is an abstract idea to grasp…unlike stage theories for
development that set out what happens when and in what chronological order. Maybe
she’s dismissing the idea…

“Is there anything left in the box?” She asks.

“Yes, there’s a thumb drive. I can’t remember what’s on it.” I tell her.

“Let’s plug it in and find out!” Another adventure; such excitement! I wish I were
as excited as Kali is about this…why aren’t I?

I open the lid of my laptop and the screen comes to life. After entering my
password, I navigate to the disk image created when I plugged the drive into the USB
port. It is...a half a dozen video clips. Oh no...

“I think these are the videos that my friends Kevin and Brian made of the ceremony and reception.”

I don’t want to watch them. Why do I feel reluctant? It’s not like I don’t know what’s in these videos, or as if anything on them could hurt Kali. Or me.

I take a deep breath. I feel as if I am about to get out of the car to go on a first date... or like I’m pausing for a moment before meeting up with a friend I haven’t seen in a really long time – I AM about to see a friend (myself) I haven’t seen... in fifteen years. Anxiety? Now? Really? COME ON! This is YOU in the videos. This is YOUR wedding – the “best day of your life.”

I am not that girl anymore.
I have moved on. I had to...I chose to...
A childish obsession with weddings...
A lavish and expensive event...to prove, what?
Look at me now.
What a waste of money, time, and energy.
Offended by the world outside my door,
Uncomfortable and critical of the comforts others indulge.
The chocolate cake tastes like black liquorice.
I hate liquorice.

What if I don’t feel happy watching them? I want those memories to stay happy... blindly, naively, delusional-ly, happy. I don’t want to risk tainting them, or changing them. I want to preserve them... preserve that self... I was a single woman who married herself...who was happy...who did not need a man to complete her...I want to preserve that the same way that the box preserved my artefacts.

But, it’s too late to object. The first video has started to play automatically and I cannot bring myself to stop it or even suggest that and risk disappointing Kali. That
smile…her smile…my smile. C’mon, it can’t be that bad. I am instantly dazed with a sense that my life is cracking open; my comfortable and coherent sense of self is shattering into a million pieces.
CHAPTER FIVE - PERFORMANCE

The Ceremony

The video begins and we see a large ballroom. On the far wall, a sound and light system are set up and there is a man and a woman talking quietly to one another. We hear classical music, featuring a clarinet, playing various songs. The ceiling boasts large crystal chandeliers, glowing brightly amongst many other smaller lights. Near the back, large circular tables draped in white table clothes, set with wine glasses and flowers have been pushed to the sides of the room, six on each side, creating a large space, an aisle, in between. Metal chairs with green fabric cushioning are arranged facing the camera, separated and continuing the aisle.

“I’m glad we’re watching these videos, kiddo. I had forgotten how much I love the sounds of clarinet music. I haven’t listened to any in quite a while.”

“Sometimes I wish I had taken band or music classes…Dad was always about sports sports sports, though. I wanted to make him happy.”

“Your father would have been just as happy if you’d have chosen music.”

On the screen, people are slowly trickling into the room and sitting in the chairs, talking to those around them. A short woman is moving around the room, with a large camera, taking pictures of various things and people. A man with long black hair tied back in a low ponytail and a woman with light red hair and glasses stand near the camera, cloaked in long silver capes. They talk casually to one another and to others.

“It’s funny that Ken has always looked like Jesus, isn’t it?”

“Yes, especially since he’s an atheist and anti-theist.”
“Who is the lady in the grey cape?”

“That’s Tina. She was a co-worker back in my shelter days. My supervisor, actually, although our relationship was always more collegial. She remains a close friend.”

“She and Ken are in a relationship, aren’t they?”

“They are now, yes. They didn’t know each other back then; they met only a couple days before the wedding when the three of us got together to talk about how the ceremony might go. They officiated the ceremony, for me.”

“Why did you choose them to officiate your wedding?”

“Well, there weren’t many options for people who were suitable, actually. I had a friend who I kind of dated way back before the wedding was even an idea. We had always talked about how he would officiate and that was the actual plan until about a month before the wedding. When I called him to ask for his measurements (for his cape), he told me that his new wife was uncomfortable with him even coming to my wedding, never mind taking part.”

“Yikes. Insecure, much?”

“Well, I’d lie if I said I wasn’t tempted to characterize her that way, myself, but to be fair, I don’t know the whole story. It was the last time I ever talked to Colin, though. I guess I didn’t understand why he would have to choose a new wife over a long time friend.”

“That’s too bad, Auntie. Entirely his loss.”

“I’d like to think so, but, in reality, it was my loss, too.”
“Oh! Shhhh…. Here comes the wedding party!”

**Procession**

A piano and violin duet starts to play – Pachelbel’s Cannon in D. On screen, the crowd of people, previously talking casually, becomes quiet. The camera shifts focus to the far end of the long ballroom, the set of double doors is open and a group of people can be seen.

As I watch and listen, the music moves me unlike any other. Nothing is even happening, yet, and I am fighting with all I have not to cry. This song is my wedding song; I chose it because it signifies love to me.

On the screen, a young heterosexual couple enters the room through the open door. Both are wearing black suits with bright pink dress shirts, black ties, and white calla lilies pinned to their left lapels. She has long straight brown hair. The male/masculine body takes a large three wick candle off of a table beside the door, holds it in his right arm and with the female/feminine’s arm linked through his left, they walk down the aisle toward the camera.

“That’s Uncle Brendan and Aunt Janelle!” Kali squeals.

I smile awkwardly, still holding back my tears.

“It’s cool that they chose to both wear suits, very masculine, yet, a touch of feminine with the pink shirts. Wait, did you choose their outfits?”

“No. It was all them.”
Behind them, another young hetero-couple has entered the room. The male body is wearing a black suit, with a blue dress shirt, no tie. He escorts a female body in a black dress with an abstract blue pattern. She has long brown curly hair and has her right arm through his left. Both wear white calla lilies, pinned to their left breasts. They walk down the aisle.

“That’s my Dad and Vanessa and here comes Grandma Cheryl and Tux. And… wait, that’s Uncle Gary!?” she asks, sounding confused.

“Yes.”
“What’s he doing there? This is your wedding!”

I can’t help but laugh. Her objection to his presence at my feminist self-wedding is akin to my frustration with the many ways that society thrust him into my life in ways that make me uncomfortable.

“I met Gary after I had started planning my thesis and wedding. He quickly became one of the good parts of my life. He would have married me… but that’s not what I really wanted. I wanted to marry myself. He was very supportive of my work and my wedding; he helped where he could and stayed out of the way as much as possible.”

“I guess that’s okay then.”

“Wait ‘til you hear his speech at the reception!” I say. “People talked about it for months after the wedding.”

“Of course they did,” she says.

On the screen, a middle aged grey haired woman wearing a black and white striped dress adorned with fluorescent flowers of many colours, with a bright blue jacket, pinned on the left with a calla lily, proceeds down the aisle. By her side is a much taller and younger blonde man, wearing a black shirt and pants under a beige sports jacket, pinned with a white calla lily. He is carrying a little black dog that has a beige bandana with black writing on it around its neck.

“What does Tux’s bandana say?”

“Dog of Honour.”

“He was soooo cute. I miss him.”

“Me too. So very much.” A tear forms in my right eye. I breathe deeply.
A young, thin, blonde female body enters next. Her hair is shoulder length and curled tightly, cascading around a slender face. She wears a yellow cape that flutters open slightly, revealing a long black dress underneath. She carries a bouquet of yellow calla lilies.

“I think that’s Liz, right?”

“Yes.”

I met Elizabeth during my days as a single woman living in Strathmore. I was 21, and had just left the relationship with my first long-term male partner. She and I went out to karaoke together quite a few times. I was drawn to her because she didn’t use her singing to try to “catch” a guy the way that most other women did. She enjoyed the music, making it (a thing for which she has exquisite talent) as well as hearing it.

On the screen, another duo follows closely behind. They look quite similar, with short light brown hair and glasses; both have broad shoulders. One is taller than the other; wearing a blue cape and carrying a bouquet of blue calla lilies. The shorter body wears orange, with matching bouquet. They maintain a defined space between them as they proceed down the aisle.

“Is that Brad and Claire?”

“Sure is. Brad’s in orange; Claire in blue.”

I met Claire when I was about 22; we bonded over our mutual love of the Harry Potter series and went out on a number of girl dates, to the movies and often out to restaurants. I met Brad through a weekly singles wing night when I was living in Edmonton and about 26 years old. I had a love/hate response to Brad at the beginning: he
annoyed me with what I then thought was arrogance and now understand as social awkwardness. We both worked downtown and often met up to chat over a quick lunch.

Technically, I introduced Brad and Claire. That is, one weekend I met up with a group of people at an event in Calgary organized through the PlentyofFish website; both of them were there and knew me so we all sat together with some other friends. They hit it off quite quickly and remain one of my favourite hetero-couples to spend time with. There’s something they do that I can’t quite put my finger on but it minimizes their heterosexual dominance; it’s like hanging out with two individual friends rather than being a “third wheel.” Being around them has always increased my sense of validity and recognition. I don’t question that they both love and respect me and the feeling is mutual.

Kali and I watch the laptop as another woman enters the room, alone, wearing a royal purple cape and carrying matching flowers. The woman is not thin, and has beautiful shoulder length red hair, in loose curls. As she walks, her cape flutters open, revealing her long black dress.

“That’s Kari, I’d recognize her any day.” Kali smiles.

I met Kari when I was 13 years old. We were in marching band together. We’ve been friends through many relationships and I can safely say that in one another we’ve always found a soft place to land when we fall down in the world; particularly when men push us down.

Kari is one of my heroes. She is the friend who lost her husband and partner of 10 years to suicide. Of all the people I know who have lost loved ones to suicide, Kari is among the most graceful and resilient. She struggles beautifully to be a good mother, in a
world that makes single parenting incredibly hard and terrifying.

On the screen, a third solitary woman enters the room, wearing a bright red cape with matching calla lilies. She is thin with long dark brown hair – some pieces are pinned up in braids.

“….and….Sarah?”

“Yes.”

I’ve known Sarah since I was 10 years old. We went to middle school and junior high together. We’re more different than we are similar. She wears jeans and work shirts, manages a pet store, runs three farms, and lives with her Mom (who is also one of my favourite people). She does her own automotive work and does not rely on men for anything. Sarah has left a handful of relationships that we both characterized as abusive, each in their own way (some emotionally, some financially, some physically) and of all the people in my life she has the least tolerance for other people’s bullshit.

One of my fondest memories of Sarah is when we were both 24 (we’re born 4 days apart) and had just ended conjugal relationships with guys named Ryan. It was Mother’s Day, and Sarah and her Mom, me and my Mom all went out for brunch. We talked candidly about men and relationships and our Mom’s, in their wonderful wisdom, legitimated our decisions to be single at this particular time and in this particular place.

“You don’t need that shit in your life.” I don’t remember who said that.

The video shows a slightly older plus sized woman entering the room, wearing a forest green cape and carrying lime green calla lilies. Her hair is short and bright red, framing a round face and very large smile.
“That’s Sol!”

I smile.

Sol is my “Edmonton wife.” We met when I was 25 and she was 45 on a singles ski trip weekend to Fernie, BC, and we ended up sitting together on the bus. We were quick friends. There are a number of reasons it could have been but nothing that feels accurate.

I organized and attended a number of singles events when I lived in Edmonton and Calgary. There were very few spaces where I could meet other people of all genders, races, classes, orientations, ages, and personalities, without being smothered by pressure to meet a man and get married. Like me, the friends I met at singles events were struggling to find recognition and acceptance for who they were; some attempted to do this by trying to find new romantic or sexual partners at the events and others did this by talking about and living single lives, with others’ who were trying to do the same. Most of us fluctuated between these two objectives, myself included.

My relationship with Sol was augmented about a year after I met her when the man Sol had been dating (she’d just given up her apartment in Edmonton and was going to move to Ontario with him) died by suicide. She spent a lot of time with me after that happened and together we constructed beautiful “single woman” identities that were fun and free. Our social lives ran parallel to one another’s from then on. I have never met anyone as quirky as Sol. She’s one of the people I miss the most when I am away from Alberta for long periods of time and one of the few who always makes time to see me when I am around.
“Here come me and Cohen!”

On the screen, following very closely behind the woman in little boy wearing a white dress pants, and a silver vest with a pinned to the upper left. He little white silk pillow.

Cohen, Vanessa’s son, years older than Kali. Although wonderful relationships with and Kory, he has never fully their extended family as his enjoyed him immensely when I by and have had mad respect for the ways that he has performed what could be called “traditional femininities.” I wish the rest of the world embraced that more so he could be more comfortable to do it publicly.

A few paces behind the ring bearer is a tiny blonde girl in a white silk dress (she looks like a miniature version of the bride) and carrying a large bouquet of white calla lilies. She is smiling at everyone in the seats on either side of her and stops a few times to stare and wave at people she recognizes. Her smile…my smile…

On the screen the double doors close behind the flower girl.

When the little girl has made her way to the front of the room, the doors open
A large woman wearing a white wedding gown enters the room, a middle aged man on each side, her arms linked into theirs. Her long hair is pinned up in curls with a section curled and hanging down her back.

A man’s voice says “Please rise for the bride.”

“Oh Auntie! You look so beautiful!” says Kali.

I can’t fight the tears any longer and they burst out of my eyes and down my face.

“Grandpa Ray and Grandpa Robert look pretty handsome too… and so happy. Aww, Auntie, you’re crying…” She hands me a tissue from the coffee table beside her love seat.
The trio walks slowly towards the camera. The man on the bride’s left wears a black suit with a dark blue shirt and back tie; white calla lily pinned to his left lapel. The man on the bride’s right wears a black suit with a light purple shirt and black tie; white calla lily pinned to his left lapel. When they are close enough for the camera to have captured their faces, all three are smiling.

The music stops and the camera pans around, showing the back of the bride; she is facing a mirror and still wiping her face with Kleenex. The mirror sits on a table and in front of it is the large, white, three-wicked candle. To the left of the mirror is a row of four bodies: first, closest to the mirror, is the woman in the silver cape, followed by people in red, orange, and yellow capes. To the right of the mirror are four more bodies: closest to the mirror is the man in the silver cape, then the bodies in green, purple, and blue. The short photographer moves around, pointing lenses at people and clicking camera buttons.

The official male voice says: “You may be seated.” The crowd obeys\textsuperscript{40}.

**Positioning the Ceremony**

KEN: We are gathered here today, not to witness a beginning of self-love, but rather a display of what already is. We do not create a wedding or a marriage, because we cannot. We can and do, however, re-craft and utilize this ritual to celebrate the wondrous and joyful occurrence that is taking place in Amanda’s life, and the commitment she makes today.

\textsuperscript{40} The wedding ritual has been normalized to the extent that everyone knows what is expected of them; my guests were very obedient to traditional wedding regulations.
Amanda has chosen you, those special and important to her, to witness and celebrate her changing sense of self, sex, and gender. Today, we witness Amanda as a bride, through and within the wedding ceremony, and we are invited to observe and consider a new sense of self - this will undoubtedly impact all who are present here today.

I’ve known Amanda for a little under a decade, I believe. She has been a very powerful force in my life; helping me to understand what feminism really is and how it pertains, not just to the women in my life, but how it concerns me as a man, and why it is necessary for me, as a man.

TINA: When Amanda invited me to be part of this ceremony, I could not have been more excited. The more that I learned about her intentions, the more I reflected on and embraced what it means to marry one’s self, to consider one’s self as the central focus of the life that we lead. I can’t overstate just how important that is, not only for Amanda, but also for all of us. I’d like to take this opportunity to invite each of you personally to spend some time reflecting on what it is to love one’s self and take the time today, as you show your love for Amanda, show that same love for your selves.

“I’d forgotten how well Tina speaks the message I wanted people to hear,” I say to Kali, without taking my eyes off the screen.

“She’s doing a nice job,” Kali replies, her tone of voice dismissing any further comments.
KEN: Do you, Amanda, acknowledge the importance of self-understanding and relationship with your self? Do you recognize your own partnership and presence and take responsibility for your self as both a sovereign and socially embedded individual? Do you present yourself today, before your loved ones, with a spirit of love and respect, in the absence of unreasonable coercion?

AMANDA: I do.

“Whoa. That’s pretty deep.” Kali says, under her breath.
My intention with this declaration of intent was to play with (disrupt and queer) the affirmations often made by heterosexual couples at the start of their wedding ceremonies that go something like “do you take this man as your lawful wedded husband?” This public performative utterance typically renders individuals (women) as subjects only in relation to heterosexuality. My declaration produces a subject that is sovereign and socially embedded; whose relationality and “identity” cannot be essentialized or totalized by one particular heterosexual relationship. This is my feminist space. I am my own subject at least as much as anyone else’s.

KEN: Very well, let us continue. At this time, Amanda has asked Vanessa and Janelle to come forward, to give a short reading.

A Short Reading

![Figure 15. Photo of the brides’ sisters-in-love, giving a reading.](Photo credit: TD Photography (2015)).

I chose Vanessa and Janelle to give a reading because I wanted every person in my family to have a part in the wedding that they could make their own. I chose a half
dozen of my favourite readings and gave the selection to Vanessa a few days before the wedding and she chose her favourite and split it in half so she and Janelle would each have a part.

VANESSA:  The Invitation, by Oriah Mountain Dreamer:

It doesn’t interest me what you do for a living. I want to know what you ache for and if you dare to dream of meeting your heart’s longing. It doesn’t interest me how old you are. I want to know if you will risk looking like a fool for love for your dream for the adventure of being alive. It doesn’t interest me what planets are squaring your moon...I want to know if you have touched the centre of your own sorrow if you have been opened by life’s betrayals or have become shriveled and closed from fear of further pain. I want to know if you can sit with pain mine or your own without moving to hide it or fade it or fix it. I want to know if you can be with joy mine or your own if you can dance with wildness and let the ecstasy fill you to the tips of your fingers and toes without cautioning us to be careful to be realistic to remember the limitations of being human. It doesn’t interest me if the story you are telling me is true (Mountain Dreamer, 2006, p. 1).

JANELLE:

I want to know if you can disappoint another to be true to yourself. If you can bear the accusation of betrayal and not betray your own soul. If you can be faithless and therefore trustworthy. I want to know if you can see Beauty even when it is not pretty every day. And if you can source your own life from its presence. I want to know if you can live with failure yours and mine and still stand at the edge of the fire with me and not shrink back. It doesn’t interest me where or what or with whom you have studied. I want to know what sustains you from the inside when all else falls away. I want to know if you can be alone with yourself and if you truly like the company you keep in the empty moments (Mountain Dreamer, 2006, p. 1).

“Oh wow, Auntie. I’m going to need a copy of that reading to take home with me and put on my mirror. It talks about a very powerful connection between two people.”

“If I remember correctly, I chose it because it described the kind of relationship I
wanted or maybe I thought I had with my self. Although, hearing it now and thinking about it, I can describe most of my relationships with the same level of intimacy. My most valuable friendships are with people who are content to exist with me; to quietly and silently accept the presence of two bodies and the many selves in whatever forms relationality takes.”

“Is that the kind of relationship you have with Uncle Gary?”

“Yes. But it isn’t necessary to single out that relationship – this is the kind of relationship I try to have with everyone, even my students and clients to some extent, although that is hard sometimes. These kinds of relationships the reading talks about usually, but not always, take time to build.”

She sighs. “Where is Uncle Gary, by the way?”

“He’s away with some of his friends for the weekend. They went down to Seattle to see a Seahawks game.”

“Whoa! I’m jealous!” She loves football.

I’m not jealous. I am content to be right here.

My Wedding Vows

We watch and listen carefully as Ken says each line first and then I repeat it back to my self, facing the mirror

In the presence of the Universe and its Creator,
Family, friends, and all my relations;
I, Amanda Lyn Baldwin take this oath and make this vow

---

41 To me, the mirror reflects an image of the body that performs the subject I experience as mine.
To be my own companion, constant friend, and source of love
From this day forward.

I promise to be my own partner;
in good times and in bad;
in joy and in sorrow.

I promise to laugh, cry, and experience emotion to a rich and full extent;
To cherish my self through the duration of my life;
I promise to love myself gently and unconditionally;
To nurture and encourage self-understanding, growth, and change,
    With reflexivity, honour, and respect.

I promise to revere the impermanence of human and natural life;
To treat all beings with respect, care, and compassion;
Sustaining existence and environment for as long as possible.

I pledge to be open to many ways of knowing;
I endeavour to understand the power and politics in which each emerges
And where agency and liberation might be exercised for change and justice.
I aspire to find comfort in the ambiguity and mystery of life.

I commit to being always present for myself;
To recognize the prominence and salience of this self-relationship
    As a desired prerequisite to all others.
This is my undertaking; my vow of self-love.
On the screen, the ring bearer walks around the bride’s dress and takes the pillow to Ken who unties the ring. Cohen returns to his chair and the ceremony continues.

KEN: Rings are an important symbol in the wedding ceremony, the meanings of which continuously change. Today, we have much more liberation to recognize and re-craft meanings than people (especially women) have had in the past. Historically, rings worn on the third finger of women have marked the property of men. Today this is not the case. Amanda, hold your ring on the third finger of your left hand and repeat after me:

I will forever wear this ring;

AMANDA: I will forever wear this ring;

KEN: as a sign of my commitment and the desire of my heart;

AMANDA: as a sign of my commitment and the desire of my heart;

KEN: I will wear it gladly and whenever I look at it;
AMANDA: I will wear it gladly and whenever I look at it;

KEN: I will remember this joyous day;

AMANDA: I will remember this joyous day;

KEN: and the vows and commitments that I have made.

AMANDA: and the vows and commitments that I have made.

**A Song**

KEN: At this time, we’re going to sign some paperwork and Liz will be singing Christina Aguilera’s “The Voice Within.”

“This will be good.” Kali says, “Liz has such a beautiful voice.”

“Yes, she is very talented.”

On the video, the music starts to play and the woman in the yellow cape takes the microphone and begins to sing.

Young girl, don't cry
I'll be right here when your world starts to fall
Young girl, it's all right
Your tears will dry, you'll soon be free to fly

When you're safe inside your room you tend to dream
Of a place where nothing's harder than it seems
No one ever wants or bothers to explain
Of the heartache life can bring and what it means

When there's no one else
Look inside yourself
Like your oldest friend
Just trust the voice within
Then you'll find the strength
That will guide your way
If you will learn to begin
To trust the voice within

Young girl, don't hide
You'll never change if you just run away
   Young girl, just hold tight
   And soon you're gonna see your brighter day

Now in a world where innocence is quickly claimed
It's so hard to stand your ground when you're so afraid
   No one reaches out a hand for you to hold
When you're lost outside look inside to your soul

   When there's no one else
     Look inside yourself
     Like your oldest friend
     Just trust the voice within
     Then you'll find the strength
     That will guide your way
     If you will learn to begin
     To trust the voice within

   Life is a journey
It can take you anywhere you choose to go
   As long as you're learning
   You'll find all you'll ever need to know

   You'll make it, You'll make it
   Just don't go forsaking yourself
      No one can stop you
   You know that I'm talking to you

   When there's no one else
     Look inside yourself
     Like your oldest friend
     Just trust the voice within
     Then you'll find the strength
     That will guide your way
     If you will learn to begin
     To trust the voice within

   Young girl don't cry
I'll be right here when your world starts to fall
   (Aguilera, 2002)
The computer screen shows two scenes simultaneously. In the foreground, people are shifting around a small table, taking turns signing a piece of paper. That same piece of paper remains framed and hung on the wall in my bedroom. In the background, the singer can be seen giving her vocal performance. When the bodies have finished signing the paperwork, they return to the mirror and arrange themselves around the large white three-wick candle. The camera zooms past them and focuses on the singer while she finishes the song.

Tears are falling down my cheeks, freely and comfortably, as we watch the screen. Like the reading earlier in the ceremony, I picked this song specifically because it spoke to trusting and validating (listening to) the self.

“Beautiful song” says Kali.

“Thanks,” I reply, sniffling and wiping my cheeks with a fresh Kleenex.

The video continues.

(Comm)unity Candle

KEN: The lighting of a unity candle is a relatively recent addition to the traditional wedding ceremony, most popular in the United States. The unity candle ceremony uses two taper candles with a large pillar candle in the centre. At the beginning of a wedding ceremony, a representative from each family (usually the mothers of the
bride and groom) light the two taper candles and later the bride and groom use their respective taper candles to light the large pillar candle together. In true Amanda fashion, we have altered this ceremony to reflect Amanda’s beliefs about the much larger influences at work in her love and life.

Together, today, we celebrate unity in all the ways it appears in our lives and in the world; the love of our family and community, the harmony and solidarity of people working together, and the connectedness of all humanity, regardless of language, beliefs, customs, or geography. We, each of us, contribute to the unity of all people.

In lieu of a guestbook, you all signed this candle when you came in and Amanda along with those she identifies as two of her most prominent relationships, her mother Cheryl and her partner Gary will now light the comm(unity) candle, together.

The video shows Amanda, Cheryl, and Gary lighting the candle together and then turning back to face the audience.

TINA: I have the honour, this afternoon, of pronouncing the completion of our ceremony. Of offering affirmation to Amanda as a woman independently owned and operated, as much as any of us can be within the limits and confines of social narratives and discourses.

The room on the screen erupts with applause.

TINA: This concludes our ceremony, this afternoon. Just a reminder that cocktails start at 6:00pm and dinner will be served promptly at 7. There is a mask-making table set up behind you on the dance floor and we invite you to do some crafting in preparation for the masquerade this evening. The supplies are meant for adults, so please supervise your
children carefully if they are participating.

**Recession**

A loud brassy wedding fanfare begins as Cheryl and Gary (with Tux) escort the bride out of the room. The wedding party follows along with the offciators and the bride’s family. The camera focuses on the lit candle on the table in front of the mirror. In the reflection, we see guests leaving the room. After a few moments, the screen goes black and the video stops playing.

Kali is sitting silently on her loveseat.

“What's up, kid?”

“Oh… umm…” She’s staring at the floor.

“You didn’t like it?”

“No, I did. I’m just… it’s not what I thought it would be.”

“What did you think marrying myself would look like?”

“I guess… I mean; it was very similar to a real wedding. Declarations, and vows, and paperwork, and unity candles. It was all so…”

“So…what?”

“I’m not sure. Normal, maybe? Can I think about it?”

“Of course? Should we watch the reception?”

“I totally want to see it. Dad always raves about how good of an emcee he thinks he was. I’d like to have some ammunition to give him a ribbing.”

“Well, okay then.”
The Reception Speeches

The second video begins with the camera pointed at what was previously the back of the ballroom. We see a dance floor in front of some sound equipment. Three bodies - the bride (Me), a man in a black suit with a light blue shirt and white calla lily (Kory), and a woman in a colourful dress and black bolero with curly hair and glasses (Lori-Ann), are in the midst of taking a *selfie*.

The bride leaves the screen.

The man takes the microphone and says: “Hello everybody, I’m Kory. I’m family…on the bride’s side.”

Laughter is heard from off camera.

Kali laughs, too. “Sometimes, it’s not that he’s actually funny that’s funny but more so how funny he thinks he is.”

KORY: Amanda has always been kind of like my sister.

We hear more laughter coming from the laptop speakers.

“What a dork.” Kali is still laughing.

KORY: She’s exactly one year, one month, and sixteen days older than me. I’ve always admired Amanda for her great qualities. Today there is a very grand and momentous occasion. We’ve been waiting over six years for today’s event. The event that will rake in somewhere in the ballpark of 250 million dollars, making it the biggest pay per view event ever. So, it is safe to say that everyone here loves Amanda very much, because they are missing the fight of the century to be here.

I’m curious why he never mentioned what he thought my great qualities were. I
guess it was more important for him to serve the punch line. Some people think that humour, or the act of “the roast,” is a passive aggressive performance of discomfort with the situation or context in which a subject finds their selves…

“That’s not really funny,” Kali says.

“No. It really wasn’t” I agree.

The audience on the video is laughing.

KORY: Alright, firstly, some quick rules. Number one, bathrooms are out to the left and probably every body has used them…especially my Mom. If you see her out there, point her in the right direction. If she’s already gone to the bathroom, point her back to her seat… back there.” He gestures to the corner that would be to his far right.

Number two, if you need drinks, see Shawna… she had the bright rainbow umbrella but seems to have got rid of it. It’s one for two dollars; two for four, five for ten, or you could get the best deal and get ten for a twenty-dollar bill. It’s the best deal. Sold.

Today, unlike at most weddings, we’re not clanging glasses because we don’t want the glasses to break…so no clanging glasses. Okay, here’s Lori-Ann.

The other woman who was taking a selfie at the start of the video steps up to the microphone. “Good evening. I’m Lori-Ann, one of Amanda’s many many many cousins. We’ve had such a wonderful day today and so Amanda, I’d like to tell you, you are such an intelligent and beautiful woman, and you have a sincere soul. I’m very honoured that you’ve chose us to be part of your special day.”

“I think your Dad wrote a script for him and Lori-Ann. Maybe those are his words…”
“I doubt it,” says Kali.

LORI-ANN: Over the years, we’ve stayed connected. I remember the days when I lived in Strathmore. I was 17 and you were 14. I saw you every day. Yes, every single day. I had to go to your house to do my homework. We would talk for hours and since I could drive, I would drive us into Calgary. We would put our favourite CD in and sing Disney songs as loud as we could, all the way into town. So, I would like to take some credit for Amanda’s love of karaoke. And although I’m not an active participant anymore in the singing of the karaoke, I really enjoy coming to listen to her sing.

We also bonded through playing music. When I was going to Mount Royal, a few times Amanda would come to my house for the weekend and we would have a clarinet jam session until the wee hours of the morning. Sixteen years ago she was one of my bridesmaids at my wedding, and today, I’m grateful to be here for yours.

Due to the fact that you’re sitting here with us this evening, I’m sure most of you are aware of Amanda’s family dynamics. Among many of outstanding family members that have helped build and shape her strong characteristics, I couldn’t think of any one person who did it more predominantly than Cheryl. Cheryl was a strong advocate for the women’s rights movement in the 1960s and 70s and has continued to push for equality and fairness in many realms, to this day. She continues to voice her opinion and has always stood up for what she has believed in.

Amanda and Cheryl have not always seen eye to eye - especially when Amanda was a teenager. I lived out on my own by that time, so when she’d have a fight with her Mom she’d call me and say, “hey, I’m coming into town.” I’d say sure, come for the
weekend, or when I was home with the baby, she’d sometimes come during the week to stay at our house. Little did she know, when she went to bed, I’d call Aunt Cheryl and say “Amanda’s safe, she’s on the couch for a while, let her cool off and she’ll come back home.”

We hear more laughter from the audience.

LORI-ANN: Without further ado, I’d like to call upon Cheryl Payne, the Mother of the Bride, to welcome everyone.”

Welcome From the Family

My Mom, wearing a black and white striped dress, embellished with many fluorescent flowers and a blue jacket pinned with a white calla lily, steps into the screen shot and takes the microphone.

I pause the video and say to Kali: “I have a funny story for you. I remember something Grandma Cheryl told me about buying that dress… she wanted to have all of the colours of the pride flag, just like my wedding party. She spent a whole Saturday morning reading articles on the internet about the pride flag and why each colour was chosen because she wanted to know exactly what she was looking for in her ‘Mother of the Bride’ outfit. She went in to one store and found the dress she wanted within a few minutes; it was cut wrong for her body shape, so she would have to have it altered. She was asking the saleswoman where she could have that done, and the lady, who Grandma Cheryl described as a tiny little Asian woman, asked about the event she would be wearing the dress too. After telling her that her daughter was having a feminist wedding,
the woman said, “your daughter must be one of those lesbians, hey?” Grandma Cheryl said she felt really offended but didn’t know what to say so she paid for her dress quickly, and left the store.”

“That is funny,” says Kali. “I can’t imagine Grandma Cheryl being so flustered that she wouldn’t know what to say.”

“That’s what I thought, too. She had some of the most interesting revelations to share with me about her experiences of the wedding. I was happy how much she embraced it and got excited by it. I remember feeling scared to tell her, at first. Initially, she wasn’t sure why I wasn’t just marrying Gary. But then, I think she thought about it and realized that I was doing exactly what she’d always told me to do – being an individual who didn’t need to be completed by a man.”

“I would have thought she would have got it right away. Especially with how many times she’s told me the story about her unity candle from her wedding to Grandpa Ray.”

We say this next part in unison, “You can’t blow out your own candle, you have to keep it lit. You always have to keep your individuality.” We smile, together and I press play on the laptop.

CHERYL: Thanks Lori-Ann and Kory, you guys are doing a wonderful job. As the mother of the bride, I just have to say how proud I am of Amanda. She’s my only daughter and she has always had a mind of her own. She was born with the kind of personality that drove some people silly. I would like to think that probably I had that

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42 It remains “unacceptable” to be non-heterosexual.
same personality when I was growing up. I think I probably got that from my Dad. We have strong personalities and we live what we believe. We’re true to ourselves.

Kali comments, “She got into the wine before the reception, didn’t she?”

“Yeah, a little bit. She was quite excited about being the Mother of Bride”

My Mom continues on the screen.

CHERYL: I’d like to welcome everybody here to support Amanda. All of her friends, my friends, and our family. I’d like to thank you all for taking part in her special day. She’s worked hard to execute this event and she organized everything from afar. I’m very proud of her.

Amanda totally believes you have to love your self, unconditionally, before loving anyone else. I remember teaching her that if you don’t love your self, you can’t love anybody else and that you can’t expect that anybody else will love you. So you need to love your self, no matter what and from there you can live your dreams and have a happy life. Happiness is about loving yourself: it’s not about money and it’s not about cars and houses.

So, again, I’d like to welcome you all. You see the good in Amanda and the power she has as a woman and the power to make changes. She’s a mover and a shaker, and Gary is very lucky to have somebody that can move him. So if everyone would raise your glass, let’s toast all of you who are here to share this special day! Thank you so much!

The laptop speakers crackle with applause and clinking glasses.

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43 Disciplining us all back to compulsory heterosexuality.
LORI-ANN: Thanks Auntie Cheryl. Next, I’d like to call up the more handsome of Amanda’s two brothers. He has been an integral part of Amanda’s life and has always been a strong supporter and advocate for everything Amanda believes in. Please put your hands together for Brendan, brother of the bride, to give a toast to the wedding party.

Kory fakes walking to the microphone and feigns confusion that Lori-Ann wasn’t talking about him, obviously another scripted joke.

Kali asks, “Do you think he knows how silly he looks, behaving like that?”

“Your Dad and I have had a number of conversations about the way that he mocks and treats people and ultimately, Kali, no, I don’t think he gets it at all. That, or he does and he just doesn’t know how to behave differently. We love him regardless, though, and when his antics get too much to take, we can always just leave.”

Toast to the Wedding Party

A man in a black suit and tie, with a bright pink shirt and white calla lily walks to the front and takes the microphone.

BRENDAN: Thank you masters of ceremonies, family, friends, and distinguished guests. Firstly, to my sister, congratulations on a truly outstanding wedding - you’re an inspiration to us all. Today I have been given the honour of presenting a toast to the wedding party. Now, when Amanda first asked me to toast the wedding party, the only thing that came to mind was that these are people I only seem to be around when there’s beer and karaoke.

How do you toast people when most of your memories include shots of tequila and several very unique drunken renditions of Journey’s “Don’t Stop Believing?” But
then it hit me. I don’t need to know them that well because my sister does. And there’s no way she would ever be around anyone who wasn’t kind, caring, loving, and things amazing, straight down to their very being. So, for being everything that my sister could ever hope for in a group of friends, here’s to the wedding party.

We hear more loud applause and some clinking glasses.

Kali says, “they always say short and sweet speeches are the best.”

“Who is ‘they’?” I ask.

She rolls her eyes. The video continues.

KORY: Thank you, Brendan. A true friend is someone who you may not have seen in years but when you meet up, it’s like you never skipped a step and there was never any highway or ocean in between. The next contestant has been a friend of the family for many years. She was my Mom’s first employee back at the first Hunger Payne’s Café, in the green hotel and has been by our side, since we moved to Strathmore. Amanda put this person into perspective by simply stating, “she’s here.” Please put your hands together as we call up Sarah Schumann, to give the toast to the family.

Toast to the Family

A thin brunette, with long hair pulled up in a braid and pinned with a black flower, approaches the front. She wore a red cape at the ceremony but is now wearing a long black satin gown. She takes the microphone.

SARAH: Thank you. Please bear with me, as I hopefully don’t cry too many tears. I want to start with a quote from Jim Butcher: “There’s nothing that makes you more insane than family. Or more happy. Or more exasperated. Or more…secure.”
Family comes in many forms. There are those that raise us. Our brothers, who drive us crazy, and those we adopt along the way. They are the people that keep us strong in times of weakness; they are the people whose shoulders we cry on in times of sorrow. They are the people who celebrate the successes and the moments of joy in our lives. Cheryl, Raymond, Robert, Kory, Brendan, Vanessa and Janelle, thank you for all the laughter, the tears, the failures and the successes. Thank you for all of the countless hours of prep that you have done to make this day possible for Amanda. But most of all, thank you for the beautiful, amazing, inspirational woman sitting here before us… Amanda. To Family!

As I listen to these words that I haven’t heard in fifteen years, my eyes well up with tears. Sarah was terrified and beyond excited to give that speech. She wasn’t sure what she would say or how she would say it, but she nailed it.

LORI-ANN: So, the next person we have up is Gary, who is Amanda’s partner. Gary is a strong support for Amanda and definitely brings out the best in her…and sometimes the worst.

Laughter.

Gary doesn’t usually say a whole lot but when he does it’s either supremely hilarious or extremely intelligent. Join us in our excitement for Gary’s toast to the Bride.

**Toast to the Bride**

A tall blonde man dressed all in black walks to the front.

GARY: When Amanda and I talked about me giving the toast to the bride, I ran a few ideas by her, and she just sat there… eventually she said, ‘you do know this is
supposed to be a toast and not a roast, right?’

Laughter.

“Think left, think right, think low, think high, oh the things you could think, if you can only try” – That’s a Dr. Seuss quote (2009). Amanda has a curiosity for what other people think. Not for what they think, but how they think it. It is a certainty, that several times a day I will hear, ‘Blocker, what are you thinking?’ I tell her. Some days we are on same page, some days the same chapter, and some days we are on completely different books. It turns out, when we are on completely different books, I learn more about her and she learns more about me. Usually the words ‘I never thought of it like that before’ are said, and we see things a little bit different than we did before.

One of the first dates we had, Amanda told me of her plans for this wedding. She explained the reasoning and the rationale behind it and the more she talked, the more sense it made. This would be one of the first times I told Amanda ‘I never thought of it like that before’ and saw things a lot differently than I did before.

Along your journey to becoming a bride, I have watched, admired, respected, and loved the person you were, are, and will be. I am so proud of you. So, if everyone will join me to raise a glass, to the Bride, Amanda Baldwin.

Murmuring voices, applause, and clinking glasses can be heard.

Kali says, “he loved you so much, even back then. I’ve always thought the two of you make the perfect couple.”

“He’s lovely. And our relationship is lovely. I think that’s because we both have our own lives and identities apart from one another. I asked his Mom, once, what she
thought the secret to a good long-term relationship was. She said:

This is how I think about it. I think that just because you are married, you still are an individual. I think it is a good thing for each person in the marriage to have some of their own friends, their own interests, and even some of their own money etc. But, I also think that as a couple there are a lot of things that you will enjoy doing together too (Personal Communications, 2015).

Her words, along with Grandma Cheryl’s unity candle story and many other conversations have stayed with me, and probably Gary too, over the years about how it’s important to maintain some sort of self sovereignty or autonomy.”

KORY: Thank you very much, Gary. You’re like our bigger brother.

The last person that will be coming up here is someone that I’ve known longer than anybody else in this room, except for her mother. I’ve seen Amanda in the mornings, at school, in extra curricular activities, on Facebook, in relationships, at work, with children, clients, family, and believe me this, in a couple of heated debates…lots with me. I’ve seen her go from Clairmont, to Strathmore, to Rycroft, to Strathmore, to Calgary, to Strathmore, to Edmonton, to Strathmore, to Regina, to Strathmore, to Cambridge Bay, to Strathmore, to LeRoy…or somewhere in Saskatchewan. I think it’s LeRoy – I was just there the other week.

No matter where she’s been and where she goes, I know one thing for sure: Amanda will impact those around her. Amanda and I come from the same place. We share a lot of similar thoughts on life and of course on marriage. I’ve had many philosophical conversations with Amanda over the many years and I’d like to make sure that I say this to you, Amanda - I’m proud of you, I understand you, and I love you.

I thank everyone here for supporting Amanda and therefore supporting our
family, and everything that we believe in and stand for. But most of all... I thank everyone here for opening their minds and realizing that happiness can be achieved through any way that a person chooses. Congratulations, Amanda. I’ll turn it over to you.

Applause.

It’s Kali’s turn to cry. “I’ve never heard him be so serious like that. Underneath all the silly jokes and making fun of people, he really does love us.”

“You, probably more than any one else in the world, kid. You should have seen the change in him when you were born. Very few things in life are as beautiful as that was. He was so careful with you, so tender, so loving. It was hard to believe my jack-ass little brother was capable of that.”

Her tears turn to laughter. “Yeah. He is a wonderful jack-ass.”

The Gracious Bride

The bride walks into the camera shot and takes the microphone.

AMANDA: Umm... I have had... a tremendous couple of weeks....

As the video continues to play, I know I don’t want to watch my own speech. It was one of the more embarrassing parts of my feminist self-wedding. It set me into a miserable mood for the rest of the reception.

“Maybe we should turn this off, now?” I suggest, to Kali.

“Awww, no way! This is the last speech, I want to see it.”

It can’t hurt. It can’t hurt anymore than the memory does. Maybe the performance was better than my memory of the experience... I close my eyes.

When I open them, I see the bride holding the microphone down by her hip and
visibly breathing deeply. I breathe deeply, too, as I watch. Everything is in slow motion as I wait for the train to crash.

AMANDA: Planning this wedding, and executing this wedding, journaling this wedding, photographing this wedding, has pushed me… (another pause and deep breath) beyond limits that I thought I had and created, for me, a strength that I don’t think anything else could have.

I am so very grateful. I am grateful to my family, who has prepared endless amounts of food this week for my friends, for my bridal party, for me, and for Gary. We’ve been here for eight days now and haven’t had to eat out once, the food just gets delivered to our door, it’s quite wonderful. The food is just one small example of their unconditional support.

To my wedding party who helped me through text messages and Face Time and Facebook messages and emails and everything endlessly. They were always there instantaneously when I had a question. It was just wonderful to have that support and that relationship.

For the stories. With every single one of you, even in your RSVPs, you and I have created stories together and I am so very grateful for that and how it has shaped me.

Particularly important tonight, although Laurie said that “today isn’t a day to celebrate the academy”, I am particularly grateful to the University of Regina. First, for accepting me as a doctoral student so that I could explore the world of education and the world of psychology and then to Laurie, for allowing me to transition my thesis into the journaling that comes along with this wedding; to a project of self-exploration and
storying. I am very grateful for the University’s support, financially and otherwise.

For my very lovely partner, who let me read his speech the other day, so I didn’t have as emotional of a reaction as I did to Sarah’s and Brendan’s, whose speeches I didn’t get to read. All of the speeches were so very beautiful.

I am a very privileged person; because of all the people that surround me, all of the employment experiences that I’ve had in my life, the education experiences, and all of the stories that I get to carry with me and that shape who I am. I’m going to stop talking so that we can dance the hell out of this floor!

The applause is cut short as the screen turns to black.

Okay, that wasn’t so bad. It was short and sweet and I thanked everyone who needed to be thanked. Except the venue…and the vendors. My brother thanked those people for me, if I remember correctly.

“Is that the last video, Auntie? Aren’t there any more of people singing or of me dancing?”

“Sorry, kid. That’s all she wrote.”

**After the Movie**

Kali and I are sitting at the kitchen table, eating a light lunch: Caesar salad and diced Cajun chicken breast. I am starting to feel drowsy and am contemplating a short nap before our company arrives.

“I have a bit of a surprise,” I tell her. “I’m not sure if I’ve ever told you this, but once a year, some of my closest friends, most of whom were in my wedding party, carpool from Alberta to Saskatchewan to spend a couple of nights keeping me company.
We pick the dates a year in advance and it is something I look forward to, all year.”

“I think I’ve read posts on Facebook and seen pictures of this get together.”

“Entirely possible. Anyways, it’s quite something that you showed up on my doorstep this morning, Kiddo, and that you’ve been so eager to hear and know about the wedding. They left a couple of hours ago and will arrive just before supper, tonight.”

She squeals loudly with obvious delight. “Sarah and Sol will be here, for sure then, right?” She’s known my two closest girlfriends since before her brain started storing long term experiential memories. “Who else is coming?”

“Nev will be here, she’s riding with Sol and Sarah, from Edmonton. Brad and Claire are of course coming from Calgary. Kari couldn’t come, this year, as her daughter Ashtyn is in her last year of high school and had a marching band camp this weekend; she’s playing with the Calgary Stetson Show Band, just like her mom and I did when we were in high school. Liz also can’t make it; she’s got a show with her new band, tonight. There were two empty seats in Claire’s SUV, so Tina and Ken took the opportunity to join everyone for the visit; they don’t usually come out.”

“I would have liked to see Kari, and Ashtyn, and Liz…” she says, glumly. Almost instantly, though, her expression turns, “But, Nev, Sarah, Sol, Brad, Claire, Ken, and Tina… that’s seven extra people for supper! What are we going to make?”

Just like her Grandma and me, she is worried about what to feed people. “The menu for this event is the same every year. I made two big trays of lasagne, last week. They’ve been thawing in the fridge since yesterday and we only need to pop them in the oven and make a salad. I also pre-made a cheesy potato casserole and we’ll have it
with turkey sausages for brunch tomorrow.”

“Can I bake a cake?”

She read my mind. “Sure kiddo, as long as it has chocolate in it – I’ve got a stock of the good stuff in the cupboard up there.” I gesture to the brown door above the toaster.

We do the dishes from lunch, and then together, like we used to do all of the time when she was a toddler, we mix up batter for an epic dessert.

Once the cake is in the oven, I take my leave to the great room (an extra living room above the garage, furnished like a movie theatre) for a much needed nap. As I lay there, sleep escaping me, I do something I haven’t done in years: I think (daydream, fantasize, remember) about my wedding day.
CHAPTER SIX – EMBODIMENT

Waking Up

I wake, the bleached hotel sheets and heavy comforter wrapped around me. My nightgown is soft white cotton with lace edges; it feels sensual, sexy, and snug against my skin. The alarm is singing quietly and if I don’t move to turn it off, the volume will increase and become less pleasant.

A smile forms on my face, tightly pulling back my cheeks. I breathe deep and try to ground myself. I am here, in an uncomfortable hotel bed. I feel a little dog breathing against my rib cage, his body curled up in my armpit. The sun is starting to peek from behind the curtains and the room is a mess…Rubbermaid totes and crafting supplies on all of the tables. My laptop is sitting on the desk by the window and it has been getting a lot of use. There is an intricately beaded and embellished ivory satin dress draped over the chair in the corner. Today is my wedding day.

Tux pokes his teeny black head up from under the mass of linens; he is ready for a walk. It took eight days, but he has learned not to pee on the carpet in the hotel room. I wrap myself in a white silk dressing gown with “Bride” embroidered on the back and pull on white cotton pants and slip my freshly pedicured toes into new white flip flops (purchased just for today); we head off down the hotel hallway.

After Tux has his morning pee, we return to our room and I do the same. I prepare the things that I will need for my hair appointment (a water bottle, some hair clips, my iPad) and make sure Tux will be comfortable in the room without me. I go back downstairs to the breakfast buffet, where others are already seated, enjoying omelettes
and raisin toast.

Hugs and friends welcome me; many faces that have not slept – they apparently stayed up to watch the sunrise, motivated by fire whiskey and gin. Sol smiles at me and runs her fingers up and down the silk of my robe, fussing about softness. Nieves tells me that it will be a good day, today – a day to remember. I listen to stories of the previous night and the fun I missed out on in favour of some alone time, a hot bath and a good sleep.

Agency and Liberation

Judith Butler proposes that “when we talk about agency, we in fact need to divorce it from the idea of the subject and allow it to be a complex choreographed scene with many kinds of elements – social, material, human – at work” (as interviewed by Bell, 2010, p. 151).

My agency does not consist in denying this condition of my constitution. If I have agency, it is opened up by the fact that I am constituted by a social world I never chose. That my agency is riven with paradox does not mean it is impossible. It means only that paradox is the condition of its possibility. (Butler, 2004, p. 3)

Liberation in terms of being completely free from social constraints (a pure/untainted individual) is impossible (Henriques et al., 1998). I am not and cannot claim to be a passive recipient of masculine hegemony: I am produced by, subject to, and simultaneously I produce at least as much as I resist masculine hegemonic power (O’Grady, 2005).

There must be an authority…which is willingly exercised over people who willingly accept it, and authority of a kind that the citizens can obey and actually want to obey…citizens must be personally persuaded of the validity of the law which is imposed on them and which they take up as it were on their own account. (Foucault, 2008, p. 213)
Subjects are effects of meanings that are not given/unalterable; power is always over someone or something that is capable of disobeying. Subjects have choices and responsibilities to resist discourse that are unjust and in order to see these choices we need to keep watch of our selves.

For me, resistance to masculine hegemony is practiced through attention to and love of the self; fashioning a self (subject) that is increasingly aware of the discourse being performed and more conscious and critical of its ongoing formation. Resistance is not a destination, rather, a continuous process of becoming.

Self-awareness is the only practice of self by which we can be made aware that the negativity of dominant discourses is being incorporated into how we fashion and stylize our selves as subjects (O’Grady, 2004). Through attention to the self, and thus to discourses, we can find agency to explore new way of forming ourselves as subject – practices of self that are more positive or better suited. This destabilization of the fixed categories of “woman” and “female” (and what it means to be feminine) opens up space and represents an act of resistance and/or agency (O’Grady, 2004).

And so…I attempted to resist masculine hegemonies through my appropriation of the wedding ceremony, to serve as a legitimating practice of self for the female/feminine subject. It was not a simple, linear, clean, or coherent disruption; rather, my experiences were contradictory –limited (entirely) by the negative self concepts I had incorporated from this as well as much earlier experiences of formation as a subject within the masculine hegemonic condition. Invoking an alternative to these discourses brought my attention to how I was and was not conforming to the ideal woman making it difficult to
Wedding Hair

I don’t have much to say, so I consume a bit of breakfast and depart the hotel in the passenger seat of Sarah’s car. We head for my brother’s house, on the other side of town, where his partner, my sister-in-love, Vanessa, will be doing my hair in her basement hair salon.

“How are you doing?” Sarah asks.

“I’m feeling excited and nervous, and overwhelmed and nauseous.”

“That’s understandable.” She replies.

There is a strange silence, charged with all kinds of energy.

“Maybe Vanessa can put some braids or curls into your hair for you while we’re here…”

“Sure, if there’s time.” Sarah smiles at me.

I feel sad that other people feel they have to step aside so that I can take centre stage, today. I hope everyone finds their own ways to shine through and feel good with me…alongside me.

We don’t say much else.

We get out of the car in silence and are greeted with smiles and hugs by Vanessa as well as my brother, niece, and nephew. The photographer arrived before us and is waiting in the salon room to begin.

I feel stronger today than I did the last time I sat in Vanessa’s hair chair. Eight days ago, on Friday night after the 9-hour drive to Strathmore, Vanessa put highlights
into my hair and trimmed it so that it would be fresh for the stagette on Saturday and bridal shower\textsuperscript{44} on Sunday. Sitting here, without the structure of a bra or body shaper, wearing only yoga pants and a tank top with a built in “shelf-bra,” I was aware of how much weight I gained since Christmas. Although not thin by any stretch (not since I was 12, really), I now weigh a good 45 pounds more than I did four months ago. Unsure what the wedding would bring with it and vulnerable to potential and real rejection, I turned to good old faithful cheeseburgers, fish and chips, and pizza, for trust and comfort. Junk food never lies; it always tastes way too good and has effects that are not so good in the long run – these are “facts” I can count on, near certainties in the rollercoaster ride of life and body image. The temporary security and familiarity is sometimes worthwhile, at least emotionally.

I’m not feeling fat in a negative way, today! Today is my wedding day! I grin some more. The silk robe covers my flabby arms as I look into the mirror, watching as Vanessa diligently twists and pins my hair, adding in extensions to create length and flowers for effect. I chat with the photographer (Tobi-Dawne) as she snaps pictures and browses my iPad, looking through wedding photos I’ve added to my Pinterest board. We make small talk about what will happen throughout the day and Vanessa expresses her surprise and anxiety that I trusted her to do my hair today without a trial run.

Kali comes in to the salon room and is extremely excited. She is tiny, her four

\textsuperscript{44} This document does not discuss the stagette and bridal shower any further. Instead, the stories focus on the actual wedding day. The important information from my journal entries for these two events has been included in other analytical ways, in the wedding day stories.
year old frame much smaller than my own. She sits on my lap, and then under the table, and then on the wash station chair, and then on my lap, and she goes around and around in circles, sometimes taking my iPad with her, to play games. I try to show her some of the different hairstyles she could have to wear with her flower girl dress, but she will have none of that; she sits still only for a few seconds and Vanessa expresses a hope that she will sit still at least long enough to get her hair done before lunch.

Figure 18. Photo of Amanda, Kali, and Vanessa while Vanessa does Amanda’s hair.

Photo credit: TD Photography (2015)
The photographer and Sarah both watch with what I think is adoration. Smiling at me when I catch their eye and reminding me silently that this day is for me. I remind myself of this and fight away any negative thoughts trying to creep into my consciousness. No matter how fat my arms are, or how inappropriately single I am, no one is allowed to think ill of the bride. And, this is my wedding day – the bride is me. Whether I have earned it or not, whether I deserve it or not, today is about validating me
and telling me how beautiful I am. I have waited for a long time for this and the day is finally here. I breathe, consciously, and remind myself to enjoy every minute because before I know it, the day will be over. I will go home to the middle of nowhere, in Saskatchewan.

When everyone is content that my hair looks absolutely stunning, and has had a turn to say so, Sarah and I return to the hotel. We have enough time to prepare for the rehearsal lunch; the caterer (my Mom and Kory) dropped off sandwiches, salads, beverages, and desserts, and I previously purchased and wrapped thank-you gifts for my family and for the wedding party. Sarah asks me a number of times if there is anything else that she can do and I start to feel ridiculous about the idea of her serving me and attending to me as she is doing.

Once everything is ready to go in the big hotel suite, Sarah and I go down to the ballroom, for a ceremony rehearsal. Everyone else is already here and no one is short on compliments about my hair; the room is buzzing with excitement and positivity. The DJ, James, has already set up the sound system and is rehearsing a song with Liz, who will

Figure 19. Photo of Amanda’s wedding hair, nearing completion.
Photo credit: TD Photography (2015)
When Liz finishes her rehearsal, everyone listens attentively while I explain what I want to happen. We run through where everyone is going to stand and who is going to talk and when – and what they are all going to say. I cry a lot and talk through my sniffles, a wad of Kleenex balled up in my fist. Everyone hugs me, smiles, and I cry some more. They ask questions and we all behave as though I am the authority. I wonder if how much I am leaving out is a reflection of how much I trust each of these people to already know and understand what happens at weddings… Everyone seems surprised that what I/we have planned is not more complicated and I wonder if there isn’t something that should be changed to better disrupt in the way I am hoping we are about to.

I wish I weren’t such a sobbing mess. People say it’s okay and that it’s normal to be emotional on your wedding day… but really? I don’t understand how I am so overcome in this way. Is this wedding story, the one that we are all creating together, different from my feelings inside? Am I feeling intense relief from the typical position of illegitimacy I occupy as a single woman, publicly? Am I happy that something I have dreamed about for so long is finally happening? Are the things that happen today, on the outside of my body, going to match the validation I try to and want to give myself inside, as a single woman? I feel so naked, so…exposed…so vulnerable…

Why do I want to control my emotions?

Within Western masculine hegemonic culture, emotions are a primary site of emotional control; emotions are also a site of political resistance and can mobilize social movements of liberation; and feminist theories and practices, in the last three decades, have developed pioneering studies of emotion, gender, and power. (Boler, 1999, p. 4)

Why should I hide them? I am unable to reconcile what I think about the emotions I am
experiencing and so I continue to take stock of what is going on.

It is okay to cry.
It is uncomfortable to cry.
I should try not to cry.
Crying is normal, and natural
I want to stop crying
Why can’t I just be happy and graceful?
Why should I be happy and graceful?
Why can’t I just be comfortable and content to exist?
I can’t. I can.
Here we go.

After closing the doors to the ballroom, Robert and Ray take my arms and we
prepare to practice walking down the aisle. Here I am, in my white pyjamas with my hair
done up like a princess, no makeup yet, and wearing flip flops - in tears and sobbing. This
day that I had dreamed of since I was a little girl is finally here, and I can’t keep it
together. It feels dis-graceful.

I push through discomfort and when everyone is content with the ceremony that
I/we have constructed, we leave the ballroom and go to the wedding party suite for lunch.
I distribute the gifts I had purchased and it really isn’t a big thing… it just happens… no
intense emotions… no tears… I feel like I should be crying, now, and I’m not.

After lunch, and a short conversation about the order of reception for later this
evening, many people leave the suite to go get ready, agreeing to meet back here 30
minutes before the ceremony is scheduled to begin. Sarah, Sol, Liz, and Kari, begin to get
ready in the two bedrooms and large bathroom adjoining this room.

I sit on the couch, alone, for I don’t know how many minutes. There are curling
irons and straightening irons and makeup… and I sit here. Watching, waiting, soothing
and trying to grasp and accept my vulnerable selves. The energy is buzzing and building
around me and I am not letting it in, not yet. I am having a few moments of peace, trying to find comfortable thoughts and familiar feelings that might help me to keep it together for the rest of the day. I am trying to channel the grace that is supposed to exist somewhere inside me. I laugh out loud after thinking the words “supposed to.” This whole thing is absolutely ludicrous.

**Woman, Female, Feminine**

Gender, understood as one way of culturally configuring a body, is open to a continual remaking...terms such as ‘masculine’ and ‘feminine’ are notoriously changeable; there are social histories for each term; their meanings change radically depending upon geopolitical boundaries and cultural constraints on who is imagining whom, and for what purpose. (Butler, 2004, p. 9)

Women’s self-relationship can be seen as a casualty of traditionally defined female identity...historically feminine identity largely has been defined, and thus often experienced, in terms of connections with others (O’Grady, 2004, p. 1).

To achieve or practice being a woman, to practice proper femininity or perform a female subject, is always already to be heterosexual - married and mother, and to defer to a male partner who “rightfully” exercises power. The signifier “woman” marks a body that is always (totalized) in opposition (Hanauer, 2003, p. 4) to the signifier “male.”

Dominant discourses call us to nurture, to care for others and privilege their wants and needs over our own. As such, women who do “choose” to enter the paid labour force, outside of the home, remain vastly overrepresented in caring and nurturing fields (nursing, teaching, etc.).

For me and many other educated women of working-class origins, teaching was, and always has been, a reasonable compromise in upward mobility because, by becoming a teacher, I was still being loyal to what I learned about identifying as a female, particularly the assumption of caring for others (Schick, 2000, p. 303).

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45 In lower classes or bodies relegated to poverty by white privilege, capitalism and meritocracy, entering the paid labor force is a necessity, not a “choice.”
To perform femininity, is to put the needs of others before the needs and love of self.

What happens when women practice a self that is at least as valuable if not more so than the people around her? Is it possible to elevate the worth of a female or feminine self and to simultaneously be married and/or be a mother? Do the roles of wife and mother always preclude care of the self? Is the sacrifice of self, invisibilizing of the self, and/or subversion of the self the only pathway to which women have any hope of being and/or feeling credible and legitimate? What happens when a woman chooses not to marry or to remain childfree? “When caring ceases to play a role in women’s (or anyone’s) subordination, the full vitality of its creative capacity to structure human relations can flourish” (O’Grady, 2005, p. 97). Can we care in ways that don’t make us subordinate? Can we maintain these wonderful and beautiful performances of femininity in a society that has and continues to turn them against us? To take us for granted? Two factors common to women’s experience – the legacy of historical subordination and a frequent imbalance between care for others and care for the self – are singled out as likely contributors to heightened self-policing activity…the intensity of self-policing is likely to vary according to social location and personal experiences of violence and abuse (O’Grady, 2005, p. 26).

The purpose of my wedding is to elevate this self-love, self-relationship to a privileged position in my life. To give me a sense of self that is not always already assumed to be heterosexual and entirely dependent on the presence and validation of a man for legitimacy; to establish my selves as somewhat sovereign; to create a space where caring for the self is as necessary and enjoyable as caring for others.
An extension of caring for the self is to allow others to care for one’s self. To receive others’ recognition and legitimation of my worth is an act I have struggled with at many points in my life. I find myself wondering if compliments given are genuine or obligatory. The possibility that expressions of my worth are merely obligatory (a reflection of another person’s desire to be seen as kind, loving, or generous) has kept me from engaging with the love of others on many occasions. It has also protected me from persons whose expressions of love were dishonest and designed to manipulate me in ways that would serve them (and harm me).

For these reasons, I could think of no better way of showing my worth to myself than to engage in a day in which I would be the object of others’ admiration and affection. The people in my wedding party were especially influential in showing me how to care for my self; to demonstrate that I was worth caring for, that I was valuable.

**Preparing Bodies for a Wedding**

When the photographer arrives, she takes photos of me sitting on the couch, and then in the bathroom, trying to do my own makeup. I have all of the makeup items you could imagine…lipssticks, liners, mascaras, blush, foundations, creams, cleaners, brushes… But, somehow, I don’t know how to use any of them right now. I’m trying… and I’m making a mess. I’m looking at myself in the mirror and wondering how that little brush got all that powder onto my face… and I have no idea why it’s all pink.

Kari comes into the bathroom and looks at me… she seems to be able to tell that I’m lost. She connects with me, in that moment, as a woman living in a society that expects us to be pretty… that demands a beautiful bride… I know that she knows
something of my lost-ness…I remember her perfect make-up on her wedding day.

Following her kind instructions, I wash off what I did, and Kari starts over, gently and carefully applying colour to my eyelids.

“No eyeliner”, she says, “you don’t usually wear it and you don’t need it.”

I’m grateful for Kari in this moment, especially. This brief instant, on my wedding day, where it is just she and I, performing femininity. She is helping me to be a woman in a way that I don’t know how, and that is our relationship. One I need, and love, and want. In this moment, it doesn’t matter that Kari has her own life and her own priorities and feels bad that she hasn’t been as involved in all of the wedding activities as the rest of the wedding party or that I want her to feel okay about all of that. In this moment, we are not talking about her husband who ended his life or their daughter who is

Figure 20. Photo of Kari doing Amanda’s makeup.
Photo credit: TD Photography (2015)
two and needs her Mom, all day, every day. In this moment, two women are inelat
ionship to one another in a way that can’t (but claims to) be explained adequately by	heory or analyzed with academic prose. This self, this fumbling, incoherent, lost,
anxious, happy, overjoyed self, is connected peacefully and receiving love from another.
This self is beautiful.

When my makeup is done, I hide away, in my own hotel room, out of public
view, to squeeze my body into the many undergarments that will structure my cellulite.
Gary stands behind me, slowly and carefully doing up each clasp (there are 27) of the
white satin and lace bustier that I will wear under my wedding gown. I wear matching
white cotton panties and a pair of white spanx with long legs so that my thighs don’t rub
together or sweat profusely under my dress. Gary smiles and Tux barks, and very few
words are exchanged.

I often wonder if I take more from Gary than I give back. He is one of the most
loyal and self-sacrificing men I have ever met and his support and participation in this
wedding, a wedding that might threaten the ego or sense of masculinity of another man,
is remarkable. I am grateful for his presence in my life and although I often struggle to
accept what he offers, I am content to continue trying. At the same time, I understand that
I am deserving of his support as much as I am deserving of my own love and respect.
Maybe one day I will know more of the ways that I reciprocate for him that, today, are
invisible. He kisses me gently on the lips and tells me that he will see me later in the
ballroom. I wrap myself in my robe once more and head back to the group suite.

“Have fun!” he calls, as I head off down the hotel hallway.
The hallway and hotel are public space…and I hold my robe tightly around me, not wanting to make others uncomfortable with my body or to be uncomfortable in their gaze. I fully intended to let the photographer take pictures of me wearing only these special undergarments. I had thought for months about potential boudoir type photographs; I will probably never wear this expensive lingerie again, so I might as well have some pictures of it.

When no one else is looking I pose, letting my gown fall open, exposing these parts of my attire that aren’t supposed to be for public consumption and as the photographer raises her camera to her eye, I feel immediately afraid and reach to retie my robe. I am a fat girl and my body needs to be covered up; I hear my Father’s voice in my head saying, “no one wants to see that.” I immediately regret my decision to obey the body shame I have been “gifted” as a plus size gal.

The photographer is standing on top of the dresser, her head near the roof, and from there she captures many trains of bridesmaids, tying each other into their dresses and fussing over each other’s hair, makeup, shoes, and bodies. Kari is doing everyone’s makeup, now, and her face registers pride that she performs this act of service in a competent way. Their hair, a variety of wispy curls, loose braids, and short/straight/sassy look wonderful. My mom is here, in her colourful dress, smiling and helping, trying to steam the capes that will be worn over the gowns and helping the girls any way she can.
When all of the girls are laced tightly into their black gowns, I go into to Sol’s bedroom so that she can tie me into my wedding gown.

**My (im)Perfect Dress**

My dress isn’t what I wanted. Maybe it isn’t the dress…maybe it is my body. My body isn’t what I wanted… isn’t what it is “supposed” to be. The wedding discourses demand conformity… my body doesn’t conform…the only thing that does seem to conform, in this moment, is my desire to be a bride…and even that is fading…fast. The dress itself is wonderful.
It is a cathedral length gown cut from ivory silk. The bodice has decorative folds of silk and at the waist there are silver jewel embellishments. The bottom of the dress has at least three different layers, to create width at the bottom, I think. The top layer boasts long thick silk, ruched in a couple of places for effect. Underneath there are many layers of tulle. The train extends four feet behind me and doesn’t have the capability of being bustled.

The modern bride’s ensemble conjures up notions of aristocratic leisure. Her attire is confining and cumbersome; the bridal gown’s tight bodice and flowing train restrict mobility, evoking the prefeminist Renaissance when women of means often wore elaborate clothing that obstructed their movements to the point that they often required cadres of attendants to help them move about their own homes. The bride’s entourage of maids of honor, bridesmaids, junior bridesmaids, and flower girls suggests a fantasy of courtly female dependence; a feudal period of ladylike decadence and sexual segregation in which leisurely women reclined in the chambers primping cushions, embroidering, and braiding each others hair. (Geller, 2001, pp. 111–112)
It takes three bridesmaids to lift the various layers of the dress and straighten them out. I wait, patiently, being attended to, and feeling very important...glamorous...like a princess or a queen with others buzzing around trying to ensure the perfect day. Wonderful...and absurd, at the same time. I feel like a fraud; none of this is at all a reflection of who I believe my self to be. Yet, there I am in the mirror. A fat white female body in an ivory wedding gown

I stare at my reflection. My fingers touch the folded silk bodice of the dress. I’m trying to make sense of this experience. I feel present, but not myself. I see my body in the mirror, yet, in many ways, it isn’t recognizable. I look like a box. Where are my curves? I have no waistline. Is this what it is supposed to feel like? I look fantastic, feminine, elegant... what does everyone else see? Will they be honest and tell me that I should have chosen a dress that covered my fat arms; perhaps purchased a shawl or a shrug? Will the social scripts required at weddings blind them? Will they profess my beauty...my grace? Will I believe them?

I do not have the perfect body and as such, it would be impossible to have found the perfect dress. I could have gone to some stores in Regina and Saskatoon, but I couldn’t find any listed that specialized or even included plus size gown. So, I shopped online, knowing that whatever I bought would have to be altered anyways and so I picked the one I liked best from an online catalogue and had it shipped to me in the middle of nowhere.

I had given them my measurements back in January and was sure that I would lose some weight before the wedding. When the dress arrived, Gary helped me to take it
out of the box and wiggle into it and then he tried to lace it up. He wanted so badly to be able to help me get into the dress and he was very frustrated, throwing his hands up in the air in a fit of irritation when he couldn’t figure it out. I almost dragged the damn train through Tux’s bowls of food and water and I remember the laugh Gary and I had when he rescued me from this almost disaster. The dress was too big for me and the seamstress who did my alterations wasn’t able to make it much smaller.

It’s much too late now, to make any changes or continue to express any regrets. I must make the best of this dress; I will rock it as if it were exactly what I wanted. I will rock this whole day in the same way, as if every ounce of me believes that the day is mine and mine alone. I make a decision to acknowledge and quickly let go of anything that might bother me, today, and wonder how many of the things I planned will be forgotten; how many mistakes will be made?

When I walk out of Sol’s bedroom, the whole wedding party, and many of my family members have assembled and are waiting for instructions. There is no “big reveal” like they show on television stories of

Figure 23. Photo of Amanda looking at dress in the mirror while Sol does it up. Photo credit: TD Photography (2015)
the wedding; no big emotional moment were everyone stares at me and gasps… we all just carry on preparing to go downstairs. Brad and Claire have arrived in the suite and everyone is in a mad rush to get their capes steamed.

Mom tells me that guests have started arriving and that the photographer has gone down to the ballroom to start taking photos; she will return at 3pm, to take a group photo, and then we will all go downstairs together, for my wedding ceremony. I look at the clock on someone’s cell phone; it is almost 3pm.

The energy in this space is intense, tangible, and visceral. People are moving around hurriedly, putting final touches on hair and make-up and aggressively steaming stubborn wrinkles out of silk capes… I tell them to stop worrying about the wrinkles… today is far from perfect and the stress for that small detail isn’t worth it – no one will even notice the wrinkles. We didn’t clean up after lunch and there are plastic containers and cutlery strewn about, wrapping paper from opened gifts on the tops of the tables, and four bottles of champagne, two unopened, sitting in buckets of melted ice.

It’s 10 minutes past the scheduled start time and anxiety is starting to build inside
me. The tension in my stomach is increasing and it must be visible on my face – the photographer has returned and reminds me that they can’t actually start the wedding without me; that there is nothing to worry about.

We pose for a couple of “pin the boutonniere” photos; everyone, including me, is smiling. I am freaking out inside and I tell myself that I refuse to continue feeling anxious. I have waited far too long for this day and put way too much energy and time into the preparations… nothing will stop me from joy. Yet, the anxiety remains.

I try to calm. Breathe. We give up on steaming capes, pose for one last group photo, and make our way to the elevator.

![Figure 26. Photo of the wedding party before the ceremony.](image)

When we arrive on the second floor, we get out and line up in the hallway outside the ballroom. Within seconds, the music begins and my little brother leads the procession.
I wait.

I watch.

Once Sarah has gone through the doors, Ray and Robert close them and I feel like I am having a panic attack; my big fat girl heart is about to explode. Robert hands me some of the tissues that are overflowing from his suit pocket and I grasp them firmly in my hand, knowing that I will need them, and trying (failing) to breathe. I loop my right arm through his left and my left arm through Ray’s right.

These two men, without much acknowledgement or visibility, have lived alongside me for as long as I can remember; they’ve been helping to keep me upright in this world, since I was very young. Robert, my little brother’s biological father and my Mom’s best friend, has been a parent to me since I was three years old. Ray, our step-dad and my Mother’s life partner, made sure I got school every day and to many extra-curricular activities; he was there. They were both there, not harming me, most of my life. They are here, today, loving me unconditionally, and escorting me down the aisle to my feminist self-wedding ceremony. I am definitely not able to escort myself. I wonder if they dreamed of this day as I did? Did they dream that there would be a groom at the end of the aisle? That they would be “giving me away” as if I were an old hat, to the man who would keep me for the rest of my life? I stopped having that dream many years ago.

Breathe. You can do this, Amanda...Wait. Okay. Let’s go.

The doors open. The tears flow freely, heavier and more uncontrollable than before. My feet move me forward, my Dads holding me up, just as they always have.

“Just laugh,” Robert says, “then you won’t cry.” He has started to sob, as well, with
a big smile on his handsome wrinkled face. Tears streaming down his cheeks, he wipes them with a tissue, and keeps pulling me forward. Ray, on my left, is stoic and smiling. Beaming and proud. He never was the crying type.

I am signifier and signified as bride; I am the sign. My entrance, here, signals that I have accepted a role; this is the beginning of a performance beyond which my adherence to or deviation from the dominant wedding script will be judged as good womanhood or bad (Schick, 2000).

**Procession**

We walk up an aisle created by the placement of chairs, in the ballroom. Everyone is staring. Everyone smiling. I see my Aunt sitting in the audience, her tears just like mine. The people become blurry through my tears and desire not to see them.

I breathe. I walk. When I stop walking, at the “top” of the aisle, I take a moment to wipe tears from my cheeks having failed at my attempts to do so while walking. In this moment, as I assume many Brides are, I am thankful for waterproof mascara.

My two fathers kiss me on my cheeks and take their seats in the front row with the rest of my

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46 The creation of an aisle through the positioning of chairs is not unlike the creation of social structures through the positioning of bodies (in language and discourses).
immediate family. I stand here, both on my own and surrounded and supported by people. I look at myself in the mirror and I know my reflection – my eyes don’t fail me in this moment, they show me what I usually see, the strengths and the stories.

The ceremony begins and after what seems like the blink of an eye, it is over.

Dearest Amanda Lyn

I attended your wedding with admiration, curiosity, and fear. Admiration - for the courage, the creativity, the thought and the conviction to realize your dream of your feminist wedding. Curiosity - to see what it would be like and how those closest to you would react. Fear - for myself, feeling emotionally and socially...
vulnerable shortly after a personally life changing event.

I was deeply impacted by your ceremony and the welcome and support you shared with me on your special day. I am inspired by the support and love and acceptance your family and friends, who obviously have become your family, have for you. I felt privileged to be witness to such a significant personal event in your life.

Recently experiencing two significant events in which betrayal, pain and grief are the dominant themes, I was touched deeply: by you and our friends and the experience. The reading “The Invitation” by Oriah Mountain Dreamer touched my soul and hearing it for the first time as you stood so beautiful (in every way) in front of the mirror, gave me a strength and purpose that I have had difficulty connecting with.

Congratulations Amanda, I love you for being yourself and showing me it's okay to do the same; for welcoming me in my sorrow and pain; for inspiring me.

I am proud to know you.

With Love,
Anonymous

After the ceremony, we form a line in the hallway and guests hug everyone and shake hands as they depart the ballroom for the afternoon. The moments are starting to blur together, now. My feet ache and time is passing slowly and quickly. When the last hug is given and the guests have diffused, I plant myself firmly onto a black chaise lounge.

My Mom appears, wanting pictures with family members and after obliging her for a few shots (with my Aunts, with my Grandfather), I tell her we need to go to the park for formal photos. So we do. I load myself, with all of the layers and lengths of crinoline and satin, into the front seat of Gary’s pickup truck, Sarah gets in the back, and we head to the park to meet everyone else for pictures.
Reception

After spending a couple of hours taking formal pictures at the park and wedding party pictures in one my favourite bars, I am exhausted. We arrive back at the hotel and I crash onto the same black chaise lounge, outside the door to the ballroom.

I chose to be a barefoot bride – I thought that this would be the most comfortable of the many uncomfortable options for wedding footwear. The photographer snaps a picture of the bottom of my feet, which, I’m sure are disgustingly dirty. My feet are throbbing, now, and my soles are black; perhaps I should have worn shoes, after all. The bottom of my dress has collected its share of dirt; perhaps I should have had the seamstress add a bustle capability… People are coming and going and I make small talk with everyone who stops by my chaise lounge.

The wedding party has spontaneously discussed and decided together that they would like a Grande entrance into the ballroom for the reception. I hadn’t planned one but have absolutely no reason to object to their plan. They talk through a few song options and make arrangements with the DJ to play a song from Phantom of the Opera: “Masquerade.”

The music begins, and Kory introduces the wedding party, one by one. First Liz, then Claire, Brad, Kari, Sarah, and Sol. He says, “and here comes the bride…. Amanda Baldwin!” I enter the ballroom where my wedding party has created an arch with their arms and lily bouquets. I move through the wedding party and am greeted with warm applause by my guests. I fake a smile. My feet hurt.

We each go our separate ways in the ballroom. We had decided that we didn’t want
to have a head table – I would rather my wedding party enjoyed supper and speeches with their own families, friends, and guests, something that a head table would have prevented. Kari is sitting with her new partner and her daughter Ashtyn. Sarah and Liz are sitting at a table with a few of our single friends from the Strathmore area as well as Claire and Brad. Sol is sitting closer to the back of the room with a large group of our single friends from the Edmonton area.

My chair is at a table with the DJ and his partner and my friend Richard who has brought his two sons; Gary has a chair beside me although he spends most of the evening at a table with his Mom and sister, as well as my grandparents.

Our table is the closest to the front and is nested within three other tables; my chair faces the dance floor and sound system. To my left is the table Kory, and Vanessa are sitting at. To my right is a table full of coworkers from my time employed by a local family violence shelter, including Tina who officiated the ceremony, the table with Liz, Sarah, Claire, and Brad is behind me.

Kory makes a few short announcements and invites my friend Richard, at my request, to take the microphone; he says a generic blessing for the meal. I am the first in line to eat. Thinking about what to serve my guests was one of the easier of the wedding planning tasks. I have never enjoyed the turkey or roast beef usually served at wedding meals and according to all of the wedding planning books and articles I read, I was constructing an event that would communicate who I believed myself to be. So, I chose a buffet of pizza and chicken wings, mini-burgers, and other appetizers.

Not feeling very hungry, but anxious, and intending to go for seconds, I take only
a small amount of my favourite foods. With my plate looking pretty empty, I head back
towards my table. I become distracted by the conversation among my old coworkers and I
take a chair at their table to listen while I nibble. I don’t know why, but as I sit here, I am
trying my best not to drop anything on my already dirty and destroyed wedding gown. I
giggle at how ludicrous this whole thing feels. Is this really me? The people at the table tell
me nice things about the ceremony and about my dress.

“My arms are fat,” I say.

“No, you look beautiful,” they reply.

I am naught more than my packaging; my personhood is invisible (Engstrom, 2008). Beauty always involves some form of sacrifice. My dress has grown uncomfortable.
The boning from the bustier is poking hard into my armpits and I have been sweating from
carrying the extra weight of the heavy dress that drags behind me, getting caught on chairs
as I move around the room. I feel dirty…and clumsy…and awkward. I am the opposite of
graceful. This is bizarre.

I move cumbersomely and uncomfortably around the room, talking with various
people and thanking them for coming to my wedding. I approach a table in the back that is
full of feminist friends who appear to be having a heated debate. As I get close, they look
at me and the conversation immediately shifts to questions about my dress. I ask what the
debate that was going on before I sat down was about; no one answers my question. The
table vacates shortly afterwards, for their turn at the buffet line, and I find myself sitting
alone. I get up to move around some more.

Were they talking about me in a negative way? Were they engaged in a critique of
my wedding that they don’t wish me to know about? My insecurities creep up on me so easily. I shake my head and remind myself that I am enough.

It must be difficult to be a guest at this wedding, today. Although I have modelled a transgression of the status quo, are others not comfortable to do the same? Why are they so silent, now? My strong feminist friends and role models are also subject to the discursive norms of the wedding. As such, the discourse has called them to relate to me as the bride figure, and only the bride figure – I (and they) are reduced from human to female…to bride. Although my misappropriation and disruption are right here, right in front of us, it remains (im)possible to behave outside of the discourse; our autopilots conform to the status quo. If I had shared more of my imaginings and visions around this wedding, would my friends have been primed to engage more fully in my resistance? Who am I to say they didn’t, I can only speak to what they told me. Instead, our voices are all relegated to silence; our humanness and our bond is invisible, overshadowed by bride figure and her network of required utterances. We are, all of us, subjects that only emerge via established places within the pre-established chain of discursive meaning(s) (Judith Butler, 1993; George, 2012).

When everyone has finished eating, my cousin Lori-Ann (the second emcee) announces that the speeches are going to begin. I return to my seat and chat quietly with Gary, about nothing important. He has his arm wrapped around me and appears to love me more than ever, today. Kory and Lori Ann are terrific emcees; they fill the space between speeches with stories and jokes that seem to keep everyone engaged and entertained.

I am in awe of those who spoke. Each person, in their own way, reinforced the
meanings I had intended for this wedding. I couldn’t have made a better selection; I am
blessed and humbled to have such wonderful friends and family.

But, I Don’t Want to Dance

I didn’t give the DJ enough information about what I wanted and expected of him
as a vendor at my wedding. I was in no way shape or form a “Bridezilla” that harassed him
about how he might do his job. Rather, I created a bunch of options for song lists with
iTunes on my iPad, and handed the device over to him. I chose some potential “first dance”
songs, but I didn’t tell him that I would only want to use them if the mood felt right - It
didn’t feel right.

Before I find an opportunity to object, I am dancing, slow dancing, with Gary, in
front of everyone. He is supportive and overjoyed to be doing this – holding me, smiling
and laughing and talking to me in front of everyone. He is proud. He said that. He says it
again, and again…and again. He looks like he is proud. He reeks of pride. He is pleased to
be the elite, the partner of the Bride. Is he pretending to be a groom? I want to push him
away…to tell everyone I’m uncomfortable…to scream at the top of my lungs. I don’t. I
keep dancing. Silently. Faking my smile and freaking out inside my head.

This shouldn’t be happening. It feels wrong and inconsistent with what I was trying
to accomplish, here. And it’s the wrong song, this song was for dancing with my brothers.
I should have communicated better. This is my fault. I’ve made my bed and now I lie in it.
He said there are three songs… that means I’m going to have to slow dance with Robert
and Ray… and who else? My brothers? To the song I thought I might dance to with Gary?
These are slow songs, so depressing, they’re sucking any of the energy and joy I had left
right out of me. People are staring and no one is smiling, and I am vulnerable, here.

All of a sudden I’m dancing with Robert to a song I had considered when I was a teenager to dance to with my biological Dad on my wedding day. I’m sobbing uncontrollably and so is Robert. He’s holding me up and he’s telling me how proud of me he is and I can’t stop crying. My heart is breaking. This isn’t right. I’m happy to see him happy and I’m so terrified and all of the feelings won’t stop.

At these moments, my ability to engage in sequential talk was inhibited. Normally integrated movements of respiration and vocalization were no longer in synchrony. Stuttered sounds, crying and tears took the place of normal syntactical talk. (Sarbin, 2001, p. 221)

I’m pathetic. I’ve made a mess here just like I do of everything. I can’t do anything right. Why can’t I stop crying? Robert, please stop crying, you’re just making it worse. I have to get out of here.

Halfway through the song, I’m dancing with Ray, who was previously dancing with my Mom. I stop crying, immediately. Ray helps me “be strong,” stoic, like him. His silence, his presence, allows me to exist peacefully. I breathe, and in a fit of irritation I kick the train of my dress out from under our feet. I smile. This is absolutely absurd. I start to laugh.

I can’t wait to change out of this dress. As soon as the music is done, I’m outta here. I waited 32 years to get into this dress and now here I am, aching to get out of it.

The third song starts to play and I don’t know who I’m supposed to be dancing with, now. I can’t think. My Mom tells me that I will dance with my Grandfather, her Dad; she retrieves him and places him in front of me, so I dance. We sway, in an awkward embrace, my body is here, but my mind is gone. My Grandfather is crying. He tells me that he wishes my Grandma were still alive; he apologizes profusely for not knowing me very
well. Grandpa has only recently learned to cry; he’s done it quite a bit since my Grandma passed away. I didn’t know them very well when I was younger; I still don’t, actually. I do know that my Mother lived in various foster homes and with other family members when she was a kid and that she moved out on her own at the age of 14, to take care of herself. There was a lot of physical violence in the home and rather than take it, my Mom decided to leave. Until recently, I hated this man, who had so badly hurt my Mother. Maybe I still do. Maybe I just feel sorry for him now; he deserves more than that.

I wonder if my Grandpa ever hurt my Grandmother. She was very passive, didn’t say much, never did paid labour, and always had a pristine home and meals on the table…. I do wish I’d known her better before she passed out of this world… the stories she could probably have told me in our non-existent private moments often fill my imagination.

The slow dance music is finished and a good old two stepping song comes on. My cousin Doug takes my arms and we try to dance, but I trip over my dress and laugh loudly, telling him I need to go change into a shorter gown. This dress is ridiculous. This whole thing is absolutely absurd.

I go upstairs to my hotel room. Tux is here, wanting to be cuddled and so I give him some time. He licks the salt from the tears, off of my face. Gary helps me out of the cathedral gown and zips me into a shorter white wedding dress, only knee length. It’s really nothing special in comparison to the big heavy gown. We take Tux out for a short walk so he can use the bathroom, and we return him to the hotel room before we head back down to the ballroom. I wonder, for a moment, if I wouldn’t rather stay in my room and cuddle with the dog.
Self As Other; Dispossession

I want to tell you a story; I cannot claim the story purely as my own - the story does not belong only to me. I am limited to the “I” who tells, a self in debt and relation to others, norms, and experiences; the very essence of “I” is always constructed by and within a social field (Belsey, 2002). I refer to this “I” as the self…my self.

The very being of the self is dependent not just on the existence of the Other... the normative horizon within which the Other sees and listens and knows and recognizes is also subject to a critical opening (Judith Butler, 2001, p. 22).

The contrast between having control and feeling like myself at the ceremony and losing control and being just “the bride” at the reception was an important experience in my learning. “The bride,” as I now understand her, is not a position of agency; she is “defined” long before she is practiced by any particular body; she is a citation of previous performances. No one inhabits “the bride,” rather, all who attempt to practice her are exiles (some more than others); they are violently forced out of and dispossess from their more agentic selves, from more powerful subject positions.

Our organic/authentic existence/being, if we even have one, is entirely lost through performance of the dominant discourses. Here, more than in other spaces, we are further from knowing who we are. As such, there is an experience of continuous dissatisfaction as a consequence of the gap between the lost real and the socially produced subject (Belsey, 2002). A shift to understanding the self as a subject necessitates understanding the self as unstable and produced in relation to others through discourses and performance (Jackson, 2004).

I am from the start implicated in the lives of the other that the ‘I’ is already social and must begin its reflection and action from the presumption of a constitutive
sociality...I do not augment myself with my virtuousness when I act responsibly, but I give myself over to the broader sociality that I am (Butler & Athanasiou, 2013, p. 108).

The selves we practice are always related and interdependent. Our freedoms are always undone by the norms that regulate desire, gender, and sexuality; we are always dispossessed by the norms and their corresponding prohibitions (single, sovereign women) (Judith Butler & Athanasiou, 2013). Julia Kristeva (1982, 1997, 2002a, 2002b, 2002c) writes of how we are always strangers to ourselves – comprised entirely of foreignness, cultural orphans, suspended prohibitions, and demonstration of alterity. We are always “other” to our organism as the stranger within us. The stranger IS us.

From this always-interdependent position, we incorporate self-policing, guilt, and shame as much as love and desire (Butler & Athanasiou, 2013); sometimes, the self-policing undermines acts of rebellious self-love. My body, unrecognizable to my self during much of my time as a bride (apart from the ceremony), is performing discourses and practicing a subject that is not, never was, and never will be my own. I know, more clearly through this performance, that the bride figure doesn’t belong to me.

**How did this get so out of control?**

When I return to the ballroom, karaoke has started and people are singing whatever they want. The kids who are here each take a turn singing various songs from Twinkle little star to Gangnam Style. Almost half of the guests have left…I didn’t get to say goodbye; I feel robbed of an opportunity and obligation to be a gracious hostess. This isn’t supposed to be karaoke night. It’s supposed to be a wedding reception with dance music and a handful of karaoke songs here and there. I should have told the DJ that all the karaoke
requests needed to go through me. I should have established control. I have no control.

Frustrated, I tell the DJ that that’s probably enough karaoke for a while. He tells me that there are just a few more songs and then there will be some dance music… I’m not sure if the dance music ever comes. I have stopped caring – really, if people wanted dance music, they’d request it, right? James is pretty good about playing exactly what people put down on their song slips and if they put dance music down, he would play it.

The rest of the night is a blur. I am uncomfortable in my short dress, too; I should have taken off the tight structured underwear when I changed. It probably wasn’t the dress that was uncomfortable. I don’t remember any of the conversations I’ve had… The kids danced, squirming and break dancing on the floor and Kali’s ivory flower girl dress was as dirty and destroyed as my gown. What else would those garments be good for, anyways?

Karaoke continues all night. Songs I like and songs I don’t, good singers, bad singers, songs to dance to …some songs that make me leave the room. I drink a few glasses of wine but don’t want to be tipsy or intoxicated, so I drink tonnes of water, too. For the most part, the ivory dress floats around the room like a ghost; absent of my body, absent of my selves.

**Totally Giving In/Up; Dumping the Cake in the Garbage**

The photographer is ready to leave. She asks if there are any shots I wanted that she might have missed and I realize that we haven’t cut the cake. I have no desire to “be the bride” any longer, so, without inviting an audience, I grab the knife and cut into it, hastily carving out a large piece for my self – every ounce of me is ready for the familiarity of chocolate and cherries; black forest is my favourite.
The cake is one of the most disgusting things I’ve ever put into my mouth. It is dry and doesn’t resemble chocolate…. even the cherry filling, usually moist and rich, is dried out and bland. What is not bland, though, is the strong taste of liquorice the baker used to make black icing. I take a second bite to be sure that I’m not just being negative and pessimistic… I put my paper plate with the piece of non-cake into the garbage can and walk away.

In this moment, I think that today has been one of the worst days of my life. I feel invisible. No one has seen or interacted with who I am as a person or who I think I am; I have been relegated to the silent, gracious, bride…. I was a dress, floating around the room, without a person in it. I wish I could start over and plan it all again, there are so many things I would do differently.

I wouldn’t send invitations;
I wouldn’t buy a dress;
I wouldn’t have a wedding party;
I wouldn’t pay a caterer or rent space;
I wouldn’t buy or accept any gifts.
I would wake up one morning and text whoever was able;
We would go out into the middle of some random wheat field;
I would sit cross-legged on the Earth;
in a pair of yoga pants or a colourful printed cotton dress.
There would be no structured under garments.
I would sing my vows and play the mandolin;
and invite others to do the same
We would take pictures with cell phones.
It would be the greatest day of our lives…
Until tomorrow…
We’d do it again.
(Un)Recognition

Through performances that are visibly and audibly disruptive, we can expose the norms of legitimacy and recognition, by which woman-ness is established. We can open:

…space for developing an ethos of critique and transformation of self-understandings that have taken on the appearance of the natural…freedom is redefined in terms of ongoing negotiation with existing power relations (O’Grady, 2005, p. 8).

We can explore how the negative effects of compulsory heterosexuality and the heterosexual imaginary as well as masculine hegemonies have been incorporated into our practices of self might begin to be mended by the retelling of ones self (O’Grady, 2005).

In my ceremony and reception, the performance of self-wedding or being a groom-less bride, was an act of public resistance. “Occupying public space is crucial; dissolve the lines that demarcate the private, private enterprise from public, public scrutiny” (Butler & Athanasiou, 2013, p. 153). At many points, I considered it important (crucial) that my wedding didn’t happen in my own backyard, with no pictures and photographs, and few guests to observe. I chose a large guest list and a grand ballroom to make a very public statement: I belong there – that women belong in the world and need neither the permission nor the validation of men for their existence. I showed the world (or at least my guests and readers) that I could be a bride without a groom; a woman who is an individual first and foremost.

Yet, watching the videos and looking at the pictures, and remembering feel quite surreal. It was my body moving around and saying things. I see it in the video and I know in my memories that I was there; it resembled a wedding, as Kali indicated. The ivory
gown, the aisle, the music, the wedding party, the words… But… was it real? Was it really a wedding? Of this, I’m not sure. In some ways, it seemed like an intricate play, scripted and enacted, yet not entirely natural or authentic. Perhaps this is an effect of the dominance of masculine hegemony and compulsory heterosexuality: nothing else feels “real” or “right.”

In my mind, I understand that there is no such thing as real. Traditional heterosexual weddings are scripted and performed, constructed inasmuch as my feminist self-wedding was. The difference is that the traditional wedding, valorizing heterosexuality, is in a different place on an entirely constructed conformity-resistance spectrum. My feminist self-wedding might fall much further on the opposite side, towards practices thought or assumed to be radical.

I was the body of a bride, without a groom. Was I intelligible as a bride, without a groom? Was I able to displace the groom and reconfigure the bride as an acting and agentic female subject. Can I celebrate the union of my many selves or the marriage of my self to a new understanding of my self, and still call it a wedding? Are these the limits of agency? Does a wedding ceremony require the illusory union of two bodies in order to be intelligible?

If certain commonly accepted ideas about what it means to be a woman, a man, a mother, a child, a sexual being, a person of moral worth, a success, and so forth fashion our experience of selfhood and provide the basis by which others judge us and we judge ourselves, it is not difficult to see that a simple act of will is unlikely to transform illfitting norms (O’Grady, 2005, p. 95).

One cannot simply become a different subject (Belsey, 2002). I can’t simply perform the bride, without a groom, and think that this will have a lasting effect on how I practice my
self. I’ve come to understand that deviating from the dominant discourses and invoking an alternative has particular effects on one’s intelligibility as a female/feminine subject, and further as a human being:

There are advantages to remaining less than intelligible, if intelligibility is understood as that which is produced as a consequence of recognition according to prevailing social norms. Indeed, if my options are loathsome, if I have no desire to be recognized within a certain set of norms, then it follows that my sense of survival depends upon escaping the clutch of those norms by which recognition is conferred. (Butler, 2004, p. 3)

“The “I” is not coherent and stable, and agency is produced within the possibilities of reconfiguring the “I” “(Jackson, 2004, p. 682), yet, a single practice or performance of a different self does not make permanent change, especially on the larger social scale. The I, the bride in the wedding ritual, although not entirely stable is produced with more consistency than I previously thought. It takes many bodies repeating performances countless times so that the performance feels less abnormal and the traditional heterosexual wedding has been performed and cited so many times, a lasting rebellion feels impossible.

My wedding was not normal; it was uncomfortable. The narrative of it remains (un)usual (Tupper & Cappello, 2008). It was so uncomfortable, that afterward when people (jokingly) referred to me as a married woman, I laughed at them and rolled my eyes.

Paradoxically, my wedding was also quite normal; I was recognizable as a bride and thus, for the moment, valid and legitimate as female subject. It was so comfortable that when people ask me questions about it, I am happy to go into detail about how and why I did things the way I did.
Subjects are always in the endless process of becoming and a single choice, a single day, can be easily forgotten becoming irrelevant. I cannot capture the selfing that I did on the day of the wedding and put it in a jar on my nightstand to take with my vitamins when my self-regard is depleted. I can, however, install small artefacts in strategic places, to facilitate a remembering and invoke my sense of rebellion and resistance to the heterosexual organization of my social world that would have me feel inadequate as an unmarried, bisexual, fat woman.

The practices of self that legitimate women do not need to be huge, drastic, or monumental. To re-do this wedding every single day would be quite expensive. Smaller acts are much more sustainable and practical. Every morning, I wake up, and on the wall across from my bed is the signed copy of my wedding vows, framed and mounted. There are days that this object melts back into the wall and is entirely invisible; yet, there are moments that I notice it, remembering, and interrupting all of the messages that tell me I am nothing. Perhaps one can’t afford not to “make every day a wedding.” It’s just as important to resist dominance in the small things, the fleeting moments that are invisible to others; these small, regular, practices of rebellious self-love, I think, are more likely to undermine the discourses that don’t serve us.

**After it was Over, Waking from a Dream**

I wake up the morning after the wedding already beyond my threshold for tolerating people. I have a long soak in the shower with warm water washing over me. Did yesterday really happen? Was it all a dream? Of course it wasn’t a dream, just check your bank account and you’ll see the evidence. What an absolute and total waste of time
and money, energy and effort…

I take extra time to scrub my very dirty feet; I slept with socks over them, to protect the white hotel sheets. After I dry off, I pull on a clean pair of black yoga capris and a very light white tunic sweater. I slide my feet into yesterday’s white flip-flops and go downstairs for breakfast and the scheduled gift opening.

I am not hungry. People around me are talking and I am not listening to them. My Mom is trying to move the gift opening ahead an hour as both of my sets of grandparents want to take part and then get on the road. I contemplate who other than them might be interested in watching me open the handful of gifts I received and decide to go ahead; most of the gifts are envelopes anyways.

## Gift Opening

The bridal registry as an institution is guided by a set of interlocking assumptions: life begins with marriage, home begins with marriage. Domestic pleasure begins with marriage. Hospitality begins with marriage. Monogamous male and female partners who are legally yoked together deserve and need well-appointed homes. (Geller, 2001, p. 163)

Only one person has ever been accused me of behaving in an entitled way; my biological father spewed this word angrily and abusively at me after I told him that I would no longer tolerate his alcoholism or violence and that he could not be in my life until he dealt with his personal issues. The word, along with the rest of his comments, put me into a self-exploration spiral whereby I re-examined many of my privileges and relationships with other people.

I wanted to tell my guests that gifts would not be accepted. I’ve gone to weddings that I did not take gifts to out of rebellion of the obligation. I don’t like giving gifts that I
feel I have to give; I prefer to give gifts when the mood strikes or the item found is a “perfect” fit. Conversely, I do not like receiving gifts that I feel have been given out of obligation. I do not have gift exchange traditions with any of my friends. With family, I’d rather give than receive; our best Christmas, for me, was when no one bought anyone gifts and instead we made a donation to a local non-profit organization. Receiving is incredibly uncomfortable for me. I felt like I did not deserve to be gifted; because this wasn’t a typical wedding, I shouldn’t expect typical gift giving behaviours.

Maybe at the age of 32, with many tremendous opportunities for employment and education, and a reasonable amount of money that I earned myself, I felt that I didn’t need gifts from anyone; like planning, paying for, and executing my own wedding, I didn’t need (or want) the financial support of people whose presence and company was the gift I’d rather enjoy. Laurie tells me that some people view it as an act of generosity to receive a gift; to receive a gift is to give a sense of purpose and generosity to the giver. From this view, a selfish refusal to receive gifts may indeed construct me as entitled.

My self-exploration, conversations, and journaling during the wedding planning process led to the decision to sit with the discomfort of receiving…to attempt to embrace it. I created a few options for guests to explore as registries. First, I made public my Amazon.ca wish list as well as my Etsy.com favourites list. Then, I explored options for online registry creation and ultimately put together a registry at Bed, Bath and Beyond. Lastly, I chose a non-profit organization (the family violence shelter I worked at) and suggested that guests who wished to could make donations in lieu of gifts.
I am very grateful to those who did take the time and expended energy and/or other resources to give me something. I received gifts of effort, objects, money, and shelter donations, from a quarter of the total guest list. I was quite disappointed (and surprised about my disappointment) about the gift receiving process. I was not upset that more than three quarters of my guests chose not to conform to the obligatory gifting custom/culture/tradition; rather, I was disappointed and even disgusted with the discussions that led me to expect more. The stories I’d heard from many friends that they received so many wedding gifts or made so much profit with their drink tickets that it balanced out the cost of the wedding led me to view my experience as inadequate in comparison. I would be blatantly lying if I told you that I did not come to fantasize about the lavish treasures typically bestowed upon the bride (and groom). Had I hoped that people would gift a single bride in the same way that they do a heterosexual one?

By denying household goods to the scholar we send the aggressively anti-intellectual message that his or her work does not matter to us. By withholding domestic necessities from the unmarried woman we invalidate female independence….by ritually showering gifis on women who marry, we enshrine both female dependence and the traditional family…possessiveness and the ideal of sexual ownership…male power through the still dominant masculine patronym…and [denigrate] unmarried women. (Geller, 2001, p. 167)

**Discipline and Category Maintenance**

Obviously, both men and women can and do resist participation in the institution of le compulsory heterosexuality, creating alternative forms of being in heterosexual relationships or claiming identities and lives as gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgendered, or single. However, such departures incite significant and not infrequently severe ramifications and retributions. (Tolman et al., 2003, p. 161)

Although the wedding was clearly mine and there clearly was not a groom (albeit was very present, visible, and involved), there were a handful of gifts that were addressed not just
to me, but to Gary and I. I can never know what the intentions of these guests were; rather, I can read the text itself and understand that it is not yet considered “legitimate” to be a bride without a groom. These gifts reminded me that it is my current male partner who makes me intelligible to others; without him, I am, or at least a gift to me is, dispensable and disposable, optional at best, and at worst unacceptable. Despite my protest, it seems that Gary has claimed me in some way, at least in the eyes of some of my wedding guests.

After the gifts were open, those who travelled departed and after only a brief amount of conversation, everyone else left, too. I had a nice long afternoon nap with Gary and Tux, already trying to forget about everything that had happened – eager to relegate my feminist self-wedding to the past. Attempting to resist dominance is exhausting; in this moment, I am more comfortable being obedient.

**Recognition, Intelligibility, and Social Mattering**

Many times in my life it has been easier and desirable to embrace the privileges conferred by passing as heterosexual. I look forward to a day when there are no risks for queer subject positions. Then, I could more actively write about my formation as a bisexual subject, without fear of what my parents, friends, or others will think of me when they read it. Bisexual subjects are made invisible and unintelligible in many ways. The most salient, for me, is the incorrect assumption that a bisexual person who enters into a long-term partnership with someone of the opposite sex or gender, is no longer bisexual. Compulsory heterosexuality makes me invisible.
Although I embrace Gary as a long-term life partner, I do not embrace the required monosexuality and monogamy prescribed by compulsory heterosexuality. To do this seems as though it would deny or erase the numerous romantic and sexual experiences I have had with women and others as well as the two women with whom I have/had longer and very significant relationships. To totalize who I am as a person and by my current relationship with one man makes me unintelligible to my self; it does not fit with who I understand my self as being and becoming. Compulsory heterosexuality and the binary of homo and hetero sexuality fails to describe me.

Recollecting the self is a precarious exercise (Butler & Athanasiou, 2013). How can one begin to challenge the vanity and ego-centrism assumed of normative selfhood? The work of stories, specifically re-storying, is available for deconstructing “the dominant stories that have overshadowed the preferred account of people’s lives” (O’Grady, 2005, p. 50). We can write the woman as “beautiful object,” and/or we can get messy, and deploy writing specifically against masculine hegemony (Butler & Athanasiou, 2013). Do I always have to see myself positively? Do I always have to be properly dressed with carefully applied makeup and stylish hair? This is not my lived experience and I have chosen to include, and thus love, the aspects of my body and my inner monologue that are less pleasant.

There is a line/boundary between those who are and are not considered “properly human;” we are categorized into groups of people who deserve either a long life or a slow death (Butler & Athanasiou, 2013). We produce dispensable/disposable populations through sexism, racism, homophobia, heteronormativity, ableism, and familialism,
among others. Normative powers unevenly distribute/arrange the “freedom” to take up particular subject positions and the privileges/power conferred through associated performance. Through the tyranny of the normal (O’Grady, 2005), we are divided into tolerant/tolerated identities or intelligible/unintelligible subjects (Butler & Athanasiou, 2013).

Distinct ideologies (capitalism, colonization, masculine hegemony, heterosexuality) masquerade as the only serious/robust arena for understanding. These understandings become taken for granted (unquestioned) as natural or “common sense” (Butler & Athanasiou, 2013); they become tyrannical (O’Grady, 2005). These ideologies inform the practices that move bodies into various configurations.

The dominance of weddings and compulsory heterosexuality (Rich, 2003) are not visible as problematic for bodies that are made intelligible through their practice. For bodies made unintelligible or illegitimate by these practices, however, the wedding ritual and power dynamics are always visible and important.

A fuller exploration of wedding discourses and performances would seek to understand how my experience as a white middle class cis-female is different from those who are not white, relinquished to lower SES, and not cis-gendered. I have no doubt that marginalized “identities” experience similar and different types of illegitimacy and misrecognition. I struggle, here, to put words to this as I am reluctant to speak for others. I consider, everyday, how I might create space for marginalized voices to be heard and recognized as speaking for them and I acknowledge that this document, focused only on my experience, fails to include these voices and experiences. It is my hope, however, that
within the context of this autoethnography, this acknowledgement of my cis-, race, and class privileges are enough to trigger others to seek more diverse perspectives and stories of experience and to understand that I speak and write only for the self that is mine. My experience is not the experience of all women.

Discourse governs pleasure and desire through incorporation of discipline and norms (formation of the subject) into the practices of self (Belsey, 2002). “Being affirmed culturally is a crucial element of a robust sense of self” (O’Grady, 2005, p. 19) – without this cultural affirmation, bodies experience a lack of recognition, intelligibility, and social mattering (both externally and internally). Assimilation is a prerequisite of recognition (Butler & Athanasiou, 2013) and discourses include parameters of discipline, technologies of power that create conforming citizens who are docile (no fight) (Belsey, 2002). In an interview with Vikki Bell (2010), Judith Butler said:

There are so-called subjects who are…subject to de-production, an awkward way of trying to describe those who never get to enter into the process of being explicitly produced as subjects…there are subjects who get produced, others who don’t get fully produced or who are only partially legible, and those who don’t get produced at all… there are forms of suffering or de-realization, or unintelligibility, or inassimilability that are not just there, but produced, enforced and managed over time, that get lived out, or that set a limit to what can be lived out. (pp. 133–134)

The ritual of weddings, positioned as romantic and desirable, maintains the hold of compulsory heterosexuality (Rich, 2003) and masculine hegemonies. Without a dispossessed and docile bride; masculinity would not be reproduced with the power to confer recognition, intelligibility, and social mattering. Bodies would find other ways to practice the self.

In some interactions, I was not recognized as a bride because I did not have the
required and necessary groom subject permitting me access to credibility. In some cases, as in the gifts addressed to me and Gary, guests engaged in practices of category maintenance to discipline me back to heterosexuality (Bronwyn Davies, 2002) and remind me that I cannot and should not deviate from my rightful place beside a man; my rebellion has consequences for my legitimacy and recognition.

Self-making always carries risks of unintelligibility; we must acknowledge the problematic limits of translating culture and language (Butler & Athanasiou, 2013) particularly when we practice selves that are alternative to dominant discourse (when we invent or invoke new and unfamiliar ways to speak our selves into existence). There are very few discourses that permit a groom-less bride and there are penalties (withheld recognition, discipline, etc.) for rejecting norms (Belsey, 2002).

I experienced and described the maintenance of heterosexuality and masculine hegemony. It was implicated in the actions of wedding guests, including vendors and wedding party members, and it influenced my self-talk and emotional response in a big way.

Take the description of dancing with Gary, my Dads, and my Grandfather, for example. Part of my distress and discomfort may have been the way I felt pushed into normative performance. A colleague pointed out to me that this description as well as many others I wrote, describes how “it is easier to feel personal failure than structural oppression or the reinforcement of the very institutions you’re rebelling against” (Tiffany Sostar, Personal Communications, 2016). I couldn’t agree more.

My alternative discourse or act of resistance can only be seen and understood
within the dominant discourses of masculine hegemony and heterosexuality, rendering my experiences of the alteration as surreal, indescribable, or questionable. I opened “the bride” to a radical rearticulation of woman-ness, dis-embedding (dis-implanting; un-inserting; un-entrenching; un-surrounding) the Bride (and thus the woman) from her social/historic condition of heterosexuality (Butler & Athanasiou, 2013). To perform disruptively and to re-enact the sign outside the sanctioned boundaries (heterosexuality; female deferred to the male) was an act of agency and resistance (Butler & Athanasiou, 2013). That it felt ludicrous and absurd attests to the dominance of heteronormativity.

Rather than the groom-less wedding as an answer to the question of liberation, we must keep the question open. The vast majority cannot have a lavish wedding even once\(^{47}\), never mind every day and so numerous other practices by other bodies in other moments are needed to privilege the concept of self-love over romantic partnership.

**Consuming the Leftovers**

In the late evening, I pack up the leftover food and wine and head over to Kory and Vanessa’s to say goodbye. Kali has left for her week with her biological Mom and Cohen has left for some time with his biological Dad.

The wine goes down quick and smooth and I am more relaxed than I have been in months. We eat pretzel buns dipped in hot mustard, slices of rich Gouda, and a boozy blueberry trifle that a baker friend sent down from Edmonton on Friday; these items were meant for the rehearsal dinner and were forgotten after the dinner was rescheduled into a

\(^{47}\) It is important to acknowledge that my ability to think and execute this wedding was directly related to race and class privileges that I did not earn.
lunch in order to make time for group manicures and pedicures.

“The most interesting thing happened this morning,” says Vanessa. “Kali and Cohen were playing tea party with the stuffed animals you gave them as thank you gifts. I went to check on them and over heard them having a very important conversation. Cohen was talking about weddings and which girls in his class he was going to marry and Kali said to him:

You don’t have to marry anyone.

You could marry yourself, like Auntie Manda.
CHAPTER EIGHT – SELF AS SOCIAL

Grasp the ways in which ‘we’ are called out of ‘our own’ self-authorizing temporalities and spatialities and toward modes of becoming-with-one-another, supra individual modes that are out of sync with regimes of social regulation and the identitarian apparatus (Butler & Athanasiou, 2013, p. 71).

The doorbell rings; I hear Kali scramble from the kitchen. All kinds of noises drift upstairs from the entranceway as I pull my turquoise fleece blanket off my feet and squeeze my legs to push in the foot of the black leather recliner. My toes curl into the long threads of the cream shag carpet and I pull myself up to standing.

“It’s so good to see you!” Nev is saying. As I approach the glass balcony overlooking the front entrance, I see that she has her arms around my niece, in a very good hug. Sarah stands behind them, in the doorway, heavy looking bags in each hand as she tries inelegantly to kick off a pair of hiking boots.

I hear the toilet flush and water run as I reach the bottom of the stairs and Sol emerges from the main floor bathroom, giving me the very wide smile I cherish. She steps forward, hugs me loosely, and kisses me deeply and softly on the lips.

“Hello, Amanda!” Nev’s voice is always much bigger than her tiny Filipino body. I knew her best in my late 20s, her mid 40s, when she had what she called her Buddha body. Always a ray of sunshine, especially in deliverance of comments and opinions on feminism, gender essentialism, issues of race, and oppression – I’ve never met someone so overjoyed to transgress social expectations and trounce all over the official stories that don’t serve us. I’ve learned a lot from my friendship with Nev, not the least of which are the possibility (her belief) that our souls are race-less, gender-less, class-less beings that couldn’t care less about our ultimately irrelevant “meat suits” and about how people who
claim to “not see race” are actually saying they don’t see her – that her race is no more invisible than the bulging erections of aroused men. I hug Nev tightly, happy as ever that she has beaten cancer once more.

“It’s been way too long, again” I say to Sarah as I pull away from her embrace. Sarah wasn’t able to make it out the past two years; she has been solely responsible for the farm and animals that were left behind after her Mother passed away. This year, a new male partner offered to take care of the horses, dogs, and other animals so that Sarah could get away. “I feel terrible that I haven’t been out to the farm to see you. I should have made you a priority, especially after your Mom…” My words stick in my throat.

Tears fill both our eyes. “It’s been a tough couple of years, that’s true,” she says. “You’ve had your own things to deal with, here, though, and you know what they say about good friendships – no matter how long we’re apart, we can always pick right back up where we left off.” Sarah is always so humble, and realistic, and positive. I envy her endless optimism. Grief was never a spot that Sarah sat in for too long. She and I have been through a lot together; junior high, band camps, boyfriends, their children, break ups, relocations, new apartments, new houses, new jobs. She’s one of very few women I know who also knows what it is like to be child-free.

“So, it looks like we beat them, then?” Sol is referring to the other vehicle, travelling from southern Alberta.

“They shouldn’t be much longer. Both vehicles were set to arrive by 5pm…”

“What are the sleeping arrangements, dearest hostess?” asks Nev.

“I was hoping no one would object to giving the two spare bedrooms to the two
couples. I blew up the queen sized air mattress in the great room upstairs and there are four recliners on the sectional up there that are super comfy for sleeping on as well as the big nest chair.” I haven’t sat in my big round nest chair since the day Tux died; that was his favourite spot to cuddle. “There’s also the white sectional down here which isn’t nearly as comfy and a loveseat in my office. Kali, you’ll sleep with me in my room, just like when you were a kid.”

Kali nods.

“Ooooh, goodie, I call the air mattress!” Sol speaks first.

“What’s that, now?” Brad asks from the still open door, startling me a little. I didn’t hear them pull into the driveway.

“Amanda was just telling us that we’re all going to couch surf, like a good old fashioned sleepover, while you four lovebirds get the spare rooms.” Sol always says things as she sees them and usually does so with neither positive nor negative undertones. It’s a trait that I respect.

“Super! I wouldn’t want any of you to witness what Claire and I do behind closed doors!” Brad says, barging in and hugging me tightly. Kali rolls her eyes and giggles. Claire comes in the door behind him and Tina and Ken take up the rear.

Ken and Tina hadn’t met before the week of my wedding and are now almost inseparable; their adult children have long left their homes and the two of them have been travelling the world together like wild college kids on spring break. I think they were in Greece just last month and have their next trip to Germany planned for the spring.

The noise is intense, echoing off the vaulted entrance as everyone greets one
another, excitedly.

“I’ll let you all get settled in, now. Kali and I are going to put supper in the oven and collect the extra chairs from the crawlspace. The drawers in the big bathroom are filled with clean fresh towels if anyone needs to rinse off their car ride. Does anyone need anything from me, right this second, or do you all know your way around?”

“Whatever you’re cooking, add extra garlic to mine!” Brad calls from the top of the staircase. He is always a joker and teaser and sometimes, to my delight, the king of puns; he usually raves about my very strong homemade garlic Caesar dressing.

A Good Chocolate Cake

We convene around the kitchen table an hour later and my stomach is growling. I was tempted to cut into the cake Kali decorated with dark chocolate icing and cherries before supper, but told myself this would be rude. Everyone pulls their chairs up close to the table and without having to be asked they start passing around trays of salad and garlic toast. Claire slices up the lasagne and asks for everyone’s plates so she can serve pieces from the huge glass casserole dish.

“That dish and these big serving utensils were gifts from my wedding,” I whisper to Kali, giving her a wink.

“What’s that about your wedding?” Sarah asks from across the table.

“Oh, um… Kali stumbled across my old thesis text this morning. We spent the first half of the day going through one of my memory boxes and watching wedding videos…” I respond, feeling awkward and embarrassed.

Do I still have grounds to call myself unmarried? I have been with Gary for 17
years, now, and although I am happy to continue this way, I often wonder what my life would have been like without him. Does being with him defy the very point of my thesis which was that it is problematic to totalize women by their relationships (or lack thereof) with men? Am I a bad feminist?

“That was such a happy and wonderful day; a lot of fun” Sarah says.

“Auntie seems to be having a hard time telling me the stories,” Kali says, exposing me entirely. “Maybe you all could tell me what you remember?”

“That was the first time I ever got a mani/pedi!” Brad announces.

Everyone laughs.

Claire builds on his response: “I remember how disappointed he was when it seemed like we might not have time to fit them in as a group. When we got to the salon, his joy was contagious. He wore his bright orange finger and toenail polish proudly for weeks. He even took off his shoes during the formal pictures so that the photographer could get an image of our rainbow of pedicures; everyone’s polish matched their capes and bouquets.”

“It was entirely a girl thing to do, back then,” explains Nev “and that meant it was taboo or unacceptable for boys or men to do it, too.”

“You wore a dress too, didn’t you?” Kali looks right at Brad.

“I wish I could say that I did. I just didn’t feel right about it… you know.

“That’s too bad,” says Kali, “dresses can be so much fun.”

“I did wear a blouse and kilt, under my cape. Don’t ask if I wore underwear though – I’ll never tell!” he teases.
Kali and I both smile at him, rolling our eyes.

“It was a strange experience; the feminist wedding was… some of it felt like an elaborate play and other parts like fun and games…” Brad replies.

“I know what you mean,” I agree. “Could you say more about it being a strange experience…?” I feel more comfortable probing other people to talk than I do talking about myself, today. Maybe that’s part of how I became a counsellor… or a result of becoming a counsellor….

“Well, as the only male in the wedding party, I felt incredible pressure to behave… to appear as an enlightened feminist man. That’s not a person I knew how to be, though… so, I did my best to just be present and to have fun. To lighten the heavy stuff… as I always do.” Brad winks at me and then at Kali (Personal Communications, 2015).

“I think it interesting that you don’t identify yourself as an enlightened feminist. To me, you are more of both than most people who use those labels.” Nev speaks up.

“Oh? How so?” He asks her.

She pauses.

“Well, you’re more comfortable being feminine in ways that most other men are not… talking about feelings and being reflective and introspective. And, you’ve never placed restrictions on Claire because she’s in a relationship with you.” I interject.

The room is quiet for a moment; sounds of chewing fill my ears.

Ken breaks the silence. “I remember people making a lot of jokes, thinking they were being really funny or witty about the whole thing – making light of the event
probably in their experiences of awkwardness and discomfort.”

“When we watched the videos, this morning, my Dad made a lot of bad jokes, didn’t he Auntie?”

“Humour is a coping mechanism for a lot of people.” I wink at Brad.

“Kory wasn’t the only person who made jokes.” Ken speaks up. “Interestingly, many jokes were made (by dudes) about the consummation of a self-marriage.”

“Some of the jokes were pretty vulgar, like that.” I add. “Some others made jokes or funny comments about how a self-marriage would or could never end in divorce.”

“I’m not sure they were jokes. Your self-marriage has lasted longer than the majority of most heterosexual marriages, hasn’t it?” asks Ken, smiling.

Physically, I can never permanently and voluntarily escape my body (unless we consider thinking about potential afterlife achieved through death). I do engage in a daily meditation whereby I attempt to “let go” or release (which is only ever really attempting to accept and minimize) the parts of my self that aren’t helpful or experienced as positive or healthy. Is that akin to “divorce?” Why do I have to compare my experience to that of heterosexual couples? I feel frustrated that my descriptions are limited and always framed within heteronormative discourses.

“I guess so.” I reply. “I think that the difference between a joke and an offensive comment relies on how the recipient of the comment feels. I remember feeling irritated that people had to compare my wedding to heterosexual weddings in a funny or witty way. It was as though the entire purpose of their comments was to point out that I was different…or that even though weddings or marriages are problematic, that they’re not as
problematic or absurd as my wedding.”

“You struggled with a lot of things around the wedding, I recall.” Says Claire. “Of all the years I’ve known you, you were never as stressed out or tightly wound as you were that week. You had a lot on your plate and you were very emotional and sensitive in a vulnerable and beautiful way.”

Everyone around the table is nodding.

“Yes. I was. I needed a prescription for sleeping meds to get through the weeks before and after the wedding. The doctor also prescribed me anti-anxiety medication to help me cope.”

“Yeah. I knew that. You weren’t your self. You weren’t the carefree Amanda that we enjoy so very much.” Claire and Brad nod and smile together.

“What else do you remember about the wedding?” Kali redirects the conversation.

“I remember Amanda’s feet.” Says Nev. She looks at me. “Do you remember saying ‘this is what a bride's feet are supposed to look like’ to me? I meditated for months on why this was the most profound memory I had of your wedding. I think it is because that statement illuminates for me how you had accurately framed how traditional roles are represented at weddings but no one speaks of them.

The centre of attention is always the bride. It is always about the bride. How beautiful she is, how beautiful the dress is, how gracious she is at the wedding. All the groom has to do traditionally is show up and he gets equal billing in the big show.

Foot washing is an act that shows fealty and servant leadership in the Christian tradition. I remember looking at your dirty feet and thinking that you saying what you did
was like you rebelling against another tradition where your feet were as dirty as you wanted. You and no one else would wash your feet to prove your fealty and servant leadership to yourself or that you would not accept that gesture from anyone else. You were the bride having your wedding with dirty feet” (Personal Communications, 2015).

Everyone laughs and their faces seem to reflect on what Nev has just said.

I don’t remember having that conversation with Nev. I chose not to wear shoes because I had heard complaints from every bride I’d ever talked to about how the shoes made for brides are as uncomfortable as they are beautiful. I had looked at some bridal shoe choices and laughed at the height of the heels and the ludicrous idea that I should wear footwear that would have any possibility of being uncomfortable. I thought about the most comfortable footwear and realized that I love being barefoot and so would do this under my dress. If I had to wear shoes, they would be the cheapest pair of white flip-flops I could find. Nev is right; this was an act of resistance and rebellion against the painful norms and regulations around appearance.

“I have pictures of my dirty feet somewhere, Kali… and yours too. Remind me tomorrow and we can try to find them, okay?”

She nods. Smiling. Her face…my face….

Claire speaks next. “The thing I remember most isn’t so much anything that happened at or during the wedding, but rather, trying to explain why I was being your bridesmaid, to my very Catholic Grandmother” (Personal Communications, 2015).

“Old religious fanatics don’t understand a whole of lot much,” says Sol.

I think about Gary’s family, most of whom self-identify as belonging to the
Christian faith. I had sent invitations to his parents as well as both his sister and brother and their families (both are heterosexually married, each with two children). Of all ten members of his family, only his Mom and sister attended my feminist self-wedding. I remember all of the questions that they both asked about what and why I was having this wedding the way I was. Neither were intentionally disrespectful - more curious and doing their very best to be supportive and find their own sense of understanding. They wanted to comprehend how I had come to this decision. No one else in Gary’s family asked any questions or took any interest in my wedding aside from informing me they would not attend.

Interestingly, when the pictures were uploaded to Facebook, many of his friends and extended family members assumed that he and I had gotten married and offered their congratulations. Tired of correcting and explaining, I let most of the comments pass.

I shake off my thought tangent as Sol begins to talk. “I had so much fun at the wedding. My one standout was that the people you chose to be in your wedding very easily meshed and cooperated with each other. No prima donas. We all had input for the pictures, the bride's entrance, etc. Lots of on the fly little decisions made the day more memorable” (Personal Communication, 2015).

I remember each of the wedding party having input and making many of the decisions, especially those that I was too tired or busy to make (what to wear, where to buy it from, what to include in the orders of ceremony and reception, where to meet, etc.). After I spent the day before the wedding shopping for many last minute items, including flowers and Hershey’s kisses for the centerpieces, Sol (along with Sarah, Brad,
Claire, and my friend Kevin) stayed up until 2am, cutting and trimming the loose stems and arranging flowers and chocolate kisses into thirty vases. They set out the orders of ceremony and reception, the “meet the wedding party” flyer, favor boxes (stuffed with a ring pop, sweethearts candy, a personalized notebook and pen, and bubbles) for the ceremony, and the favors for the reception (treble clef shaped bookmarks and bottle openers). They answered a lot of questions from other people; many more than I knew they did.

I remember having long conversations with Sol about her interactions with others about the wedding. She would attend events in Edmonton where some of my wedding guests were and she gave them as many details as she could. She encouraged others to treat my wedding like any other and to be prepared for a good time. Sol even lent my friend Karen one of her fancy dresses to wear to the masquerade themed reception.

Other conversations seemed to be characterized by curiosity. People asking questions about the wedding and what the whole thing was about. No one described having conversations that could be thought to be negative. The whole thing fascinated others. Some guests even emailed asking if they could bring others’ that I had never met who were super interested in the topics my wedding might address.

“You all did quite a bit of work in the months and weeks leading up to the wedding as well as the night before, day of, and morning after. I wouldn’t have made it through the event without all of that support and help.” I look around the table, meeting the eyes of my closest friends as I express this gratitude.

This doesn’t differ much from the discussions I’ve had with others about the way
their heterosexual weddings have been carried out. Most wedding parties are quite involved in choosing their own outfits and helping the bride to choose her dress and make other decisions. If anything, my wedding party was less involved in the planning than others might have been due to the physical distance between us – ten hours is much too far to drive for a dress fitting. Their participation was limited to looking at websites and having conversations with the whole group on Facebook; we shared a lot of pictures. On the night before and they day of the wedding, each of them were diligent about asking what they could do and making sure it was done to my liking. This is similar to what other brides have described.

“What else are personal attendant good for?” Sarah smiles at me.

“What meanings did you take from the ceremony?” Kali asks the group.

“The whole thing was about self-love,” says Ken, directly to Kali. “Your aunt showed us that, not just in the words she said during the ceremony but in the way she embraced each one of us where we were at during that point in all of our lives. I had just lost my job and career of twenty years and was on the verge of losing my house and all other possessions. My mental health was lower than it had been through my entire life. I was working a labour job, trying to prevent my bankruptcy, and they scheduled me the night before and the night after the wedding. When I talked to Amanda about this, she asked what she could do to help and how she could accommodate this shift in my life while still maintaining my involvement in the wedding, which she knew was very important to me and I knew was important to her.”

I’m stunned. I’ve never heard Ken talk like this about me before and I am at a loss
for words.

He continues, “she really modelled for me how to be gentle and accepting with myself; to acknowledge both my limitations as well as the commitments, beliefs and values that remain important.”

“Amanda did that for me as well,” says Tina, beaming joy in Ken’s direction. “The months surrounding the wedding were some of the hardest in my life, also. We knew we were losing my Mom to cancer and I remember spending every day up until Amanda’s arrival, in bed, not wanting to face my life. The wedding and the oath of self-love was a shining moment in a really dark time and it helped me to face my life and my pending loss; it put many of my other relationships into perspective – especially the one with my Dad – and I remain grateful for that.”

I meet Tina’s eyes, and smile with her.

“Your Auntie was a model for a lot of the single women friends we share, who attended the wedding.” Nev speaks again. “Many women struggle with relationships and break-ups and through the years, in their struggles, they’ve often told me they remember the feminist wedding and tell themselves that don’t need a man to complete them – that they are whole already and always in community with a larger network of social relationships.”

“I’m starting to see that, for myself,” Kali tells the group.

**Loving My Self**

We talk and talk and talk, until the sun starts to peek in the window. I am barely able to keep my eyes open and so I say goodnight to my friends, and head upstairs to my
room, where Kali has long been asleep in my king sized bed. Without turning on the lights, and slightly tipsy from all of the wine, I fumble around for the door to my ensuite bathroom, so that I can do my business and put on fresh pyjamas.

“Is that you, Auntie?” Kali calls, sounding younger than she is.

“Yes, kiddo. I’ll be right out,” I say as I close the door and turn on the light.

I wash my hands and face, brush my teeth, and change into a long oversized red and black flannel nightshirt with buttons down the front and a pocket on the left breast. I turn off the bathroom light and open the door, closing it behind me before taking three familiar steps to my bed.

“You’re on the side closest to the window, right?” I ask to make sure I don’t climb right on top of my beloved niece.

“Yeah.” She says.

“You sound glum, kid,” I realize out loud. “What’s going on?” I climb in beside her and pull the covers up to my chin. As my eyes adjust, I can see that she is lying on her side, facing me.

“I still don’t know what to do about Chris,” she says. “I care about him and I want to be with him, but I also don’t want or need the unnecessary stress. If he isn’t in, then I need to be out. I don’t need him in the first place so I shouldn’t be doing all of the work to make a relationship out of nothing. Right?”

“Relationships are hard, Kali. This world makes us act in certain ways and guys are still gendered differently from girls, no matter how much progress has been made. Nothing is black and white… I can’t tell you to give him an ultimatum or to break up
with him, or any of that because I don’t know what that will do or if that will achieve what you want. If what you want is for him to meet your family, maybe you need to ask him what it would take for him to be comfortable with that. He might want to meet people one by one and not in a big group like at Christmas. You can ask if he’d be willing to have lunch with us when I visit campus in two weeks, perhaps.

I do know that no relationship is worth unreasonable self-sacrifice, like your family, and that no relationship should end because of misunderstandings or fears. If someone is going to take on a position of life partnership, it requires vulnerability and intimacy…trusting that your partner has your back and isn’t maliciously trying to cause harm… and if they are, well, then we call that abuse and no one should have to tolerate it but even that isn’t simple and uncomplicated. Relationships… the complex dynamics between two different people living in an even more complex social world… are difficult to navigate. It’s important to understand why we stay in relationships. Sometimes, they don’t work… and if you’re anything like me, you probably stay way too long, hoping for change and holding out to see if it can happen. Caring about someone isn’t enough to make a relationship work and sometimes we have to care about our selves enough to leave.”

“I’ve been dating Chris for a year. I like him and I do care about him, but we want different things out of life, I think, and out of a romantic relationship. He wants to do his own thing, all of the time, and I want to build a life with someone. I’m scared to be single, Auntie. I’m afraid that failing at the relationship with Chris means that I’m not good enough for anyone.”
“I understand, kiddo. That feeling of worthlessness… knowing that any recognition of my value as a person, as a woman, depended on my ability to find and marry a man… I understand.”

“That’s why you married yourself, isn’t it? To show women everywhere that weddings and relationships aren’t a magical wand or fairy godmother for happiness? That women need to challenge the message that we are nothing without men because we can be everything that we need, for ourselves? Or maybe that there are other kinds of relationships, like the ones with family and friends, and our selves, that provide at least as much if not more fulfillment that the relationship we think we need with a man?”

“No man ever fulfilled me the way I fulfill myself, in the quiet moments when the noise of social discourses is turned down. No man will ever fulfill me the way that my relationship with you does. Your uncle Gary has always been a wonderful addition to my life and I am grateful for him – at the same time he does not define me. His presence in my life can’t be the thing that makes me valid, at least for myself. In many ways, I am always both single and married. In many ways I am neither – those categories fail every time I try to use them to describe my life. Maybe one day you’ll see how society’s obsession with valorizing and romanticizing weddings makes being a single women undesirable, invisible, and impossible in the sense that a single woman is only ever an eventually married women.”

“I wish I were stronger.”

“You are strong,” I argue, slightly irritated by her belief that she is not. “There is remarkable strength in compassion and confusion, in reflection and contemplation, in
vulnerability and emotion; without feeling lost like you do right now, you would never make change and grow. Don’t you ever ever ever let society tell you that these experiences make you weak. Strength IS the experience of struggling with how to live a good life. If it were easy, we wouldn’t have to be ‘strong’ at all, now would we?”

“You’re right, Auntie.”

“Sometimes I am, yes. You know what else I’m right about?”

“What’s that?”

“How much you look and think, and feel, and love, and live, like me. Do you think that’s all a coincidence?”

“No, Auntie. I’ve always wanted to be like you. You’re a strong and amazing woman.”

“So are you, kiddo. I made sure of it.” I feel her start to move on the bed next to me. As she gets close, I lift up my arm and she cuddles into my armpit, like she used to when she was little.

“I love you, Auntie. Thank you for this weekend.”

“I love you too, Kali Jessica Baldwin. Always have and always will. Don’t you ever forget how absolutely precious you are, to me, and the rest of our family. Whatever you decide to do, with this relationship, and with the rest of your life, I will be here with you, witnessing and supporting your choices.”

“I know.”

“Well good, I won’t repeat myself and be all sentimental like a drunken fool, then. Let’s get some sleep, alright?”
“Alright. Goodnight, Auntie Manda.”

“Goodnight, Niecie Kali.”
CHAPTER NINE – SIGNIFICANCE

If this document were a scientific report designed to discuss the findings of an experiment, it might contain definitive conclusions for the purpose of explaining, predicting, and controlling the construction of research and stories. If it were a television show or movie, the characters would be moving on into happily ever after. Lived experiences are often stories with contradiction and without resolution; we don't unequivocally overcome adversity. Happily ever after is an illusory ending, a device used to justify and make necessary the preceding struggle and reinforcing the dominant discourse(s) from which the struggle emerged.

At the end of the research process, I don’t really have any “conclusions” to present you with. There are no black and white answers to questions raised. Rather, I hope that what I have accomplished is the provision of a rich description of my experience in attempting to perform resistance – to make myself as something other than a woman who is always already viewed and recognizable only in relation to a male life-partner. I hope that you have read and lived in relation to it and that I left the meanings and interpretation open enough that you could come to your own “conclusions.”

It seems a good fit for this chapter to briefly summarize the work that my stories have already accomplished and how they might inform my selves, my practices, and possibly those of others going forward. It is also important, here, to provide some discussion of how this research represents an original and novel contribution to the field of Education and the practice of School Counselling.

I write the final draft of this concluding chapter, around the one-year anniversary
of my feminist self-wedding. I have recently sent out thank-you cards, expressing
gratitude for the many gifts (the foremost being presence and relationship) that my
wedding guests bestowed upon me. After the wedding, it took me 4 months of 16 hour
days, to finish my journal and assemble the first draft of this thesis text. In the last 8
months, I have completed many revisions, incorporating the kind, loving, respectful, and
critical feedback and suggestions of my supervisors and committee members. It is this
process, the construction of the research text, the use of autoethnography, that this final
chapter addresses.

Assessing the Methodology

My autoethnography implicates the romance narratives and cultural stories of
compulsory heterosexuality that encourage young women and increasingly young men to
relate and perform pathologically, in negative and unhealthy ways, to the wedding ritual
and corresponding subject positions. My feminist self-wedding and the research text it
informed, was not a one-time battle but rather a series of snapshots in an ongoing struggle
to navigate compulsory heterosexuality and the necessity of performing the bride as a
developmental milestone. Embedded in these stories and discourses are the many
prescriptions around how to be a woman and further how to take oneself up (legitimately;
recognizably) as a female/feminine subject.

If this document fails autoethnographically in any way, it is that it could further
eliminate the differentiated bits and pieces of literature and theory, incorporating them
more into the stories and showing how they work rather than telling or talking about
them. That said, I wish to look a little closer, at my use of Ellis’ (2004) prescribed
elements of autoethnographic methodology, as discussed in Chapter Two: (a) putting the self in research, (b) writing therapeutically, (c) writing vulnerably, (d) writing evocatively, and (e) writing ethically.

**The Writer Self**

Susan Gannon (2002) instructed autoethnographers to perform a writer-ly self. By this, I understand writing as a present and conscious, deliberate, (dis)embodied, and intellectual act, reconstructing memory that is not pure/objective. “When the performance of the text has been successful, it is legitimate. The memory, reconstructed in text and performed, has become an ‘authentic experience’” (Gannon, 2002, p. 672). Although nothing is authentic and the appearance or “feeling” of authenticity is often derived from conformity to the dominant discourses, this thesis presents selves and stories that are possible and realistic.

For the most part, I avoided valourization of an all-knowing individual in search of certain "truth" because truth in this way is singular (Gannon, 2002). Instead, the “I” in the stories is as unsure as she is sure, a character that is multiple and contradictory. It’s difficult, I think, to write in a way that doesn’t present the self as concrete or all knowing, without sacrificing the requirement that a doctoral thesis should illuminate what you’ve come to know.

I combed through the document a number of times, often unsure of what could be changed or destabilized. I wrote of many things as “real” no matter how much I attempt to challenge this. A complete destabilization of all knowledge and language would not have allowed me to make or support important points.
Many researchers such as Leona English (2005) treat stories merely/purely as data that can be coded. English (2005) uses feminist theory and poststructural theory in combination with narrative methodologies to show that women aren’t docile one-dimensional bodies. She analyzes how stereotypes act as a technology of power and are incorporated as practices of the self, in the learning processes and gender performances of women.

I struggled to explicitly analyze the stories in the way English prescribes. Rather than theorizing or analyzing how I incorporated the discourses of compulsory heterosexuality into my subject formation, I illustrated it by writing stories and information from my childhood, adolescence, and young adulthood. I then told the story of my intentional albeit fleeting disruption of compulsory heterosexuality. It felt as though my inclusion of theoretical literature, with and within the stories, was redundant. In many ways, I fought with temptation to pick apart the stories of my selves, to put myself further under an intrusive and invasive microscope, in ways that I wasn’t sure would add to the text. Ultimately, I relied a lot on my supervisors and committee to help me decide where explicit analysis was useful and where it could be omitted. I think this was contingent on the very unique readings of each of us, our personal curiosities and passions, more so than any one theory of how to do things. The feedback from my supervisors also made me aware of the places that I had not or could not accurately communicate my intentions or experiences. The words on my computer screen were never a direct or uncontested version of the thoughts in my head; how others make meaning and interpret my writing was not something I could predict or control.
Writing Therapeutically

When I work with counselling “clients” on various issues, there is one question that comes up on a regular basis: What has changed since the last time we talked about this? I have experienced many shifts in my sense of self that could be attributed in some way to my autoethnographic writing – intentionally paying attention to and writing many selves.

First, I found myself more conscious of negative self-talk that is aligned with the discourses of compulsory heterosexuality, particularly around body image. As is shown in the story, my relationship with my body is contradictory and unstable. There are times that I feel especially sad or angry with myself for “allowing” my body to get so big. Unlike before the writing of this thesis, I’m now more likely to recognize and interrupt this negative self-appraisal – to understand where it comes from and who is served by it. I can then recognize the very positive things about my body that I’ve reframed as more important. For example, I really enjoy doing yoga and stretching out the tensions and aches that build up in my body while I sit here writing. Also, my belly and breasts are Tux’s favourite spots to curl up and rest into, something that he can’t do with others who have different body shapes.

Although I am not able to prevent negative self-talk from happening at all, I am better able to recognize it and thus choose to enact more helpful and positive lines of thought. Particularly around writing this research text, I find myself having small arguments in my brain, usually ending with the belief that I can only do what I can do and trusting that this will be enough to ensure that this text is viable as a thesis.
The text was constructed, re-constructed and read not as truth, but as "a resource for examining the constitutive power of discourses" (Gannon, 2002, p. 671); poststructural writing as an act of transgression against an imperative to produce people and places as objective and coherent. Like Gannon, I used autoethnography to “pick at the scabs” of my personal history and expose pieces of self-construction that were minimizing my sense of agency.

Second, I find myself reflecting differently on wedding related announcements and photographs I encounter in conversations and on Facebook. Having planned and executed my own wedding, I’m increasingly empathetic to others who are doing the same, understanding the intensity of navigating an industry that profits from self-doubt and criticism and capitalizes on these negative experiences in order to elicit consumerism. At the end of the day, I more readily recognize that the wedding industry and experience isn’t about the bride and groom, and this is frustrating and problematic for me to witness and try to explain to others.

Third, I’ve become increasingly critical of the depictions of romance and weddings on television, in movies, and other forms of media. Although still moved by depictions of love (I cried just last night, watching an advertisement that showed a wedding proposal), I am more likely to step back from my emotional response and consider the media with a lens critical of compulsory heterosexuality and other masculine hegemonies. I find myself also experiencing a greater amount of disgust with depictions of blind conformity, acts that ignore or make invisible a woman’s consent (asking for a Father’s permission before proposing, giving away the Bride).
Finally, the many artifacts and reminders of my wedding frequently remind me not to return to a default of compulsory heterosexuality that would lead to my relationship with Gary swallowing me whole. Once the first extensive draft of this document was complete, I added additional activities to my weekly and monthly schedule, that I enjoyed doing apart from Gary. I built a small counselling practice and took a part time position as a school counsellor in my local division. I also taught a couple of university courses and I joined a choir. Although the importance of maintaining the activities I did when I was entirely single was always obvious to me, the wedding and the writing renewed my sense of individuality in a good way.

**Vulnerability: Ambition and Insecurity**

I wanted badly for the writing to be good and "true." I struggled with the idea that "good" writing conforms to the masculine hegemony of education where more embodied and experiential writing (which could be thought to be more feminine) is bad. The tension was visceral; I feel it in my abdomen as if my intestines were tightening in knots - like a snake suffocating its prey. I wonder, reader, if you’ve felt this too. I struggled with which language to use and when and which strategies to use, and although no clear or absolute answers or resolutions surfaced, I wrote in ways that were a good fit for what I was trying to say; in ways that reduced the discomfort in my body. Ultimately, I believe I succeeded in constructing a wedding and an autoethnography that could be called feminist poststructural and characters reflective of my selves.

However, I would be remiss not to tell you that I struggled daily against a desire to quit. On a couple occasions I asked Gary if we should turn my wedding into our
wedding. I am grateful that he saw the value in what I had proposed as my feminist self-wedding and had been engaged with constructing for myself and for other women prior to meeting him; he told me so in his polite refusal to be the groom in my wedding. He parroted back to me comments that I had made about the importance of recognizing female subjects apart from their relationships with men - as individual human beings in and of themselves and in addition to a large number of interpersonal relationships without giving privilege or priority to a male partner. I am glad that he was not bothered by and continues to love and support me in my attempts to make him invisible in my writing and sometimes, my life. Perhaps he feels that my existence as a valid and valuable individual body is my right and his responsibility to respect…

It is important to differentiate, here, between receiving “support” from Gary and the idea that I in any way needed his “permission” to plan and execute my feminist self-wedding. The wedding was something that I had thought about and began taking steps towards long before Gary entered into my life. I did not need, want, or obtain Gary’s “permission” to continue on with my plans. The wedding was discussed at the very beginning of my interactions with him and had he contested my plan (as many before him had), this would have been a deal breaker for me; he would not have been invited to continue a relationship with me.

His relationship to me during the wedding planning and execution was mostly as a silent observer. He listened when I talked and applauded when I was excited. He redirected me back to the goals I had clearly stated when I grew discouraged or otherwise drifted from my intended course. He supported me and to be clear, had he chose not to,
the wedding would have gone on without him; I hope that I have described the numerous others with whom I have important, supportive, reciprocal, respectful, loving, and intimate relationships.

Gary’s presence was a source of much discussion among my colleagues as well as with my supervisors during the formation of this text. Additionally, it was a source of internal debate as I struggled to frame his presence as either good or bad, a binary that was ultimately ineffectiveness (like most). He was there and is included; I have written him as an attempt to place him in my writing in a similar way to how he exists in my life as lived. I have failed at this, as well, as language is not a window onto the world but the way that we (re)produce both the world and ourselves. I am saddened that once again, this relationship to a man seems to have coopted and undermined the point I wished to make: it is dangerous and problematic to position female/feminine subjects as only ever, already, or eventually in relation to a man. Perhaps this makes evident the inescapable power produced by the repetition of compulsory heterosexuality and other masculine hegemonies as well as the language available to speak discourses and subject positions into existence.

**Writing Evocatively**

It was difficult to know what and how my writing would evoke for my readers. When I wrote, read, and revised the various elements of this document, I was often taken back to the scene that I was trying to write. The writing is evocative, for me, when I read it and although I hope that it is so for you as well, at this point, I can’t know that. The handful of friends and colleagues who have undertaken reading pieces and drafts of this
document have expressed their gratitude that I wrote something that was easier than they expected to engage with; that it wasn’t “dry” – a word I take to mean inaccessible or boring to the average reader. I am very grateful to you, whoever you are, for taking the time to read my writing.

**Writing Ethically**

The Kali character was needed, to help me write lovingly. Being that she is still quite little, five years old, now, it is impossible not to love her. This is different from the struggle and difficulty I’ve had with unlearning the self-hatred and self-misogyny inspired by compulsory heterosexuality. It was much easier to love Kali than to learn a new relationship with my self; the former led to greater ease with the latter.

Kali and the other characters in the stories are extensions of my many socially indebted selves named for and inspired by people in my life. The process of writing was profound in that it augmented for me the paradox that a “real” self is both impossible and yet always assumed, merely a vehicle through which we navigate our context. If each character was an extension of me, writing them was writing my selves and this helped me to reframe my construction and love of self.

After completing the initial draft of this document, I sent copies to each person in my life to which a character in the story was linked and encouraged them to point to places where I could write differently, perhaps in ways that made them more comfortable, particularly where “their” characters were concerned. Additionally, I requested that my readers ask questions – tell me when I wasn’t clear about something or at what points they were left with unanswered questions. I incorporated the feedback I
received into the many revisions of this document; this process made the document richer. Again, the feedback provided by both of my supervisors and my committee members was a prolific influence in my writing.

**Personal Significance; Recognition**

In addition to the personal significance described previously in the therapeutic and vulnerability sections, I wish to elaborate on the ways the research has impacted me and my quest for recognition and legitimacy. The act of performing and writing an alternative discourse was much more problematic than I originally thought. I found myself increasingly looking to others for validations and recognitions that were neither theirs to give nor mine to have; my disruption of the requirement that I compose myself in relation to a man was temporary and in many ways positioned me as further unrecognizable and unintelligible as a woman; my transgression was more salient than my intended misappropriation.

My supervisors observed this struggle during my writing process. I grappled extensively with the decision to keep Gary as a character in my text. I was frustrated and disappointed with the idea that making him invisible might bring up issues of academic integrity (as if the only possible truth of my life needed to include him). Ultimately, I thought about the story from the perspective of a reader and the sense of betrayal I might feel reading a story written by a woman who claims to be single when she does in fact live alongside a male partner. To claim that I am neither single nor married would ignore the social context in which I emerged and continue to exist: compulsory heterosexuality requires that I am one or the other. Within the story, however, I wrote my character the
way I wish I were free to exist in my lived social world.

I utilized the power of my family’s recognition and support as well as my male life partner’s presence to add legitimacy to my claim. Although, I don’t know how effective this was for most people or what lasting results or impact it might have (whether or not my appropriation of the wedding ritual and bride subject was “successful”) on those who attended, or even myself for that matter. The passing of time might reveal more around how others’ experienced and remember the wedding. The purpose was not to achieve full or final recognition but rather to expose what the conditions of recognition were (Judith Butler & Athanasiou, 2013, p. 78).

However, it is important to note that I did receive recognition of my inspiring and rebellious position from many of my wedding guests as well as other friends and family. People talked about what I had done and from what I have been told, it seems my wedding created space for (provoked) critical reflection on both weddings and self-love. I have hope that this research text holds the potential for the same.

There were three highly influential testaments of recognition, for my feminist self-wedding. The first was the conversation my four-year-old niece had with her stepbrother the morning after the wedding, advising him that he doesn’t need to marry anyone else – “you could marry yourself, like Auntie Manda.” The second was a report from my Mom that my Grandma Sheila (my stepdad Ray’s Mom) had been chastising others’ in the family who did not attend the wedding and telling them that they should have been there and they missed something very special. Third, about six weeks after the wedding, my former boss and subsequently friend who attended the wedding was talking
with me about planning and participating in her oldest daughter’s hetero wedding. She talked about her reluctance to fully celebrate the hetero-wedding and marriage after having witnessed something much more “real” and “powerful” at my feminist-self wedding. So, it seems, then, that my wedding was effectively disruptive.

**Theoretical Significance**

The use of autoethnography written through a lens of feminist poststructuralism to deconstruct heterosexuality in the formation of the female/feminine subject is an original contribution to the field of Educational Psychology as well as to the growing base of research that informs and is informed by autoethnographic methodology and feminist poststructural epistemology. Although weddings, the bride subject, and more generally the female/feminine subject have been discussed previously in education, psychology, and educational psychology – the topic has not been addressed with feminist poststructural epistemology, autoethnographic methodology, and augmented by story as method.

Shawn Wilson (2009), in his discussion of ontology, epistemology, methodology, and axiology, describes these interlocked parts of a research paradigm as parts of a circle rather than mutually exclusive “concepts.” I’ve found this to be an accurate conceptualization in writing the experiences tied to my physical body. “Telling personal stories serves the ‘selfing’ process in different ways than does reading or hearing stories-not-one’s-own, especially (but not only) fiction” (Jones, 2010, p. 564) and it makes clear the impossibility, or at very least, the difficulty, of categorizing the self into ontology, epistemology, and methodology.
There are multiple ways of knowing; multiple ways of being; multiples method of meaning making (Hendry, 2009). It seems that "wandering, and perhaps getting lost, is key to the ongoing process of inquiry" (Hendry, 2009, p. 78) and I can tell you - even as I near completion of this thesis, I feel more lost than ever; my memories and desires have become increasingly contradictory and I have many more questions than I did when I set out. Not knowing, though, is not a reason to quit exploring, to refrain from climbing the mountains of our human experiences and getting to the top only to find that there are more mountains to climb or that the gravity that previously held you down has disappeared. It is this epistemology of doubt that "has the potential to break down the barriers and walls that keep scholars from engaging in meaningful dialogues across differences" (Hendry, 2009, p. 78).

I invoked and engaged with ideas of Michel Foucault, Judith Butler, Carolyn Ellis and many followers/collaborators of their work. I took up and utilized Foucault’s notions of subjectivity and the formation of the subject (always within discourse) and practices of the self (technologies of power incorporated into self-understandings). Foucault’s notions of discourses and performance represent the themes (see my headings) utilized in construction and analysis of the research text. I also took up Butler’s notions that gender is performed and agency, resistance, and emancipation, although limited, are always possible through awareness and deconstruction of dominant discourses (again, see my headings). Finally, I have taken up Ellis’s methodological framing of autoethnography in order to privilege story and demonstrate that story is both a form of analysis and subject to analysis. Ellis’s notion that the self is always already social (deconstruction of the
self/social binary) is the theme utilized in the construction of Chapter Five and autoethnographic methodology was utilized in creation of the entirety of this research text. This document contributes to the above-discussed theoretical conversations.

Reading this document, you may feel a pull to interpret the story or the literature in a different way than I have; I invite you to consider everything that comes up for you and pay attention to what hegemonies your interpretations represent – to better understand how you, too, reader are a producer of and produced by discourses.

As the personal and embodied experiences of women are generally underrepresented in academic research, I am happy to be contributing to the growing base of literature in this area. This document is a contribution to understandings of how women can and do take themselves up as subjects within a masculine hegemonic society and discourse of compulsory heterosexuality (Rich, 2003) and wedding obsession. This research is not an original contribution to feminist poststructural theory as much as it an example of the use of theory in the construction of story, narrative, or autoethnography.

**Social Significance**

I set out on a path to explore, deconstruct, and impact the ways that weddings and masculine hegemonic heterosexual discourse produce and are produced by women. “An understanding of the way one has been fashioned and fashions oneself sociohistorically is an important component of broader social change” (O’Grady, 2005, p. 113). In addition to therapeutic change in the ways I understand my selves, I am hopeful that my research will illustrate and influence gendered/sexualized formation of the subject in our discursive social world. This study holds potential to create awareness and understanding
of how dominant masculine hegemonic discourse work in/through the selves of bodies marked as female/feminine.

This autoethnography provides an example of how our constitution by/within discourses both creates and limits the subject positions and thus agency available to be taken up and exercised. The dominant gender and romance stories culturally available to women normalize the superiority, aggression, and dominance of men, and cast women as dependent, deferent, forgiving, and loyal to their men, needing men to complete their lives (Ellis, 2004, p. 281; Goldner, Penn, Sheinberg, & Walker, 1990; J. Wood, 2001).

What would happen if this dominant discourse lost its hold? Would this create space for the narratives that better represent lives as lived, no matter how messy (Ellis, 2004, p. 281)? I hope, reader, that I have disrupted some of your social understandings and notions of bride, wedding, and woman.

Embedded in the “official stories” of western (white) society is the idea that we can do and be anything we wish. My research deconstructs this assumption pointing to the heterosexual underpinnings of social hierarchy the incorporation of this discourse into one’s sense personal pleasure and desire. It is not as simple as announcing and accepting that women are equal, we must look deeper into the systems, subjects, stories, and institutions that continue to produce masculine hegemonies and compulsory heterosexuality as well as how these and other discourse are incorporated into the formation of the female subject.

Privileging heterosexuality and assuming it universal or compulsory produces and constructs the pathology associated with the “single” position. I need to know more about
where my opportunities for resistance lie. Maybe you do too. How can we find/create and hold open spaces for the production of alternative discourses? The answer to this question is in constant flux; every moment brings with it new and different possibilities for resistance and agency.

In order to be a credible, valid, and recognizable woman, one must reach the milestones set out by compulsory heterosexuality and experience the rite of passage that is the wedding. This ritual, when performed, reproduces heteronormative values and a masculine hegemonic order of society that does not acknowledge women as people, but rather as always an object for the use of men. Although times have changed and I have hope that the transformation of society will eventually offer more legitimation for non-male (and non-white, and lower class) bodies, what I have learned from my research is that the discipline to perform in alignment with the dominant discourse greatly restricts the ways in which I can take myself up as a female/feminine subject. Resistance, although possible, still comes with uncomfortable and painful risks to intelligibility and recognition and in many cases risks to basic needs and life itself. Changing the self, resignifying the subject, and transforming the discourses are difficult, complex, and complicated endeavours and as female subjects our agency to do so is paradoxical.

Perhaps, for some, this document might serve as a model for critical reflection and the need for deconstruction of the subject positions made available and taken up by many women. We have the option to reject and resist the scripts provided to us for what it means to be happy and healthy; alternative ways of life are available to us. This awareness adds to our understanding of the experiences of women at all stages of life
(children, adolescents, adults, older adults) and to the decision making processes of women who are dreaming of, considering, planning, participating in, and reflecting on weddings.

This thesis barely skims the emotional, psychological, spiritual, physical, and social impacts of this oppression and secondary status positioning. The impact is often so subtle as to go unnoticed and consistent with the dominant discourses, is easily passed off or understood as personal deficiency or individual pathology. Plenty of literature can be located on what is wrong with women and how to fix it; how women can take care of themselves and make themselves more attractive to men or more ready for marriage and mothering. My research indicates that more literature that teaches women to love themselves irrespective of their relationships with men might be beneficial.

This text uncovers a need for us as a society to do better by the younger and as yet unborn generations of girls and women, encouraging expressions of self and experiences that are not always in relation to men, marriage, and mothering. This may mean an increased amount of encouragement of boys and men to orient themselves in more “feminine” ways, particularly towards relationality (empathy) and parenting, to free up the energies of girls and women for other ways of becoming female/feminine subjects.

The genders I have in mind have been existing for a long time, but they have not been admitted into the terms that govern reality. It is a question of developing, within law, within psychiatry, within social and literary theory, a new legitimating lexicon for the gender complexity we have always been living. (Butler, 2004, p. 219)

I see this document as contributing to the feminist message that “people should be able to be what they want to be, and will be happy if the world is organized to allow them to be
so” (Bronwyn Davies, 2002, p. 57). Further, I continue to believe (strongly) that “it is possible to imagine being different than we are now” (Cappello, 2012, p. 33).

While the traditional narrative structures are extraordinarily difficult to think or feel beyond, we must nevertheless attempt to develop a new narrative form if children are to take us seriously when we tell them that bipolar oppressive [married-single] patterns are neither essential nor acceptable (Davies, 2002, p. 57).

**Education Significance**

The field of education (concerned with human learning) holds much potential for exploring how discourses are performed and experienced by individuals and how humans become subjects through and within them. Education extends beyond the question of how humans learn academic content or curriculum into how we learn to become subjects; how female/feminine bodies perform gender within our school systems. It further extends to how we become subjects outside of the school system, in non-academic spaces. This document serves to teach the reader of such space.

Michel Foucault’s studies of the subject and power offer concepts (which he did not apply to a study of emotions per se nor to women’s oppression) useful to a historicized approach to the study of emotions and discipline in education. (Boler, 1999, p. 11)

As pointed out by Foucault (1995), schools serve as a technology of power in the organization and control of children’s bodies. These outer technologies are more often than not taken up by subjects and incorporated into subject formation. Technologies of the self that may have (negative) effects on the worth individuals (particularly women) will have for their selves. Foucault (1977) refers to the school building as a mechanism for training and teaching as a relationship of surveillance. This surveillance (disciplinary gaze and normalizing judgement) is then taken up by the subject who is a student and
incorporated into the individual’s techniques and practices of the self.

Tolman et al. (2003) looked at the production of compulsory heterosexuality in schools and found that these discourses have a direct relationship to male perpetration of violence and harassment against females. From the failure of adults to interrupt or respond to harassment (thus silently encouraging boys to engage in these behaviours) to the difficulties experienced by girls and boys in “distinguishing between flirting and dominance and aggression” (Tolman et al., 2003, p. 162), schools allow and even encourage “developing boys and girls to be socialized into the established hierarchy of males over females and to learn to grow comfortable with it” (Tolman et al., 2003, p. 162). Similarly, Jeffrey Smith (2007) found that teachers act paradoxically as accomplices in the development of gendered heteronormative discourse and subjectivities.

Emma Renold (2000), similarly, found that female children take up gendered and sexualized subject positions within discourses of compulsory sexuality. Girls were observed to police their selves and others bodies and behaviours through surveillance and regulation and deviations from prescribed norms of girly hyper-femininity were acceptable only when the girl displayed a competent heterosexual performance of relationship. For boys in this study, fighting, football, and having a girlfriend were signifiers of masculinity and a lack of social participation in these ways subjected boys to ostracism and ridicule characterized by homophobic and heterosexist remarks. “Many boys resorted to defining and asserting their heterosexuality through discourses, gestures and practices of misogyny and homophobia” (Renold, 2000, p. 323).
A critical approach to the production of gender, particularly the male/female binary and compulsory heterosexuality, is vital to the learning and provision of education to children and adolescents. At the earliest levels of formal schooling (kindergarten), children already have understandings of the gendered discourses available to them (Blaise, 2005). This research has direct implications for the personal development of our female adolescents, who are incorporating a position of secondary status, or non-heterosexual illegitimacy (homophobia) into their senses of self and negatively impacting or undermining their self-esteem and relationship with self.

The literature and this research supports a shift in approach to provide more affirming education experiences to bodies both produced and marginalized by compulsory heterosexuality as they take themselves up as subjects within various discourse. We can and should do better by our learners and ourselves by engaging critically with students to foster awareness of possibilities for shifting the formation of all subjects. A widespread move towards critical pedagogy (Kincheloe, 2008), may move us towards this goal.

Particular selves are produced through the process of learning both in and outside of schools and this document provides information about the effects and impacts the organization of the social body may have on female/feminine subjects. This thesis contributes a link between critical feminist pedagogy (in and out of the school system) and the idea that the self can be storied critically.

This research invites the opportunity for critical reflection and transformative change at all “levels” of society and in all places of learning. The transformative
(evocative, provocative, ethical) quality of autoethnography and the feminist poststructural malleability of the subject open insights for and beyond education and educational psychology and are important because educators and practitioners of psychology within the education system encounter non-male students in at least 50% of their interactions. This research makes the oppression of non-male and non-heterosexual bodies more visible and provides insight into their experiences and potential systemic changes to decrease oppression and increase the quality and quantity of positive experiences.

We know that with a lack of critical awareness, “educational leaders may find themselves at the mercy of local popular prejudice, unable to prevent…controversies from eclipsing ethical concerns for…students’ and teachers’ safety and well being” (Birden, Gaither, & Laird, 2000, p. 638). Renold (2000) pointed to a need for new curriculums and policies that are sensitive to and reflective of students’ sexual cultures. As such, new strategies and interventions are required that unpack and deconstruct compulsory heterosexuality (Rich, 2003) and its impact on the lives of (everyone) those involved in our education systems.

**Counselling and Therapy**

Although my doctoral education has been classified as belonging to the field of education, my professional career and activities will continue with counselling and therapy as part of my practice. The therapeutic quality of autoethnography and the feminist poststructural malleability of the subject (through practices of the self and subjectivation) have particular implications on the field and practice of counselling.
psychology as well as education and psychology more broadly.

In my practice, I utilize narrative therapy (rooted in poststructural theory) to help clients give new meaning to their lives through stories. The stories we think and tell always privilege some people and relationships whilst making others invisible. As described by Gene Combs and Jill Freedman (2012), the purpose of narrative therapy is to position clients as the “privileged authors of their own lives” (p. 1035). This positioning cannot be accomplished without a consideration of the limits of agency and awareness of the fallibility of the self/society binary.

Psychotherapy often involves telling the story of the past and reinterpreting that story so that instead of a narrative that locks the individual into a set of problems or a sense of failure or inadequacy, it becomes a story that frees energy and potential to act differently (Bateson, 2007, p. 216). Storying and re-storying allows people to plunge themselves in multiple possibilities rather than the linear trajectory of the problem story (Combs & Freedman, 2012); clients come to understand that they have agency in how they take up various positions in their lives. Narrative therapy helps to reframe past experiences in ways that better suit the ever-changing self; clients can develop their lives with preferred stories. Narrative therapy centres contextualized meaning making; it exposes the ways that people are recruited (through subjectivation) into problem stories (Combs & Freedman, 2012). Some psychotherapy has to do with restorying, locating the event as it exists in memory and reframing it. Memory “has been influenced by all sorts of outside forces and the challenge is to find a way for the individual to understand what happened that will free him or her to be a productive adult” (Bateson, 2007, p. 216)
This document illuminates autoethnography as a process of selfing through story and a means of illuminating processes of (re)subjectivation. We are all part of culture that makes us as we make it – we are caught up in discourse; counsellors likely unknowingly produce dominant discourses of heteronormativity and wedding/marriage glorification. The research presented may foster critical awareness.

Counsellors and therapists play a crucial role in either countering or perpetuating experiences of isolation and marginalization and as such must refrain from viewing or treating girls and women as though they are victims. This is particularly important when counsellors are called upon to provide support to victims of violence and abuse and/or grief and loss support around the end of a relationship, be it through divorce, death, or otherwise. When women are expected to defer to men throughout their lives, the loss of the man to which she must defer is a particularly sensitive life transition and opportunity for critical reflection on larger processes of socialization and positive personal transformation. The achievement of what Robert Roughley (2014) refers to a sense of authentic self or identity pride comes from active manoeuvring or navigation through cultural and social mine storms and counsellors and therapists enter lives that are typically in the midst of precisely that.

While individuals understood as female and feminine each bring their individual experience to counselling, more common concerns (oppression, discourse, power) should not go overlooked. Some suggestions, based on the struggles indicated in the preceding research, include: (a) deconstruction of compulsory heterosexuality; (b) deconstruction of bride and wedding fantasy and desire; (c) development of the skills to think critically and
reflexively about societal values (current and historical); (d) understanding of selfing practices; (e) exploration of the both dominant and alternative subject positions made available to women; (f) traditional ideas of femininity and gender-role socialization; and (g) exploring family dynamics and how they relate and contribute to all of the above.

Additionally, both counsellors and educational psychology professionals can play a pivotal role in working with and advocating for equality for non-male, non-binary, not-hetero individuals. The construction and production of subjectivities can be shifted so that the autonomy and sovereignty of girls and women becomes at least as important as that of boys and men.

Finally, if my story resonates for someone, they may consider it as potential companionship and comfort (Tillmann-Healy, 1996). If not, they may have a jumping off point for reflecting on their own subject formation. This research has potential to be instructional; an example of how to maintain critical stance concerning the selfing process, dominant discourses, and the production of the female and feminine in general and the bride subject and wedding ritual in particular.
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APPENDIX A - THEORIZING THE SELF

The self (the poststructural subject) is a phenomenon that is always in the process of being reconstituted. The self is not singular, stable, and coherent; rather we produce our selves and simultaneously are produced within or at the intersection(s) of various competing discourses; there is no “real self” that underlies our performance of discourses. Helen O’Grady (2005) wrote: “the idea that underneath all psychological, social, or historical determinants there lies a true, untainted self is a common assumption in western culture” (p. 3). The notion of a static and essential inner self – a body with a conscious and rational mind that is aware of and can articulate itself, as discussed previously, is a construction of humanist philosophy and subsequently reproduced many times in psychology. These taken-for-granted views of the subject as capable of self-articulation or self-knowledge (Gannon, 2006, p. 474) is a site of deconstruction.

The self both is and is not a fiction; is unified and transcendent and fragmented and always in process of being constituted, can be spoken of in realist ways and cannot; its voice can be claimed as authentic and there is no guarantee of authenticity. (Bronwyn Davies & Gannon, 2006, p. 95)

The self is a signifier, like any other text; constituted through and within discourses. Just like language never gives the secret of it’s final signified (Belsey, 2002), so too can we never fully or entirely claim an essential or purely autonomous self (or soul). If an original, core, or authentic self does exist (which we can never know), it remains impossible to unravel the perpetual chain of deference/differance and tease out the fragments that are “real” from those that are socially constructed. Yet, we still write self-conscious narratives; we produce our selves as subjects within the western discourses of an autonomous self that values fulfilment and authenticity (Muncey, 2010). The self is a
Tessa Muncey (2010) positions self as a process rather than a structure and articulates that consciousness can never be a direct copy of the world; story is always metaphor, a useful tool/technology for the practice of selfing. The research text produced from my thesis work will be a tool of selfing; an exercise in invoking multiple selves and multiple practices of self. My resignification and appropriation of the wedding ritual (a text) as a tool of single female validation, recognition, and legitimacy might then serve as a model story or metaphor for resistance of other dominant discourses(s).

An authentic self, along with an objective world, if there even are such things, are impossible to access in a pure form and that this frees us to use autoethnography in the construction of a fluid self, or rather multiple selves in context, in ways that might work better for us. Self-autonomy is an illusion (Muncey, 2010), an abstraction derived from humanist ontology of the self. When we encounter constructions of self that seem quintessentially unique or individual (feelings, desires, aspirations, intimacy), we must understand that they are socially managed and organized…it is impossible to know the boundaries of subjectivity and objectivity.

**Embodiment**

When I look into the mirror I see a self, a body, and I know that body to be my own and not yours or someone else’s. So, how does the material body fit with the constructed self? This question calls for deeply/widely theorization of embodiment - an idea addressed in feminist, post structural, feminist poststructural, and autoethnographic literatures. The idea of embodiment invites me to ground my work in the “the sexed
specificity of the female body” (Butler, 1993, Chapter 1, para 2).

Judith Butler (1993) tells us that bodies matter. The body “is the always-already marked monument inscribed with the values and the history of particular cultures” (Henriques et al., 1998, p. xv). The body is a visible signifier of identity; through a process of formation of the subject, meanings become attached to or derived from my body and it’s clothing, locations, and interactions - sex, gender, race, shape, age, ability, sexual orientation, class, profession, religion, education, and many other categories on which identities are based and divisions of the world made and subsequently claim to be justified.

The material of my body performs the self that has been produced as mine. It is the body that performs languages and discourse; it is with and through the body that we imagine and produce our selves as thinking and feeling, creatures. We “cannot function independently of our bodies” (Muncey, 2010, p. 23).

The authentic self as contained within the body is a myth that pervades science and subsequently psychology. Rather, it might be more accurate to state that the process of self is written on and through the body. There is no way to prove that the body does or does not contain or perform our essence or entity – our authentic self. Bodies and the subject positions performed by bodies are always in social context; the subject is always relational (Gannon, 2006) always performing; agency, liberation, and emancipation are performed resistances within discourses. Human experience is multi-

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48 Here, “mine” refers to the interlocking of bodies and corresponding performative selves; the body is no more an individual’s authentic possession than is the more abstract self, both belong (owed) to discourses.
layered – it involves physical bodies in addition to constructed consciousness and numerous (maybe infinite) other threads. However, the body does not own its performative utterances; discourses do not originate from a single individual.

Pointing to the social construction of selves doesn’t negate the physical or scientific existence of the body. The material body is a thing, at least in this world it is and there is no way to know that other worlds (afterlife, for example) exist. The point is that selves are also more than (yet, entirely) their biology; how we perform socially cannot be reduced to physical biology or neurobiology. Like the single stories that Adiche (2009) uncovers about race and culture, narratives of science and the physical body aren’t necessarily untrue - they are a substantially incomplete picture of the human.

The authority for selfing through story begins (and always inescapably remains) in the body, through memories, in a space of lived experience (Gannon, 2006). How can a self be written without this link and beginning in the body? Academic narratives, such as the one we are engaged in in this imagined comprehensive exam defense, are traditionally an attempt to performance privilege rational thought or logic, through language used by the usually erased body. It gives the illusion that the body can be bypassed, or ignored, produced as the negative or inferior half of the mind/body dualism; the body is an object to be controlled. Hopefully I am showing you that not all research has to be that way. Poetry is an excellent example of how writing can be more embodied.

**Poetry**

The works of Luce Irigaray (1985a, 1985b, 1993, 2002a, 2002b, 2004), Hélène Cixous (Cixous & Clement, 1986; Cixous, Cohen, & Cohen, 1976; Cixous & Kuhn,
1981; Cixous & Miller, 1993; Cixous, 1991, 2000, 2010), and Julia Kristeva (Kristeva, 1982, 1997, 2002a, 2002b, 2002c; Kristeva, Jardine, & Blake, 1981), three followers of Jacques Lacan, have in common that their work “aligns rationality with the masculine and sees the feminine in forms and aspects of language marginalized or suppressed by rationalism: poetic language and the languages of mysticism, madness and magic” (Weedon, 1987, p. 9). Writing the feminine can and does look and feel quite different than the academic and scholarly writing thought to conform to masculine hegemonic traditions. Autoethnographies, which transgress the norms of the academy, fit this description as well. Autoethnography often includes or is represented in poetic verse. Poetry is embodied; it more closely resembles the language our bodies use than does linear academic prose (Ellis, 2004).

For example, Kristen Blinne (2012) performed auto(erot)ic ethnography; using poetry to present a sense of her embodied sexual self. She wrote:

I (re)search myself
Inside and out
Above and below
I learn myself
Who I am
What I can create
I feel myself
Warm, soft skin
Textured, folded, scarred
I perform myself
For you

For me

I find myself

wanting more

(Blinne, 2012, pp. 953–954)

Writing the Self

This research, the stories of the self and subject I present, were intended to illustrate a shift from the adolescent and young adult female and feminine who produces herself as humanist subject impacted unknowingly by masculine hegemonies and discourses of compulsory heterosexuality (including the necessity to wed), to an older woman who recognizes, rejects, and resists this way of being a female/feminine subject. I intended to show my own experience of transformation in this way, this new practice of self, through the storying of a character who in many ways resembles me and in equally as many ways resembles women more generally; our common struggles for a sense (within our selves and communities) of always partial recognition and legitimacy.

The text demonstrates how subjects are positioned at the intersections of various discourses, offering different and often contradictory positions that can be taken up. There are idolized positions that seem to be produced with power and agency, or status and hierarchy, that upon closer look reveal the continued submission and subjugation of the female and feminine in favour of masculine hegemony and male dominance. Although the stories offer and depict an opportunity for resistance and agency within
masculine hegemonic discourses, it also demonstrates the difficulties and consequences with attempting to resist dominance and take up alternative subject positions.

At the end of the day, the self is the only discursive field in which individuals have any productive power, whatsoever. This power is elusive and limited by contexts and discourses, we did not choose and cannot control (Judith Butler & Athanasiou, 2013). Small changes within our numerous selves can be transformative, though, particularly those characterized by or akin to self-love. When enough of us have recognized and repeated these small acts of rebellion, the larger discourses might shift, allowing for those subject positions currently marginalized, silenced, and made invisible by the dominant discourses to be recognized.
APPENDIX B - A HISTORY OF WEDDINGS

There is never a moment in which we could imagine that gendering is not taking place or that it is a thing of the past. All weddings, including the one documented here, produce gender. Michael Cappello (2012), in his thesis on the production of (white) teachers, warns, “the telling of these stories, outside of an analysis of the history that forms the context for their reality, allows these stories to remain as stereotypes” (p. 4). I can extend and apply this idea to brides and say dominance makes it seem possible to tell wedding stories outside of the context that produces gendered (heterosexual) subjects. All weddings occur in a particular sociohistoric moment with prescriptions for who and what gendering will produce.

While completing a brief history of weddings as one of my comprehensive exam papers, I wondered if it wouldn’t be a good move to change the thesis (again) to a fuller genealogy of weddings. The work of genealogy traces how the forming of the formed takes place (Judith Butler & Athanasiou, 2013; Foucault, 1978, 1985; Prado & Prado, 2000). The possibility of designating my entire thesis to this work, while important, was ultimately nullified by my a much larger desire to understand my own formation and subjectivity within these discourses. It is important, however, to give a bit of this brief history, to help place this project within its sociohistoric context. Something I found particularly interesting was Daphne Gerda Lerner’s (1986) assertion that “the customary right of male family members (fathers, brothers, uncles) to exchange female family members in marriage antedated the development of the masculine hegemonic family and was one of the factors leading to its ascendancy” (p. 110-111); weddings (marriage) came
first and then masculine hegemony making weddings a seed or root of masculine hegemony.

Weddings, from seeking a woman’s father’s permission or hand in marriage to a father “giving away” the bride, are exemplary of a kinship custom that defers to paternal authority (Geller, 2001). In my comprehensive exam papers, I divided the history of marriage into three broad frames to make clearer the formation of the subject of women through different practices. The categories, which I still stand behind still, were: (a) marriage by force, bride of capture; (b) marriage by purchase, bride of currency/kinship; and (c) marriage by choice, bride of agency. Please excuse my (over) use of quotes, here. I do this intentionally, to chart the literatures I used to frame the history of weddings in this way.

**Marriage by Force, Bride of Capture**

In what Ethel Urlin (1990) called “primitive” times, marriage entailed an entire absence of female consent along with glorifications of physical violence and force (not much has changed in some places – look at the prevalence of rape and violence against women). Urlin describes her understanding that wedding ceremonies celebrating marriage were as yet unknown. She goes on to explain how women were fought for; the strongest man physically took the woman. Thus, physical force is “documented” as the earliest form of marriage.

Remnants, traces, and evidence of marriage by force is implicated in other times and spaces, as well. Canada, despite most people’s taken for granted notion of it as a country of “freedom and equality,” has metaphorical (and literal) blood on its hands.
concerning the capture of brides and marriage by force. In a discussion of the culture of
Canada in the 1860’s, Nancy Millar (2001) wrote:

Thousands of men scrabbling for gold and building a province, but nobody to
wash the dishes and warm the bed. Bring on the Columbia Emigration Society in
London, England. They came up with the obvious solution – take the women to
the men. Or at least take them to the colony and see what might happen. As it
happened, England had a surplus of women right then…so at least three
‘brideships’ set out for the colony. (p. 24)

This may not be “Bride by Capture” in the “hit her over the head with a club and drag her
back to your hut” kind of way, however, bio-power is evident in the systematic
displacement of women’s bodies - women had no choice but to marry in order to sustain
their physical lives. Diana Leonard (D. Leonard, 1980) elaborated this point:

In many societies women are physically forced into marriage, should their
socialization to accept it fail…most women have no inherited land or businesses,
etc., and those who work for wages have earned approximately half what men
earned in comparable occupations…men could (and can) support themselves
reasonably well when single, but have benefitted from women’s domestic and
sexual servicing, procreative capacity, and child rearing within marriage. (p. 5)

The general public’s view has always tended to stress the social importance of
marriage – as the principal way of validating one’s adult status, one’s personal
and sexual proficiency, and as providing emotional support and stability…but
marriage is also an economic necessity for most women (Leonard, 1980, p. 5).

Canada is implicated in the narrative of marriage by force and the captured bride
subject. According to Millar (2001), in 1897, there were “schemes that sounded a great
deal like the brideships…there were more women than men in parts of the US, a result of
the Civil War, so why not send off a few thousand to the north?” (p. 73). And, “there was
the American entrepreneur who decided there was more than one way to get some of
[the] gold. He’d find women who were willing to go north and be auctioned off…the idea
faltered before it got to the alter” (Millar, 2001, p. 73).
This changed in the twelfth century, when the Church took control of marriage, worked to stamp out concubinage, and imposed rules of permanence and monogamy upon both women and men...because it ensured the purity of blood lines and the orderly transmission of property from one generation of “legitimate” male heirs to the next, wifely fidelity was the bedrock on which the new family rested. (Geller, 2001, p. 23)

**Marriage by Purchase, Bride of Currency/Kinship**

Urlin describes this marriage as “not so much a union of hearts and souls as the joining of strawberry patch to two fields of wheat” (Urlin, 1990, p. 66)

The husband still chooses and buys his wife much as does cattle. He presents the bride with gold and silver coins, which she wears as a necklace. The father of the bride loudly expresses his dissatisfaction until the number reaches what he considers to be the proper limit (Urlin, 1990, p. 66)

Neither I, nor Urlin are the only writers to point out the currency of women.

According to *The Elementary Structures of Kinship*, the object of exchange that both consolidates and differentiates kinship relations is women, given as gifts from one patrilineal clan to another through the institution of marriage. The bride, the gift, the object of exchange constitutes ‘a sign and a value’ that opens a channel of exchange that not only serves the functional purpose of facilitating trade but performs the symbolic or ritualistic purpose of consolidating the internal bonds, the collective identity, of each clan differentiated through the act. In other words, the bride functions as a relational term between groups of men; she does not have an identity, and neither does she exchange on identity for another. (Judith Butler, 1990, p. 52)

The bride as currency is presented also by Gayle Rubin (1975) and discussed in a detailed interview with Judith Butler (Rubin & Butler, 1994). They discuss woman having been objects of kinship which is always a “relationship between men...about the bonds of men, but which takes place through the heterosexual exchange and distribution of women” (p. 55).

The custom extends four thousand years back into western history crossing regional boundaries and cultures... as a dialogue between men; an institution in which women were bartered, passing from one man’s household to the next. The
sex-gender system that underscores marriage expands beyond the law, back into history and into the consciousness of individuals undertaking the nuptial process. (Geller, 2001, p. 114)

While historians disagree as to whether the ancient wife was a piece of property transferred from father to groom or a legally disenfranchised individual who garnered the symbolic gift of a bride price, it is clear that from her beginnings as a historical entity, the wife occupied a subordinate position that was also, ironically, her sole option for respectability.

In ancient Greece marriage was, once again, a process of transfer by which a woman’s kyrios (“lord” or “controller”) gave her to another man for the purpose of procreating children. (Geller, 2001, p. 20)

Intersectionality of gender and class is made salient and noticeable by Russell Martin’s (2012) description of the brideshows that took place in Russia between 1505-1689; upper class men married into the middle ranks of the aristocracy and demanded an elaborate show to occur prior to making their sections (Martin, 2012). Women were paraded around like livestock for men to evaluate and choose “the best.”

This period in time was somewhat distinct as before 1505, the highborn married the daughters of other highborn houses. After 1689, marriage to foreign-born brides returned as normative practice. This augments my previous argument that weddings (and marriage) are mutable texts. Each shift in regulator practice illustrates how “the nature and extent of the ruler’s power is revealed by the set of rituals surrounding and enabling the selection of a bride for the tsar” (Martin, 2012, p. 10).

A bit of an aside, here: I spend some of my free-time reading books and literature that my partner’s teenage nieces and my actual potential female adolescent clients might read. I do this for a number of reasons, first and foremost of which is to establish a knowledge base of things they may relate to and narratives that their lives are produced by and within. Recently, upon request of Gary’s 12 year old niece, I read The Selection
(Cass, 2013b), *The Elite* (Cass, 2013a), and *The One* (Cass, 2014), a series written by Kiera Cass. The story-line of the series is not unlike the Russian brideshows described by Martin (2012). I was quite unsettled to find that this process is being romanticized for adolescent women to incorporate into their understandings of self and gender.

In the period Martin (2012) discusses, the justification for marriage within the local middle class is depicted to as necessary in the overall political strategy of the aristocracy; the middle class did not come with the large expenditure of resources or unbreakable commitments to other places. Martin positions wedding as a site of calculated alliance. In the upper classes, where the right to basic needs was taken for granted, marriage and the currency of women was based in a requirement or desire for political allegiance/alliance with other bloodlines. In the lower classes, the exchange of women was often based on material items required for the sustenance of physical life.

The shift from marriage by force to marriage by purchase or choice was more difficult for those marked at many intersections of marginalization and oppression (class and race, predominantly).

The brideshow explicitly displayed potential brides as objects and pawns to be used for the political desires and needs of men. This practice makes salient how conflict among discourse can be avoided by burying it deep within rituals such as brideshows and weddings. Those with power engage in ritual with those below them on the hierarchy of power, as a means of projecting a spirit of collaboration. This has implications for today's Bride, who takes for granted the pleasure and joy of weddings, imagining that the politics can be ignored.
A system of voluntary association is very different from a system in which obligatory marriages create dynastic systems or other forms of political organization...It is not radical to say, in anthropology, that kinship doesn’t do in modern urban societies what it used to do in pre-modern cultures (Rubin & Butler, 1994, p. 87).

In its ancient form, marriage held no interest, had no reason for being, except insofar as, although a private act, it had legal effects or at least effects relative to status: handing down a name, instituting heirs, organizing a system of alliances, joining fortunes. This meant something only to those who were capable of developing strategies in such domains...in the underprivileged classes, marriage become – beyond the economic motives that could make it attractive – a form that owed its value to the fact that it established and maintained strong personal relationships, implying the sharing of life, mutual aid, and moral support. (Foucault, 1986, p. 77)

**Marriage by Choice, Bride of Agency**

Alongside the constitution of Canada as a country, and the documented liberation of commonwealth countries from British rule, and subsequent action on the feminist and other civil rights fronts, a new “type” of woman emerged in the literature: the woman who could say no (if she wanted to).

The so-called “New Woman” of the early 1900s, while she still displayed some of the attributes of the older femininity, particularly the missionary impulse to help the poor and civilize the ‘heathen’ races, was less [enamoured] of the domestic ideal. Young and university-educated, she was just as likely as not to forsake marriage for a career. She also displayed a visibility, freedom of movement, independence of thought, and brashness and irreverence of manner sufficient to elicit a good deal of scorn and dismay from the older generation. (Azoulay, 2011, pp. 6–7)

Urlin (1969) describes this new frame for women as a time in which love prevails. She glorifies the “fact”/notion that young people are allowed to choose for themselves, no longer constrained by the tyranny of the dowry. With modernity and the secularization of the wedding ceremony, came romance-based companionate marriages.

In the seventeenth century the idea that two people could find fulfillment in a
partnership based on unsupervised personal choice and mutual affection was still so radical that it was conserved dangerously subversive. One century later marriage based on personal and erotic attraction had become a popular norm. (Geller, 2001, p. 24)

With its beautification of women’s role within the marriage, the nineteenth century gave rise to…the big white wedding featuring elaborate pageantry and lavish displays of spending and sentiment. (Geller, 2001, p. 25)

Despite the fact that it was, once again, legal subordination, with a husband controlling his wife’s property and earnings, wedlock continued to be the central aspiration of most women…with its extraordinary profusion of images sentimentalizing wedlock and its rigid code of marital gender relations, the nineteen century was, also, not coincidentally, the era in which women organized and began, overtly, to fight, coming together with an agenda of specific demands and ultimately achieving a series of sweeping reforms that included not just the vote but the protection of matrimonial property (in 1882) and equal access to divorce (in 1923). (Geller, 2001, p. 26)

The secularisation of the wedding ceremony … implied more than women’s emancipation from arbitrary religious authorities (Yılmaz 2005). It heralded a new ‘modern’ power regime in which the state asked for the right to be involved in and regulate intimate spheres of life, especially areas related to marriage and family. This involvement marked the personal relations within the familial (private) sphere as symbolic sites where certain interpretations of secularism and modernism could operate…this attempt to establish hegemonic power over people’s daily cultural practices denotes a problematic, contested political process of both domination and struggle. (Dağtaş, 2009, p. 6)

Of Canada in 1899, Millar (2001) says:

Even though women shared equally with men the work and worry of a new home in a new country, there were still the most incredible social expectations of the two sexes. Men were to lead, women follow. Men had control of the land and the money, women didn’t ask. Women had the babies, men didn’t ask. Men inherited land and position, women had to marry it. (p. 79-80)

In the late 20th and early 21st century, weddings and marriage are thought to be “freely chosen.” Research in the 21st century has established that transitions in contemporary heterosexual relationships from casual encounters to dating, co-habitation, and marriage are likely to be controlled by men, not women (Baker & Elizabeth, 2013;
Bogle, 2008; Sassler & Miller, 2011). Male privilege lingers in intimate relationships informing material reality and social expectations (Baker & Elizabeth, 2013). “The state-sanctioned, monogamous heterosexual partnership is now touted as the pivotal adult relationship for most men and women – a liaison so momentous that it necessitates celebration via a costly extravaganza that no mere friendship would justify” (Geller, 2001, p. 26).

Most educated women who came of age in the 1990s or after believe marriage to be a level playing field on which the male and female gender (because there are no other genders) perform as partners or teammates. Like Geller (2001) I too have witnessed women who seem to be similar in age to my self mocking the women and marriages of past, “perceiving their mothers and grandmothers’ marriages as outmoded social arrangement that have no bearing on today’s jazzy, egalitarian, two-income couples” (p. 110). Unfortunately, “facts” and research illustrate a different story: women are not equal in their own homes. We still take on responsibility for more than 70 percent of household duties and when we choose or have to work outside of the home, continue to earn less than our male counterparts (Geller, 2001). Additionally, women are overrepresented in support and caregiving positions of employment and underrepresented in leadership and management.

While the institution of marriage is not the sole culprit of such inequity, marriage iconography [still reinforces] the notion of wedlock as women’s primary work, projecting and explicitly antiprofessional image of femininity. (Geller, 2001, p. 111)

Weddings, then, (always, inevitably) remain “tainted by the historical residue of female subordination” (Geller, 2001, p. 70). Today, weddings represent voluntary participation
in the performance of modernity – a choice to (re)produce and perform masculine hegemonic discourses. The traditional wedding is a space for silent transmission of bourgeois values – heteronormative relations between humans (Belsey, 2002).

However, matrimony is not a universal experience that is raw and untempered (fixed; stable; concrete). It is entirely socially constructed and produced, shaped by humans and has “origins in the inception of western civilization” (Geller, 2001, p. 18). Weddings are a political performance and thus merit the political analysis that Jaclyn Geller gives quite freely:

Despite the daily realities that have moderated matrimony’s sexist doctrines, the institution has always been powerfully biased against women. Marriage is not merely stained with the notion of gender inequality; it has been the West’s central vehicle for enforcing that inequality, as it has simultaneously offered women their primary work and main source of identification. (Geller, 2001, p. 27)
APPENDIX C - VERISIMILITUDE

How trustworthiness (methodological rigor) is established is what sets autoethnography apart from other types of qualitative research (Coia & Taylor, 2013). Validity, for autoethnographic research, comes not from attempting to align the story with objective or universal facts (which cannot be accessed even if they do exist). Rather, writers seek verisimilitude: for the reader to recognize the story as lifelike, believable, and possible. The experiences of the reader, researcher, and participants become priority (C. Ellis, 2004, p. 124). Verisimilitude refers to the plausibility of a narrative; authenticity and credibility are transformed from “did this actually happen” to “is this possible?” Truth becomes less fixed/stable/objective and more relative, shifting, reflexive, and entirely constructed.

Historical truth refers to event that occurred in the remembered past; narrative truth refers to events that either may or may not have actually happened in the historical past but are believed to be true (in the psychological sense) by the rememberer. (Muncey, 2010, p. 102)

The idea of historic accuracy is similar to the search for objective truth…I’m not sure it applies, here. Tessa Muncey (2010) points to memory as already/always entirely distorted and biased.

No narrative is ever straight reporting, because every act of communication is shaped in some way by the communicator and the expectation of who is expected to receive it and the context of their relationship...[we can] devise ways of voicing and interweaving multiple narratives that stitch lives together in many different ways, without trying to settle on a single version of what happened, or a single conclusion for all listeners to take away. (Bateson, 2007, p. 215)

Even moments, never mind years, after a memory is coded, it becomes subject to changes in a person’s perspective(s) (Muncey, 2010). Within the field of psychology, memory is
considered less a vehicle for accessing the past and more a metaphoric theatre. Steven Lynn and David Payne (1997) wrote:

As a dynamic medium of experiencing the past, memory may be imperfect, reconstructive, and shaped by present expectancies, needs, and beliefs… it is this general notion – that memory is not a simple recording of the historical past – that lies at the hard of current controversies… it is our hope that these articles will serve as a catalyst for continued open and constructive dialogue in the midst of shifting ground. (p. 55)

Autoethnography takes up the constructed and discursively produced quality of memory as an opportunity for positive change. That said, autoethnographers do not tell something that is known to be false, rather, they acknowledge that true and false are not objective, scientific, black and white concepts.

“According to poststructuralism, language does not represent reality. ‘Real’ stories, like ‘real selves’ do not exist. All stories, whether observed, heard, or read, lived and imagined, are imaginary storylines” (Shaw, 2012, p. 73). Stories that we accept as real are (re) constituted by language; memories are produced (made and recalled) in different and often competing, discursive fields.

**Temporality, Autoethnographic Time**

So, if we understand that true and false are not fixed/stable/objective qualities of a memory or narrative, we can extend this belief to the construction of chronological time – to stories and understandings of temporality (the fluidity of time). If a subject performing a speech act cannot be the same as the one who acted previously – that is, if the I of discourses is never directly, purely, or innocently restored (Barthes, 1989, as cited in Gannon, 2006, p. 475), then, storied selves can take a number of different forms and orders of time (Brockmeier, 2000; Bullough & Pinnegar, 2001). Jens Brockmeier (2000)
tells us that autobiographical time:

is a back-and-forth movement between the past and the present that furthermore relates to the future, even if this might not always be evident. Yet, unless I give up on my life at all, there is always a future towards which it is directed, a future that begins in this very moment and already looms into the present in which I tell my story. (p. 54)

It follows that autoethnography presents an opportunity to weave numerous forms of selves, with various orders of time, in the creation of a multi-layered and temporal human subject (Brockmeier, 2000, p. 56).

If we accept that memories of the past are entirely mutable and yet important to constructions of the autoethnographic self, can we can also accept mutable dreams, fantasies, and projections of the future have the same or similar importance? Mary Catharine Bateson (2007) offers that:

plans made for the future are made in the context of a set of narratives about the past and, even more significantly, the way we story the past prefigures and empower the choices to be made for the future and defines the relationships within which that future will be enacted. (p. 216)

What would it look like to blur the lines between past, present and future, in the construction of a text of self? Brockmeier (2000) reminds me that “every narrative about my past is always also a story told in, and about, the present as well as story about the future” (p. 56).

Viewed this way, the autobiographical process turns out to be not so much about an individual and sovereign subject taking stock of past events…rather, what happens in the autobiographical process is an interplay of positioning possible pasts and possible beginnings in the light of an end, that is the present of the story at the time, and in the context, of its telling. (Brockmeier, 2000, p. 55)

Does the present of the story have to “match” the present in which I write it? Once I have written any text, it can only ever be read as something written in the past… If I utilize
autoethnography to story a possible future, I can derive from it powerful information about selves in the present and the past.

I want to write my narrative as a possible self, 15 years from now. My story will explore the meanings of the past from an entirely possible future position in order to cope with “past” harmful practices of the self (insecurity, inadequacy, illegitimacy) experienced and remembered in the “present” of the writing (which will always be the “past” of the reading); it will illuminate a possible self in the future who has dealt with the barriers and adversities that I have and do struggle with.

The future self I will project in my thesis is no less possible (or real) than constructions of past and present selves. Rather, it seems that this undertaking frees me from particular risks of storying past and present selves – the illusion of a fixed and stable self constructed through the printing and/or publishing of a static printed text or story (Bochner & Ellis, 2001).

All types of selves are experienced in the now. My past selves no longer exists outside of my memories and stories of them; they can only be interpreted (reconstructed) from my current position in time (Ellis, 2004). Similarly, the future self that I have written and constructed as the protagonist in the story so far does not exist outside of my thoughts and stories of her. Both the past and the future are important to the present self.

Barbara Jago (1996) in her discussion of the self as storyteller, explains how the past is in perpetual construction and reconstruction. The present and the future are not exempt from re-constitution; we are always in the process of subjectivation. By acting to (de) construct desirable and/or undesirable future selves, I reinforce to my self and my
readers the idea that I have been, am, and will continue to be constructed selves; I will try to (re) produce and my selves as poststructural subjects, through storying. There is agency, resistance, and transformation in this.
APPENDIX D - SAME SEX WEDDINGS

The term “marriage” is used in industry to signify corporate mergers and union of two large bodies of peoples or interests. Additionally, it is used to describe how we can and have “married” two or more ideas, together. Could the wedding ritual be used to celebrate and ceremoniously join many types of self; to acknowledge the ownership of a woman by her self and signify her emergence (existence) as an individual apart from men? What else has the ceremony been used for?

Angela Bolte (1998) pointed to a society in which same-sex marriages might not be considered real or thought to exist; she attributes this to the dominance of heteronormative notions of marriage and weddings. Weddings had been considered only in terms of spouses, husband and wife, man and woman (Bolte, 1998). This particular masculine hegemonic and heteronormative legal definition was so dominant and powerful that nothing else was visible or intelligible as marriage or wedding.

In Canada, this heteronormative status quo has been undercut in the recent past, as documented by Heather MacIntosh, Elka Ressing, and Heather Andruff (2010);

In the last three decades, most Western countries have seen important steps in the advancement of equal rights and protection for all citizens. With respect to gay and lesbian individuals, the Trudeau government’s removal of homosexuality from Canada’s criminal code in 1969 was an early and significant change…Following a court decision in 1999, both federal and provincial governments introduced bills amending laws related to family law, adoption, pension benefits, and income tax to give couples in same-sex relationship the same rights and obligations as heterosexual couples in common-law relationships….The federal government’s passage of the Civil Marriage Act on July 20, 2005, extended the right to marry to same-sex partners across Canada. (p. 79)

I found inspiration in the increasing amount of academic research and literature on same-sex weddings. Research on, by, and with gay and lesbian couples who have
performed a wedding ceremony is increasing in quantity; the right to marry signifies a
form of equality (Badgett, 2011). This research ranges from discussions of policy and
legislature (legal struggles) surrounding marriage for same-sex partnerships in the USA
and Canada (Nicol & Smith, 2008) through to longer and more detailed narratives
describing the struggle for legitimacy and recognition experienced by same-sex couples
in their performances of wedding (Lenon, 2008; MacIntosh, Reissing, & Andruff, 2010)
and the struggle to revise traditional wedding ceremonies to better fit the persons utilizing
the ritual in the validation of marriages (Lash, 2004). Some research points to the
wedding ceremony and marriage institution as practices that are losing their hold and
necessity for women (Kopelman, Shea-Van Fossen, Paraskevas, Lawter, & Prottas, 2009)
and lesbian couples and parents in particular (Kelly, 2009) who in many cases choose to
live common-law without marriage.

One quantitative study (Badgett, 2011) surveyed 556 individuals in the United
States (Massachusetts) and the Netherlands in an exploration of the impact of same-sex
marriage legislation. Both the right to marry and the choice to exercise this right was
correlated with feelings of social inclusion (the highest being among white high-income
men) suggesting that policies of social inclusion for same-sex partnerships might have
positive psychological benefits.

My point in referring to this research and literature is to show that others have
begun to queer (disrupt; interrupt; reconstruct; appropriate) the wedding ritual in ways
that fit for them and as a means of accessing the validity, recognition, and legitimacy
offered to heterosexual couples through the wedding ceremony and marriage institution.
As discussed previously, my wedding was planned with only one disruptive intention: celebrating self-love in place of conjugal love. The remainder of the wedding was planned as I had dreamed it would happen, since I was a child.

The question remains as to whether non-heterosexual claims to the right to marry are a way of submitting to regulatory power. Do we seek to be fully ordered (and thus recognized and legitimated) by discursive and dominant norms? Is desire (always) inextricably tied to these norms? We must engage directly with hegemony in the struggle against them.