

## WHY MARRIAGE?

### *Introduction*

The possibility that marriage equality may exist in our country in the near future is a major advance for civil rights. Prohibitions on same sex marriage discriminate, treating lesbians and gays as less than full citizens. However, of all the battles for civil rights, the battle for marriage equality is one of the most compromised. Marriage has a long tradition of subordinating half of the population. Marriage equality means equality among couples, but it doesn't mean equality within couples. And the desire for equality can bring the demand for homogeneity. To be equal, do we have to be the same?

This project is an exploration of these two concerns — that marriage institutionalizes inequality, and that equality requires assimilation. Through fiction, non-fiction and visual art, the contributors have each investigated their unique perspective on marriage, offering criticisms and alternatives. As the political debate around marriage equality rages, we insist on a more fluid definition of family and commitment.

A simple story, *What's in a name* by Jeanne Dunning, makes perfectly clear the interest of the State in maintaining the institution of marriage. But if marriage equality becomes the law of the land, would that mean the State's interests in marriage have been compromised? Or will the State have greater control over more people, as homosexuals are assimilated into bourgeois culture?

Kevin Pierce analyzes the consequences of marriage on heterosexual couples, from the historical role it played in the oppression of women to the unknown details of the legal contract that people enter into when they marry today. *Wedding License: \$40. Divorce? Priceless* chronicles his and his partner's personal struggle to resist the pressure to marry.

On the other hand, artists Laura Letinsky and Shane Huffman discuss the futile desire for completeness that is often the ideal we seek in marriage. In a rambling texted conversation, emotional needs and expectations of love are woven into daily routines of work, existential anxieties about artistic identity, and references to romantic pop songs on Youtube.

Is marriage an expression of the aspiration for a romantic love that will endure all hardships, including the insecurity of the temptations of infidelity? Lauren Berlant and Laura Letinsky examine this question as it is manifested in Letinsky's photographs. The illusion of domestic bliss is spoiled with spilled wine, dirty dishes, and abandoned rooms.

Romance is perhaps the greatest marketing tool that marriage has. The image of the princess saved by Prince Charming embeds the desire for marriage in children at a young age. Karen Reimer's intervention in the romance novel as formulaic fiction is disarming – having us recognize the power of concepts by the number of times they are repeated. In this selection, the chapter for the letter “M”, we experience “marry”, “married”, and “marriage” as well as “me”.

The illusions of marriage are magnified in *Countering Marriage: An Entrée into Lord Sunder's "Unchained Liturgy"* by Sibel Katoptos. Katoptos, a pseudonym for an independent

scholar and literary theorist, comments upon a narrative text by Lord Sunder, another pseudonymic author, which is in turn thoroughly critiqued internally by sub-textual commentary. For these texts, the terror of marriage resides in the subconscious of the individuals who partake in its sacraments. These texts are absurd hermeneutics of a farcical ritual.

Kathryn Franke exposes the consequences of same sex marriage that it's proponents would rather not see. In *Public Sex, Same Sex Marriage, and the Afterlife of Homophobia*, Franke claims Anthony Weiner, the shamed former congressman, as the standard bearer for the rights of sexual non-conformism. The irony is amusing, but the subject is serious. Franke resists the domestication of homosexuality as a threat to freedom. "Sex for its own sake, and as part of a politics of freedom."

At the heart of the marriage equality debate is the unspoken horror of other people's sex lives. *The Kids Are Not Alright?* by Samuel Galloway and Joseph Sannicandro outs the true fears of conservatives: men fucking men, women fucking women. They confront this horror by making explicit what "pro-family values" opponents of same sex marriage and the marriage-equality gay community want to deny: that many gay men don't have conventional sex lives. They sometimes have multiple partners with widely varying age differences; they sometimes engage in dangerous sex. Galloway and Sannicandro resist the pressure for homosexuals to assimilate to heterosexual norms. They embrace the radical difference of homosexuality.

Outsiders expose the hypocrisies of the mainstream and provide creative alternative models to the status quo. In his

contribution, *The Papi Project: The Archives*, Rodriguez selected images from the thousands of photographs he found among his father's belongings. The images document his father's family – the family he made with his children and wife, and the family he chose among the gay community in Chicago's Boys Town in the 1980s. With children's birthday parties, pet cats, men hugging and kissing, adults sitting around the kitchen table late at night, Rodriguez's project proclaims family as both biological, (who you are born with and mate with,) and cultural (who you count on and who supports you, or who you fight with but stay with anyways). Likewise, photographer Lisa Lindvay has been documenting her family for over five years. Her father is the sole parent and provider for four children: his own daughter and three others who are the children of his ex-wife. Lindvay captures the struggle and chaos that co-exist with the compassion and tenderness in her family. Like Rodriguez, Lindvay's family is not bound by blood, but by choices, struggles, and commitment.

With this print addition of *Carceral Notebooks Volume 10*, its larger on-line companion, and the art events held in Chicago in 2013 and 2014, we hope to reveal a richness – indeed an unruliness—that is suppressed by the current political and media discussion of marriage.