

1) Introduction

The focus of my study is to explore how married couples negotiate individual and collective identities and associated epistemic rights on a moment-by-moment basis during talk-in-interaction, through the deployment of seemingly mundane practices. Although I have included the discussion of various relevant conversational elements and the sequential organisation of talk, I specifically examine two practices: 1) *the use of personal and collective pronouns*, whereby I explore when and how speakers employ either the personal pronoun “I”; the collective pronoun “we” or where and how shifts between these pronouns occur, as well as 2) *shifts in gaze direction*, whereby I pay close attention to the exact position and relative function of a gaze shift; that is before, during or after a claim. I investigate the exact moments in conversation at which these practices are employed while married people make claims about themselves and on behalf of their partners.

Marriage relationships seem to be unique in the sense that married people (as my data demonstrate) orient to having epistemic rights that people ordinarily do not typically orient to having. In alignment with Heritage (forthcoming) the notion of *epistemic rights* as it is used in this report is to be understood as the authority over certain knowledge that a speaker orients to during conversation; thereby either exercising the right to talk about this information or orienting to their limited access to this knowledge and resultant minimal authority to make certain claims. This could refer to knowledge pertaining to the speaker’s own individual knowledge; the couple’s shared knowledge as well as their partner’s independent, first-hand knowledge. The data show that speakers use the abovementioned practices to orient to their own as well as their partner’s identities and epistemic rights which seem to be treated as blurred in the context of a marriage relationship.

Hence, married couples are faced with a dilemma of when to present themselves and their partners as individuals and when to make claims about them collectively as a unit. Even while making claims about their partner’s individual opinions, thoughts or feelings, married people seem to orient to their special epistemic rights to be able to speak on behalf of their partners, albeit these claims are mitigated through various displays of uncertainty. My data suggest that this oriented-to uncertainty is not as evident when speakers make claims about collective actions that they share with their partners or when they speak about their own individual thoughts, feelings and opinions.

As my data show, speakers appear to employ these practices to demonstrate varying degrees of caution about claims, thereby displaying sensitivity to their partner's epistemic rights. I examine the use of these practices to establish how and when couples deal with this dilemma; that is, to establish how and when individuality is *maintained* and how and when an individual identity is *subsumed* into a marriage unit.

I begin with a situating literature review that specifically describes different views and functions of marriage as well as how these perspectives have shifted historically with marriage often being regarded as the ultimate level of a relationship. I move on to describe feminist critiques of marriage that mainly originate from the struggle against the oppression of women. These criticisms focus especially on tensions pertaining to individual identity formation and identity maintenance within a marriage unit, and claim that there is a seeming paradox underlying the practice of marriage: it simultaneously restricts the development of autonomy as well as enhances individual development through the intimacy seemingly present in a marriage relationship (Weinzweig, 1986). This leads to a discussion of the existing literature on the dilemma concerning individual versus collective identities within the context of marriage and a discussion of how previous studies conceptualise, as well as investigate, these individual and collective identities in various ways. I conclude the literature review by describing notions of epistemic authority and identity and the link between these two concepts. In this section as a whole I explore the dilemma of identities and associated epistemic rights that participants are faced with in the context of marriage relationships.

In the "Methodology" section, I describe my data collection and sampling procedures as well as provide a discussion on issues pertaining to generalisability and the suitability of my data. In addition, I briefly explain the analytical procedure employed, namely conversation analysis, and argue for why the study of interaction is the most appropriate choice of analysis for this type of research endeavour. After briefly describing the relevance of exploring the two practices of interest (*the use of personal and collective pronouns* and *shifts in gaze direction*), I describe the transcription process.

In the analytic sections of the report, I provide an in-depth analysis of a set of practices through which married couples manage the previously described dilemma. I conclude my report with a discussion of what the analysis reveals about how and when married couples negotiate between individual and shared identities and how and when they orient to their own as well as their partner's epistemic rights through the employment of the abovementioned

practices. Hence, the aim of the study is to establish how and when these practices serve to construct boundaries around the ways in which marriage involves compromising individuality to be a part of a unit. This is relevant, considering that none of the previous research has examined the *in situ* emergence of this dilemma, and the ways in which people reveal and manage it in the course of interactions. While previous research regards identities and related concepts as fixed variables that can be measured in relation to other variables, I aim to demonstrate the fluidity of how identities and epistemic rights are oriented to from moment to moment in interaction.

The aim is not to discover the internal, psychological processes such as intentions or motivations behind these practices; that is, I do not offer reasons for *why* these practices occur. Ultimately, in keeping with Schegloff's (2006) ideas that interaction is a primary site for sociality, the purpose of the study is to understand an element of the social organisation of marriage by examining the particular moment-by-moment sequential organisation of the given interactions.

2) Literature Review

2.1) Differing Views and Functions of Marriage

In every known human society, marriage has played a crucial role in social organisation regardless of the different types of marriage in varying contexts or cultures, and is therefore not simply a part of society but plays a fundamental role in structuring society (Amato, 2004; Karasu, 2007). This supports the idea that marriage is a universal phenomenon that is recognised by many different cultures as the ultimate level, “the golden standard” (Amato, 2004, p.102), of a relationship, and can therefore be treated as somewhat different from other types of relationships (Amato, 2004; Garrett, 2008; Karasu, 2007). People generally assume that marriage is an acceptable and intrinsically good practice that everyone is familiar with on a conceptual level, if not on a practical level, and does not need to be justified (Amato, 2004; Garrett, 2008; Karasu, 2007). According to Karasu (2007), many researchers regard marriage as a way to organise private and public lives, and argue that this practice is deeply embedded in many cultures, if not all.

Karasu (2007) suggests that marriage can be classified as an institution due to its particular commitments and social, economic and legal benefits. This means that the practice of marriage is also a public and social institution that not only represents a commitment between two people but also a contract between the couple and society (Karasu, 2007). It follows then that certain rules and social expectations are linked to marriage (Karasu, 2007). In alignment with this claim, Popenoe (1996) argues that marriage forms a “cultural script” (p. 247) that individuals can adhere to. This informs individuals as to what is expected of them by society; that is, it sets up rules and regulations that are expected to be obeyed; sets out how a person should or should not behave and stipulates consequences if these rules and regulations are not obeyed (Nock, 2001). By instituting a set of agreed-upon codes or laws in this way marriage creates an identity (Nock, 2001). Being “married” or “single” can hold varying meanings and forms an important part of an individual’s identity (Nock, 2001). By constructing identities of individuals and relationships between individuals, marriage ultimately organises society to a large extent.

In order to construct such a constituent but abstract part of society, language plays a crucial role. Through the use of particular discursive practices an abstract phenomenon like marriage

can be constructed and agreed-upon aspects of this phenomenon can be expressed. According to Schegloff (2006), identities and lives are constructed through language. Therefore, marriage is linked to the production of identities and is produced and reproduced through interactions and the use of language. It could be argued that in order to understand a married couple, and more broadly a family, we need to see how they interact with each other and with society. Marriage creates a link between individual lives and public lives (Karasu, 2007). Thus, a useful way to explore marriage is to examine interactions between people and how these produce marriage relationships, and the subjectivities associated with them.

Although the abovementioned aspects of marriage are relevant, marital commitment should be regarded as a practice that has many facets (Adams & Jones, 1997). Marriage is different from other types of relationships since there are different legal, social and interpersonal factors that play a role in marriage, exclusively (Adams & Jones, 1997; McDonald, 1981; Nock, 1995). One way in which the multiple views on marriage become evident is through the contrast between marriage as an economic agreement as opposed to a declaration of love (Strong, DeVault, & Cohen, 2005). Consistent with this view, Becker (1973) proposes a theory of marriage in terms of an economic arrangement where both partners are equal participants in contributing to the economy and where economics can partially be understood as a system of married couples who earn money. In contrast, Strong et al. (2005) argue that love, as the basis for most marriages today, is not only an emotion but also an action directed at and performed with your partner.

Despite the existence of many varying alternatives, marriage, especially heterosexual marriage, is largely taken-for-granted (Amato, 2004; Garrett, 2008; Karasu, 2007; Kitzinger, 2005). It seems to be something that many people do without reflecting on the many and varied ways in which it operates socially and psychologically or without considering other possible alternatives (Amato, 2004; Garrett, 2008; Karasu, 2007; Kitzinger, 2005). Although this is not the direct focus of this study it is important to question the practice of marriage and to not simply accept it as a taken-for-granted phenomenon. Therefore, it is appropriate to examine the practices through which marriage is produced. In particular, a study of the production of identities and subjectivities of married people in interaction is suitable.

This exploration is particularly relevant in modern society in which there has been a variety of shifts in thoughts and practices with respect to marriage (Byrd, 2009). Not only has cohabitation become an attractive alternative to marriage (Manning & Smock, 2005; Smock,

2000) but there has also been a noteworthy shift to change the definition of marriage to include the union of same-sex couples, in some countries, at least (MacIntosh, Reissing, & Andruff, 2010). Moreover, for women especially, marriage concepts have shifted to accommodate work demands as well as family demands (Bielby, 1992; Moen & Smith, 1986).

The African context has been a particularly interesting platform for challenging the traditional Western conception of marriage due to the vast variety of possible variations and definitions thereof. Traditionally, in some African cultures for example, procreation is the main reason for marriage (Baloyi, 2010). Another form of marriage that might also be changing from its stricter traditional form is polygamy; specifically polygyny (having two or more wives) (Epstein & Stanton, 2010). Epstein and Stanton (2010) argue that in Southern Africa traditions of strict polygyny are no longer stringently practiced and instead are replaced with other types of casual unions; such as women having various casual relationships with men in order to attain some sort of financial security. There have been many changes regarding customary marriage laws as they have become just as valid as laws pertaining to traditional Western views of marriage (deVos & Barnard, 2007). Furthermore, conventional Indian marriages are also widespread in parts of South Africa and some research has focussed on variations in these forms of marriage within Indian tradition when practicing Indian marriages in different countries (Singh & Harisunker, 2010).

Another important shift away from normalised, traditional views of marriage has been driven by the fight for basic human rights of people in many contexts. For example, in the struggle for equality, the legalisation of same-sex marriage has played a significant role and has been one of the central rights that same-sex couples have fought for (Josephson, 2005; Lehr, 1999; MacIntosh et al., 2010). These struggles clearly demonstrate that marriage is a goal that people strive for and is a structure that is seen as being central to human fulfilment. The right to be married is regarded as equally important to any other right especially because it allows for the attainment of further rights (deVos & Barnard, 2007). MacIntosh et al. (2010) explain the practical benefits of being married, such as attaining legal recognition, which is particularly important for same-sex couples should they be interested in, for example adopting a child or wanting to care for their partner in the case of an illness.

Not only is the right to marry regarded as a fundamental human right but there seems to be more social support and recognition for couples who are married (deVos & Barnard, 2007;

Macintosh et al., 2010). Relatedly, some researchers have demonstrated that married couples are generally healthier and happier people (Karasu, 2007). Specifically for same-sex couples marriage can represent a platform on which they can make their relationship public and disambiguate their sexual identities. In this way marriage plays a unique role in the expression of sexual orientation and possibly even identity (MacIntosh et al., 2010).

Notwithstanding the significance of the many variations and historical shifts in views of marriage discussed in this section, my study focuses on a feature of marriage that is apparent across different types of marriage and different social contexts: the way in which marriage represents the joining of two (or more) individuals and accompanying identities into a socially-sanctioned union or unit; that is, from separate individuals to a collectivity. As demonstrated in my analysis, married couples in general are faced with having to negotiate between orienting to themselves and their partner as a unit, or as separate individuals, in interactional contexts.

2.2) Feminist Critiques of Marriage

A pivotal transition with which the meaning of marriage has changed has been associated with feminist criticisms (Josephson, 2005; Lehr, 1999; Leonard, 2001; Smith, 1997; Strong et al., 2005; Thomas, 2005). According to these perspectives, a family or marital relationship can be nurturing and emotionally, economically and socially supportive, however, it can also act as a platform for oppression against and domination of women (Callan & Noller, 1987; Josephson, 2005; Lehr, 1999; Leonard, 2001; Smith, 1997; Thomas, 2005). The ideal of a “nuclear family” has perpetuated oppressive gender roles which have excluded women from more powerful positions in society (Callan & Noller, 1987; Josephson, 2005; Lehr, 1999; Leonard, 2001; Smith, 1997; Thomas, 2005). By excluding women from many career opportunities, men have traditionally been expected to work and women expected to remain at home to take care of children and household chores (Josephson, 2005; Lehr, 1999; Leonard, 2001; Smith, 1997; Strong et al., 2005; Thomas, 2005). This implies certain unequal power dynamics that have dominated Western society and have facilitated the direct or indirect oppression of women through the refusal of certain opportunities and consequent dependence on their husbands (Josephson, 2005; Lehr, 1999; Leonard, 2001; Smith, 1997; Strong et al., 2005; Thomas, 2005). Consequently, marriage has been regarded as an economic necessity for some women to survive as there have hardly been any feasible

economic alternatives in the past (Josephson, 2005; Lehr, 1999; Leonard, 2001; Smith, 1997; Strong et al. 2005; Thomas, 2005). The immense power of the institution of marriage in these contexts has reflected how favourable (and in some cases necessary) marriage really is and, hence, is regarded as the “golden standard” (Amato, 2004, p. 102) of a relationship.

However, there has been substantial criticism of marriage that questions whether such an arrangement that serves as a space for oppression can indeed be labeled the “golden standard” of a relationship (e.g. Boonzaier, 2006; Josephson, 2005; Lehr, 1999; Leonard, 2001; Smith, 1997; Strong et al., 2005; Thomas, 2005; Wardle, 2006; Weinzweig, 1986). In order to challenge traditional ways of constructing gender and marriage, feminist movements have advocated change that allows women to have the same opportunities as men to achieve an elevated status in society, for example, by being able to have the same employment opportunities (Strong et al., 2005). Linked to this has been the dramatic change in many societies where women have entered the work-force as equal co-providers for their families (Strong et al., 2005). Implied in these shifts are attempts to improve power imbalances (Boonzaier, 2006; Josephson, 2005; Lehr, 1999; Leonard, 2001; Smith, 1997; Thomas, 2005).

In many societies power dynamics and particular gender roles are deeply embedded in a patriarchal system. It has been argued that due to the power imbalances between women and men a marriage allows for a private space where various forms of oppression can be exercised, a prevalent form of which is domestic violence (Boonzaier, 2006). According to Boonzaier (2006), the problem of oppressive structures within a male-dominated society is exacerbated by traditional, taken-for-granted constructions of marriage and gender roles.

Weinzweig (1986) explores an important paradox that questions the compatibility of marriage or marriage-like relationships with feminist ideas on the development of the self and individuality. On the one hand, historical forms of marriage and marriage-like relationships have supported oppressive structures that impede autonomous self-development for a woman; on the other hand, growth of the individual seems to be nurtured in the context of an intimate relationship in cohabitation (Weinzweig, 1986). In traditional male-dominated societies, marriage has been the only lifestyle option for women who have often been regarded as the economic or sexual property of their husbands (Josephson, 2005; Lehr, 1999; Leonard, 2001; Smith, 1997; Thomas, 2005; Weinzweig, 1986). Traditional gender roles and labour divisions have forced women to take care of their families before tending to their own needs

(Josephson, 2005; Lehr, 1999; Leonard, 2001; Smith, 1997; Thomas, 2005; Weinzweig, 1986).

However, even within modern, more liberal forms of committed, cohabital relationships stereotypical gender roles may continue to exist; individual choice may be compromised; the need for physical and psychological distance from others, which is crucial for self-development, is threatened and opportunities to relate to other people outside the relationship unit are restricted (Josephson, 2005; Lehr, 1999; Leonard, 2001; Smith, 1997; Thomas, 2005; Weinzweig, 1986). This last point is particularly important since by committing to only one person¹ there are only limited ways to have intimate relationships with others (outside the marriage unit) who would contribute to the growth of the individual by, for example, pointing out negative habits or character traits that the intimate partner might simply learn to live with (Weinzweig, 1986).

Weinzweig (1986) suggests that living on one's own might prove to be the most ideal context for developing an individual self and unique identity. However, she proceeds to provide potential ways in which a marriage or any other type of marriage-like relationship could contribute significantly to the formation of such an identity, especially for a woman. She suggests that it provides a context of affection, sex and companionship which allows the individual to focus on the development of other aspects of their lives and proposes that the individual's partner could act as an external mirror reflecting the individual's self-perception (Weinzweig, 1986). Furthermore, the individual can grow in a context of interaction and mutual respect (Weinzweig, 1986).

Weinzweig's (1986) conclusion to this dilemma, from a feminist's perspective, is that a woman must first be autonomous on her own; then autonomous while being together with her partner and only then can an identity be formed and a sense of self developed in the context of relating to others. However, this seems like a very clear-cut, straight-forward solution to a dilemma that is evidently not so simple to solve. The tension of finding an individual identity within or separate from the shared identity of a marriage unit seems to be a dilemma that many couples deal with. Regardless of whether people have (prior to getting married) already developed the kind of personal autonomy or identity that Weinzweig (1986) suggests,

¹ This applies to the case of *monogamous* marriage relationships which is relevant to the present study since the sample only consisted of couples involved in this type of relationship. Future research might prove to elucidate this dilemma in the context of *polygamous*, *polygenous* or other types of marriage arrangements that include more than two partners.

marriage remains a common and popular choice for large numbers of people. Furthermore, it is clear that due to the historical oppression of women through the patriarchal structure of marriage, even today, women are faced with a greater struggle in finding their individual identities than men are (Josephson, 2005; Lehr, 1999; Leonard, 2001; Smith, 1997; Thomas, 2005; Weinzwieg, 1986). However, though arguably particularly salient for women, anyone involved in marriage or a marriage-like relationship is faced with the dilemma of having to negotiate individual and shared identities (Skowron, 2000). In the following section I discuss the research literature that has focussed on this identity dilemma.

2.3) Dilemmas of Identity in Marriage

Previous research in the field has concluded that there is a constant negotiation of contradictory processes and needs that influence the formation and maintenance of individual identity, which can be regarded as one of the most central aspects of being a social human being. This contradiction seems to make the formation of an individual identity, while at the same time finding stability in the most widely accepted form of an intimate relationship (namely marriage), almost impossible (Askham, 1976).

There have been various ways in which the basic issue of individual versus shared identities has been referred to in existing literature. Askham (1976) refers to this tension within a marriage relationship as the “identity” (p. 534) versus “stability” (p. 534) dilemma. Harter et al. (1997) propose two extreme dimensions of relationship styles: “self-focused autonomy” (p. 147) versus “other-focused connectedness” (p. 149); whereas Shulman, Levy-Shiff, Kadem and Alon (1997) treat this as a tension between “closeness and individuality” (p. 37) in the context of an intimate relationship. Skowron (2000) makes claims about predicting the “quality of marital relationships” (p.229) from “differentiation of self” (p. 229). More recently, Sahlstein and Dun (2008) have called this the “autonomy-connection” dilemma (p. 37), which is similar to the way Harter et al. (1997) have described this tension, however Sahlstein and Dun (2008) use a very different approach to do so. A discussion on the various findings as well as methodologies used to investigate the abovementioned concepts is relevant in order to demonstrate that my study explores this tension from a different and original perspective.

Harter et al. (1997) draw on data collected from a newspaper survey which required participants to identify their own relationship style as well as that of their partners by

indicating one of three possible styles: “self-focused autonomy” (p. 147); “other-focused connectedness” (p. 149) and a combination of the two relationship styles defined as a “mutual” style (p. 149). The study contributes to the understanding of the maintenance of an “authentic self” (p. 147) within an intimate relationship. The authors aim to establish the frequency of identified relationship styles as well as the extent to which the relationship style of a participant could predict that of his or her partner. This results in a categorisation of particular relationship dimensions accompanied by an attempt to place participants in these categories in order to make claims about their identities. The implication of this is that identity is viewed as a stable construct that can be labelled and categorised. This cannot fully and comprehensively cover every aspect of an identity and related relationship dynamics. Based on their aggregate results, Harter et al. (1997) make conclusions about how certain types of people will behave in general based on very restricted categories; for example, they conclude that participants in the “mutual” (p.149) group would identify their partners as part of the “mutual” (p. 149) style relationship type. This approach thus focuses on broad patterns, derived from self-reported self-categorisations, rather than examining actual interactions for the fluid and variable ways in which identities are produced and negotiated at particular moments (cf. Antaki & Widdicombe, 1998).

Similarly, Shulman et al. (1997) treat these concepts of individual and collective identities as variables that can be measured (with the help of quantitative intimacy and self-disclosure scales), and claim that a sense of intimacy is affected by closeness experienced with one’s significant other. This attempt to establish a cause-effect relationship can answer a very particular question, namely *why* certain types of intimacy occur more frequently than others but it cannot provide any answers about *how* this happens or how it becomes observable during interaction.

This particular study on closeness and individuality (see Shulman et al., 1997) did examine the interaction between the participants and their partners; however this was simply rated on a 5-point scale to establish what relationship-type the couple was a part of. Therefore, nothing could be said about the intricate details of how they interacted, and predetermined limited categories were imposed on a construct as complex as identity and relationship dynamics.

Skowron’s (2000) study on the relationship between the “differentiation of self” (p. 229) and the “quality of a marriage relationship” (p. 229) is a further example of the employment of quantitative methods to explore the ability to keep a sense of self within an intimate

relationship. This is based on Bowen's (1978) conceptualisation of the importance of differentiation of self for long-term intimacy and mutuality in marriage for both partners, regardless of gender. Conversely, an intimate relationship can help form a sense of individuality (Weinzweig, 1986). There thus seems to be a constant tension to maintain a sense of self in a committed relationship such as marriage while forming an identity as a unified couple (Bowen, 1976; Kerr, 1988). The contradiction lies in achieving autonomy without the fear that the partner will leave and being close without feeling smothered, along with attaining an individual as well as collective identity (Bowen, 1978; Keir & Bowen, 1988). Even though these ideas are very helpful in understanding the dilemmas of individual and collective identities within a marriage relationship, the authors simplify what seems to be a complex set of concerns into a simple dyadic typology, and do so without directly examining the behaviour that the two "types" are assumed to be defined by.

Even though Askham (1976) previously employed an approach that was more qualitative in nature than the studies described above, she still explores the tension between individual identity and a sense of stability within a marriage using frequency counts of different types of themes that occurred during interviews. Hence, retrospective interview reports were used to provide evidence for various ways in which it becomes apparent that a sense of identity requires privacy whereas this privacy might jeopardise the stability within a relationship. Thus, a question about *what* is going on is answered while failing to answer *how* this is done. This retrospective report approach also raises questions about the degree to which people can accurately recall and recount the details of their relationship or whether the people producing the reports may be working in the interview setting to present themselves in particular ways, as opposed to "accurately" answering the interview questions. In this case the interview's constituent role in the production of certain actions is ignored and, instead, the interview process is merely regarded as a context in which phenomena can be discovered and determined.

In an attempt to attain a more comprehensive picture about the "autonomy-connectedness" (p. 37) dilemma, Sahlstein and Dun (2008) use qualitative interviews to explore this tension. The authors describe participants' management of pronouns such as "I" and "we" during the interview. Despite this, the study offers a list of themes that explore how an imbalance in autonomy in relation to connectedness can result in the termination of a relationship but does not examine the details of how such imbalances are produced interactionally, instead drawing on firm categories or types similar to those employed in the other studies described above.

However, it is significant that it was found that the tension between individual and collective identities seems to be in some way implicated (at least based on participants' reports) in the existence and maintenance of an intimate relationship such as marriage. This demonstrates the importance of exploring how this dilemma is negotiated in a context where married couples are still in a relationship.

In contrast to the abovementioned body of literature the present study assumes that the relevance of particular identities can change constantly during the course of conversation on a moment-to-moment basis, so that this construction of identity cannot be viewed as a fixed and general characteristic of an individual but rather is dependent on the immediate action and conduct of the participant within the conversation (Antaki & Widdicombe, 1998; Kitzinger, 2005; Lerner & Kitzinger, 2007; Raymond & Heritage, 2006). Therefore, I attempt to establish *how* participants manage the dilemma involving individual versus collective identities and negotiate the abovementioned seemingly conflicting notions in talk-in-interaction by examining the moment-by-moment details of participants' conduct. This offers a new perspective on how people might shift between individual and collective identities at different times during interactions to show that boundaries between these identities might be treated as blurred and not rigid as previous research has assumed. In taking this approach, my study converges with a body of literature, situated primarily within conversation analysis, relating to the intersections between identities and matters of epistemic authority. I briefly discuss this literature in the section that follows.

2.4) Identity and Epistemic Authority in Interaction

Related to the abovementioned tension between individual versus shared identities is the issue of rights to knowledge and rights to perform particular actions at particular moments during interactions. According to Raymond and Heritage (2006), identity itself can be produced through the management of so-called epistemic rights during talk-in-interaction. Rights, responsibilities and authority in terms of knowledge and who has access to this knowledge are formed by, as well as, contribute to the speaker's and recipient's identities (Glenn & LeBaron, 2011; Raymond & Heritage, 2006). In combination, these related tensions constitute the basic dilemma of self-other relations (Raymond & Heritage, 2006).

Raymond and Heritage (2006) refer to these links between identities and relative access and rights to knowledge as “the epistemics of social relations” (p. 677). This includes the processes by which participants’ identities are linked to and constructed by their relative access and rights to possess certain knowledge as well as articulate it (Kamio, 1997). Primary and secondary rights to knowledge constitute identities because only people with a certain identity or experience are typically treated as having access to particular types of knowledge and therefore rights to this knowledge, since there seems to be a deep connection between what we know and who we are (Glenn & LeBaron, 2011; Muntigl & Choi, 2010). According to Tsoukas (2005), knowledge and identity are intricately linked in the sequential organisation of interaction.

Heritage and Raymond (2005) argue that epistemic authority is negotiated from moment to moment through the actions people produce at particular moments in interaction. As such, epistemic authority is not seen as something that is rigidly tied to particular identities; instead it emerges from the ways in which people interact with each other. People have been shown to recurrently act in ways that demonstrate an orientation to links between epistemic authority and identity (Raymond & Heritage, 2006). Moreover, people have shown sensitivity to their rights to knowledge or their rights to assess a situation or evaluate a statement relative to the rights of their co-participants (Chafe & Nichols, 1986; Goodwin & Goodwin, 1987; Kamio, 1997; Stivers, 2005). This implies that a speaker’s so-called “epistemic stance” (Heritage, forthcoming, p. 8) only exists in relation to the recipient’s adopted “epistemic stance” and becomes evident through the sequential organisation of the conversation (Heritage, forthcoming).

The notion of “epistemic authority” (Heritage & Raymond, 2005, p.15) (or epistemic primacy and subordination) is especially interesting in the context of a marriage. As my analysis demonstrates, married people recurrently display caution about, and produce certain actions in order to manage, the question of when they have the right to speak on behalf of both themselves and their spouses, as opposed to when they can speak only for themselves as individuals. This in turn has implications for the emergent relevance of their identities either as independent individuals or as part of a marriage unit at particular moments in interactions (Heritage, forthcoming). I examine how this is negotiated within the context of a marriage unit where identities and rights to knowledge are treated as being blurred, shared, and are created on a moment-by-moment basis in conversation (cf. Lerner & Kitzinger, 2007).

Research on the intersection between epistemic rights and memory in the context of marriage has shown that participants oriented to having the right to answer whenever their spouses could not remember a detail (Muntigl & Choi, 2010). Furthermore, responsibility for not remembering can be transferred to the spouse who can then be held responsible (Muntigl & Choi, 2010). Hence, the oriented-to boundaries between individual and shared identities seem to become treated as blurred within a marriage or marriage-like committed relationship.

Previous studies of epistemic authority have demonstrated that individuals are normatively treated as having primary rights to know and describe their *own* thoughts and experiences (Goffman, 1983; Heritage & Raymond, 2005; Sacks, 1984). However, my data demonstrate that married couples may observably orient to collective epistemic rights at particular moments in interaction. The merging of participants' identities into a marriage unit becomes visible in the ways in which they make claims on behalf of their partner in certain situations. Hence, while other studies show that individuals usually orient to rights to their *own* experiences and opinions, my analysis builds on this to show that in an intimate relationship such as marriage or similar relationships participants also orient to having the right to speak about their *partner's* thoughts, experiences and feelings.

Married couples thus seem to cross this boundary of being able to comment on their partner's thoughts, feelings and opinions, which is a right that usually solely belongs to the individual (Heritage & Raymond, 2005; Raymond & Heritage, 2006). The individual/collective dichotomy of epistemic rights is not treated as rigid and speakers seem to orient to blurred epistemic boundaries. It therefore becomes evident in my analysis that the couples struggle themselves in knowing when they can speak for their partner and when it is seemingly best to speak for themselves.

Building on the literature described above, my findings show how and at which particular moments married people draw the boundaries between individual and collective identities and associated epistemic rights in interaction. In contrast to previous research, I show that epistemic rights and identities can become blurred within a marriage and that making claims about individual thoughts, feelings and behaviours is not treated as exclusively reserved for the individual, as speakers make these types of claims on behalf of their partner. It is evident that participants are not always certain themselves about how to negotiate these issues and may shift between treating themselves and their partners as individuals at one particular moment during the conversation, while shifting to presenting themselves and their partner as

a unified couple at another. Hence, my findings will contribute to the body of research pertaining to identity and epistemic authority. Although this is beyond the scope of this particular study the results may also contribute to further research on subjectivities and “selves”.

3) Research Questions

Based on the above discussion of the literatures relevant to the present study, the research questions guiding the study were as follows:

- 1) How do married people manage their *own* as well as *their partner's* identities and oriented-to epistemic rights in interactional contexts?
- 2) At which moments in talk-in-interaction do participants treat themselves as independent individuals; when do they treat themselves as a part of a marriage unit; and when does the negotiation between identities become evident through a shift between these two orientations?
- 3) What actions are being performed as this identity negotiation takes place; that is, at which moments in conversation do speakers speak for themselves; when do they collectively make claims on behalf of their partners and when do speakers display caution when speaking on behalf of their partners?

4) Methodology

4.1) Data

I explore the dilemma described above by drawing on seven video- and audio-recorded semi-structured interviews (each of which lasted between 45 minutes and two hours) with married couples who were all above 18 years of age. One of the couples was not married but had been living together for 18 years and had a common-law agreement². These couples were asked a number of open-ended questions³ pertaining to the every-day practicalities of, as well as conceptual issues pertaining to their married lives. The interviews were videotaped in order to allow for analysis of non-verbal practices that may be relevant for understanding the actions within the interactions. Before agreeing to participate the couples were given a Participant Information Sheet (see Appendix B) informing them about the relevant details of the study. Following this they each individually signed a Consent Form (see Appendix C) indicating that they consented to being both audio- and video-recorded. All interviews were conducted in the participants' respective homes for comfort and convenience.

A combination of various sampling procedures was used. Initially, two couples were chosen using a purposive sampling technique; that is, chosen according to the criteria "being married or in a long-term committed relationship". Once these two couples had completed their interviews further participants were recruited via snowballing: the initial couples were asked whether they could direct me to any other married couples or couples in long-term committed relationships who might be interested in taking part in the study. I asked the initial couples whether they knew of other potential participants who would answer my questions very differently, thereby employing a maximum variation sampling technique to ensure a group of participants who would answer the interview questions in a wide range of ways. This reduced the likelihood that whatever emerged from the interviews would be an idiosyncratic product of having a like-minded or similar group of participants. The analysis of the data began as soon as I had completed the first interview, to enable a process of sampling to redundancy

²Byrd (2009) argues that cohabitation can act as a symbol for commitment and that this form of commitment can paradoxically represent a stronger bond than marriage since the couple is in the relationship by choice and not because a piece of paper, the law or cultural rules associated with marriage bind them to each other. Therefore, it is appropriate to include this couple in my study.

³ Even though the participants were shown a short video clip and were subsequently asked questions about it, the analysis ended up focussing on more general features of the interview and so there is no analysis of what was said in the video.

based on having (on an on-going basis) identified the practices that appeared most pervasively throughout all the interviews, such that there was reason to assume after seeing the same things throughout seven interviews that I would observe similar practices in subsequent interviews.

Thus, the rationale behind the sampling procedure was to capture as many different interactional practices as possible, while not assuming that these are tied to any particular categories of people. Despite the relatively small sample size in the data set, the pervasive nature of each practice identified throughout all the interviews suggests that the use of these practices (and thus orientations to the dilemma they point to) is not restricted to people of particular demographic categories but seems to be prevalent among married people in general. The aim of the analysis is thus not to make distributional claims about particular, demographic categories of people or to establish how frequently particular categories of people might employ these practices (Schegloff, 1993). Instead, the focus is on *how* (through which practices) and *when* (at which moments during the course of the conversation) the practices themselves are produced, on a case-by-case basis (cf. Peräkylä, 2004).

This has implications for how the term “generalisability” is understood. For the purposes of this study, the view of generalisation adopted is similar to that of Peräkylä (2004), namely that “generalisability” in any qualitative research, especially while employing conversation analysis and interaction analysis, is understood as a “possibility” (Peräkylä, 2004, p. 297). The focus is on establishing which practices are *possible* without attempting to infer that these practices necessarily do occur in other contexts (Peräkylä, 2004). Furthermore, the aim is not to establish the frequency of these practices across all the interviews to find an emerging general phenomenon or pattern across *all* married couples (cf. Peräkylä, 2004). In this way, I focus on the details of particular practices in particular cases, rather than making claims about the distribution of occurrence of these practices or general types thereof in any particular (type of) interaction.

Linked to this idea of “generalisability”, it must be noted that even though efforts were made to create an interview setting that was most conducive to interactions that resembled naturally-occurring conversations⁴ the interviews constitute a particular kind of institutional research-based interaction, and talk in the interview context should not be assumed to be

⁴The interviews were conducted in the participants’ homes. Furthermore, the couples were encouraged to engage in a free-flowing conversation as opposed to answering a structured series of interview questions.

reflective of talk in other contexts, including ordinary conversations (Potter & Hepburn, 2005). However, Holstein and Gubrium (2004) argue that “spontaneous conversations are not necessarily more ‘authentic’ or bias-free” (p. 155) than conversations that occur during an interview. Thus, interviews were examined as constituent parts of the actions performed and as interactions in their own right, albeit interactions that may differ in significant ways from ordinary conversations or other institutional interactions. That is, the presence of the researcher was not treated as a “contamination” (Holstein & Gubrium, 2004, p. 155) to the research process that impedes the ability to make accurate claims. Instead, I (as the researcher-interviewer in the interview context) incorporated my questions, responses, and other actions into the analysis as a constituent part of the participants’ production of the practices on which my analysis focuses. This approach is consistent with the suggestion that analyses of interviews can be deepened by attending to the interactions that take place between the participants and researcher as well as between the participants themselves (in my case, married couples) (Potter, 2000; Potter & Hepburn, 2005).

Moreover, it could be argued that the research findings are less valid or “pure” (Holstein & Gubrium, 2004, p. 155) because the participants were aware that they had been approached to participate in the study by virtue of being married couples, so their identities in this regard could be seen as having a kind of occasion-based omni-relevance – meaning that they could be heard as relevant for virtually anything that is said in the interviews (Sacks, 1992). However, despite the participants knowing that they had been invited to participate by virtue of being a married couple, the data revealed recurrent orientations on their part, at particular moments, to the question of when they could or should speak on behalf of the marriage unit, versus when they could or should speak only as individuals. Thus, even in a context where being married is hyper-relevant, the couples still recurrently orient to the distinction between being individuals (sometimes) versus part of a married couple (sometimes).

In light of the above arguments, interview interactions provide a useful site for examining the dilemma described above and it is likely that this type of interactional context is not the only place in which speakers show an orientation to, or produce, these practices. Rather, we might expect that such practices would be observable in any context in which people's identities as married couples versus individual people is relevant. However, further research, involving the examination of married couples’ interactions in other interactional settings, may be required in order to evaluate the degree to which these practices do occur in other contexts.

4.2) Analytic Approach

The analysis employed in this study is conversation analysis which has developed as a rigorous method to explore how certain practices “make social action and interaction, mutual sense-making and social reality construction possible” (Heritage, 2004, p.222) in many different contexts (Heritage, 2004). Schegloff (2006) notes that interaction is the primary site of social life and that it demonstrates how actions are sequentially organised and produced by participants. Using conversation analytic techniques, the sequential organisation of the conversation was analysed, while attending to interactionally relevant features such as pauses, intonation, emphasis placed on certain words and the general temporal organisation of the conversation (e.g. the unfolding of sequences of action, overlapping talk, etc.).

A conversation analytic approach offers a powerful set of resources for the examination of this dilemma (including the uncertainty about rights to knowledge) in talk-in-interaction. According to Heritage and Raymond (2005), “the distribution of rights and responsibilities regarding what participants can accountably know, how they know it, whether they have rights to describe it and in what terms is directly implicated in organized practices of speaking” (p. 16). Moreover, in interaction, particular actions and practices create certain identities (Raymond & Heritage, 2006). Thus, in order to understand how married couples position themselves as an individual versus as part of a marriage unit and how they negotiate the “individual-collectivity” divide by exercising certain rights to knowledge, it is appropriate to examine the details of their interactional practices in this regard.

Furthermore, the analysis focuses on language use as an action-orientated process where individuals use language to perform actions and by doing so construct their reality and, more specifically, make sense of their identities in the context of marriage (Wilbraham, 2004). Language is not simply a tool to provide an internal thought or idea with a name and should not only be regarded as a means to express attitudes and understandings of a reality (Willig, 2001). It must be made clear that language “construct(s) versions of social reality” (Willig, 2001, p. 88). The focus should be on how social categories are constructed by language (Willig, 2001). Hence, contrary to some of the previous research discussed in the literature review, I focus on the action-oriented nature of the participants’ talk rather than treating these displays of knowledge as a reflection of inner states. I investigate how the negotiation between individual and collective identities gets done in the context of action-in-interaction.

Furthermore, I do not attempt to make claims about participants' inner states, or claim that they are consciously using the practices I examine, but rather that the use of the practices (consciously or otherwise) serve as a vehicle through which matters of epistemic authority emerge as an observable basis for the production of actions-in-interaction.

It is further noteworthy that the focus of the analysis is primarily on the practices the participants employed in producing actions-in-interaction, rather than on the content of the talk itself (although the content of the talk is typically relevant for understanding how particular practices and actions are produced). As such, the content of my questions and their answers is of less importance to the analysis than the ways in which the participants displayed an orientation to the dilemma identified in the literature review, through their use of particular practices. Hence, the aim is not to make general thematic frequency counts of what is being said but rather to examine how epistemic authority is negotiated within the interactional context produced by the topics being talked about (Glenn & LeBaron, 2011).

In order to ensure a level of validity when making analytic claims Peräkylä (2004) suggests that the researcher should pay close attention to what is said in the turn that follows the practices of interest. In agreement with this suggestion, I additionally analyse responses and subsequent turns as evidence to support my claims. Peräkylä (2004) further suggests that it aids the analysis process to examine the interplay between verbal utterances and other non-verbal modes of communication. Therefore, I will focus on the analysis of both verbal and non-verbal practices in order to attain a better picture of the individual-collective identity dilemma.

The analysis focuses on two sets of practices, namely *the use of personal and collective pronouns* and *shifts in gaze direction* through which the negotiation of individual versus collective identities becomes observably relevant as a phenomenon that participants manage interactionally. This means that the analysis is not based on the special importance of pronoun use or gaze shifts per se, but rather on the ways in which examining these practices provides a way of observing the consequentiality of the individual versus shared identity distinction.

The analysis was aided by detailed transcripts of the interview interactions. The transcripts were produced using a simplified version of the conventions developed by Gail Jefferson (and listed in Jefferson, 2004). In the transcripts of the excerpts demonstrating the shifts in

gaze direction I employed a modified version of an additional transcription procedure developed by Goodwin (1979), which was specifically developed to be able to show details pertaining to gaze shifts during conversation. Pseudonyms were used so that there is no way of linking what was said to any particular participant. The excerpts examined in the following sections were carefully selected to clearly exemplify the abovementioned practices, while demonstrating the range of variation in their production.

Even though the focus in the study is not so much on *what* is explicitly being said but rather on *how* it is being produced, it is noteworthy that, in all the interviews in my data set participants repeatedly talked about the individual ("I") versus shared ("we") identity issue at various times in the interview. At the same time, though, some couples explicitly stated that when people get married they become a "unity":

Excerpt 1 (Liza and Thabiso)

- 1 R: So, sort of what is a marriage about then, in the end?
- 2 L: Commitment [an-
- 3 T: [°Man, it's about unity°.
- 4 R: Unity
- 5 T: Ya.

One participant even stated that two people essentially become "one person". This demonstrates the relevance of this dilemma as a topic of concern for these couples and shows that it is a tension that these married couples (and probably many others also) deal with. However, the primary focus of the analysis is not how couples reflect upon or talk *about* this dilemma, but rather on how they display their orientations to this issue through ordinary and pervasive interactional practices such as the use of pronouns and shifts in gaze direction, regardless of the topic of conversation at the time.

5) Analysis

5.1) Use of Personal and Collective Pronouns

Consistent with the view that identities are constructed on a moment-by-moment basis in every-day interactions, the exploration of self-reference offers insights into the ordinary ways in which speakers construct identities and negotiate epistemic authority during conversation (cf. Kitzinger, 2005; Lerner & Kitzinger, 2007; Heritage & Raymond, 2005). It has been shown that self-references are closely linked to the participant's situated identity because they demonstrate on whose behalf the participant might be speaking (Lerner & Kitzinger, 2007; Raymond & Heritage, 2006). Generally, the self-reference "I" is used for the expression of individual feelings, thoughts, experiences, intentions and opinions to which the individual has primary rights (Heritage & Raymond, 2005; Lerner & Kitzinger, 2007; Muntigl & Choi, 2010; Sacks, 1984). When explaining, assessing, evaluating or describing *shared* experience or knowledge, speakers have access to partial ownership over this particular experience and knowledge and so, exercise the oriented-to right to speak on behalf of both themselves and/or those with whom they share it (Lerner & Kitzinger, 2007).

This differentiation between collective and individual epistemic rights is also evident in my data. In this section I examine how participants employ either "individual self-reference" ("I") or "collective self-reference" ("we") to position themselves or their partners in particular ways, as well as to index individual or collective identities (Lerner & Kitzinger, 2007, p.526). By examining speakers' use of pronouns (specifically, the individual pronoun "I"⁵ versus the collective pronoun "we"⁶), I explore how speakers orient to their identities as either separate individuals or part of marriage units. Furthermore, I explore how these orientations intersect with matters of epistemic rights as it becomes evident that married people display certain taken-for-granted beliefs about what sort of information their spouse *should* know about and what type of experiences and information they have epistemic rights to (cf. Lerner & Kitzinger, 2007; Raymond & Heritage, 2006). Furthermore, my data show that married couples often refer to themselves as a collective using the collective self-reference "we" which shows ways in which the use of the personal pronoun "I" for individual thoughts, feelings and opinions (e.g. Lerner & Kitzinger, 2007) might not always apply.

⁵ This includes variations thereof, such as "me".

⁶ This includes variations thereof, such as "us".

The data show that at some moments the couples orient to their status as a unit. However, they treat it as important for each partner to still maintain a certain amount of *individuality*, especially when expressing their opinions and thoughts. This has implications for what the underlying and implied rights and entitlements of marriage partners are interpreted as: when does one member of the marriage unit speak for themselves and when do they speak as a member of this marriage unit and can therefore also speak for the other member? The use of pronouns, a seemingly mundane and pervasive practice, can reveal a fundamental feature of the social organisation of marriage, namely the tensions and boundaries between maintaining one's individuality and becoming part of a unit. I will show, through an analysis of the use of these pronouns, *when* and *how* this individuality is maintained, when collective identities are produced or when there seems to be uncertainty about which to use.

I begin with cases in which *individual* self-references are produced (using the personal pronouns "I" or "me"), and thus in which speakers produce their identities, and orient to their epistemic authority, as individuals. I then examine cases where *collective* self-references are constructed (using the collective pronoun "we"), thus reflecting orientations to epistemic rights to knowledge and information that the couple collectively has access to within the marriage unit. Finally, I examine cases in which speakers shift between the use of "I" and "we," thus displaying uncertainty about which identity (individual versus collective), and which associated epistemic authority, is appropriate for the action being produced- demonstrating the resultant blurring of identities and obscuring of associated epistemic boundaries within a marriage.

Excerpt 2 demonstrates how a speaker can reinforce their own individual opinion by repeatedly using the individual pronouns "I" or "me". Through the presentation of her own ideas on the meaning of marriage, the speaker, Mary, orients to her individual identity and presents herself as an independent "I" who has individual thoughts, intentions and opinions. The excerpt is part of a question-answer sequence, in which the answer is part of a broader question posed to the couple a few turns prior to this one, which elicits a response about reflections on the meaning of marriage, specifically for a same-sex couple. More specifically, Mary responds to the researcher's claim about the interpretation of marriage for a same-sex partnership as a "public display" (line 7) or "public commitment" (line 7).

Excerpt 2 (Mary and Betty)

1 R⁷: Mm: no, it's is interesting that you say that 'cause,
2 um, (.)⁸ some of the things that I I've read also,
3 you know, d- especially for [same sex=
4 B: [Mm:
5 R: =marriages it seems to be a bit, a little bit more
6 important to have that public, (..) you know that
7 public display. That public commitment of "we are
8 together" and "we are committed" [and
9 B: [Ya.
10 ((21 seconds omitted, as Mary's partner, Betty,
11 produces response not related to the target
12 practice to be analysed))
13 M: You know [so many gay couples move in together,
14 B: [Um::
15 M: it's something that that happens. (.) [Um: and then
16 R: [Mm:
17 M: (.) you know, they (.) get tired of each other or (..) something
18 happens [(.) and they just split up and then
19 R: [Mm
20 M: there's a new partner. (.) This was a (.) "I am going
21 to be with you for the rest of our lives. [This is what
22 R: [Mm
23 M: I want. This is my commitment to you"
24 and (.) that was important for me. That was a "I'm
25 not in this until I've had enough fun, [and then I'm
26 R: [Mm
27 M: moving [on".
28 R: [Mm Mm.

Just prior to the employment of the practice of interest the researcher uses the collective pronoun "we" in the question and hence indirectly makes a collective answer relevant. That is, the examples given which represent possible statements by same-sex couples about the meaning of marriage include only collective pronouns: "we are together" (lines 7-8) and "we are committed" (line 8). This suggests that, if anything is expected, it would be a collective response demonstrating how the couple, "we", feel about marriage and what it means to *them*.

⁷In all transcripts the letter "R" is a designation for "the researcher".

⁸To represent pauses of varying lengths a simplified version of Jefferson's conventions was used:

- (.) micro pause (not longer than 0.1 sec)
- (..) macro pause (between 0.1 sec and 1 sec)
- (...) long pause (longer than 1 sec)

However, in responding, Mary only speaks for herself and specifically only reports on what she felt at the time rather than what they both felt. She chooses to utilise the individual self-reference “I” (along with “me” and “my”) to express a list of declarations: a promise: “I am going to be with you for the rest of **our** lives” (lines 20-21) and “This is my commitment to you” (line 23); a desire: “[This is what I want” (lines 21 and 23); a priority: “that was important for me” (line 24) and a declaration of what she intends not to do: “**I’m** not in this until **I’ve** had enough fun, [and then **I’m** moving [on” (lines 24, 25 and 27) which are all produced as her own claims and not necessarily also her partner’s through her use of the personal pronouns.

Interestingly, she reports these feelings or opinions as part of what the decision to get married symbolised for her. “This was a (.)” (line 20) seems to refer, following the researcher’s question, to their action of making a public display of commitment. This suggests that these are not things she literally *said* at the time (in which case we might expect her to use personal pronouns, given that she would be reporting what she explicitly said), but rather these are “quotative” reports of how she felt, and of her commitment to her partner. Especially considering that the researcher used collective pronouns in her question (“we are together” (lines 7-8) and “we are committed” (line 8)) her claims could plausibly have been reported as being something common to both of them, rather than just her.

She thus uses individual pronouns such as “I”, “my” and “me” (lines 20 and 23-25) to express claims about, in her opinion, an unyielding commitment to Betty and her intentions to make the marriage last. She starts off by establishing a contrast between her relationship with Betty and the relationships of “so many gay couples” (line 13). In producing this contrast, she suggests that some same-sex couples seem to get involved in cohabital, non-committal relationships that do not last very long and that seem to be part of a phase. She treats this as something that is an objective fact; “it’s something that that happens.” (line 15). In combination with her matter-of-fact tone of voice, she presents this as common knowledge. She then constructs her and Betty’s relationship as qualitatively different from other same-sex relationships, thereby correcting the researcher’s assumption of the similarity between their relationship and other same-sex relationships. This is supported by her strong emphasis; that is, contrastive stress on the word “This” (line 20) and her change of tone of voice that firmly and confidently declares that “This” (line 20), that is, *their* commitment or act of marriage, is different. This contrasts to Mary’s use of collective pronouns to describe the collective

actions of these other couples by referring to them as “they” (lines 17 and 18) or talking about collective actions with “each other” (line 17). However, when she continues to describe in which ways her and Betty’s relationship contrasts to the short-lived, non-committal relationship of “so many gay couples” (line 13) she does not continue to use a collective self-reference such as “we”, “our”, “us” or “each other” to express their combined collective thoughts on their marriage as was done in the first part of the contrast while referring to other couples with “they” (lines 17 and 18).

Similarly, Mary’s use of “I” contrasts with her use of the second-person pronoun “you” in reporting her commitment to her partner. That is, by stating “This is my commitment to you” (line 23) and “I am going to be with you for the rest of **our** lives” (lines 20 and 21) she clearly distinguishes Mary (the “me”) from Betty (the “you”) as two separate individuals who could have differing views on marriage as well as differing intentions or plans even within the marriage unit. This differentiation is accentuated by Mary’s stress on the pronouns “my” (line 23) and “you” (line 23). This serves as further evidence for Mary’s sensitivity to her limited epistemic rights over her partner’s thoughts about, as well as intentions and motivations for their marriage because they are treated as two separate, independent individuals.

It is also worth mentioning that elsewhere in the interview this couple had revealed that they had been cohabiting for many years before they got married; thus, by their own account, showing a certain degree of intimacy within a long-term, serious, pre-marriage commitment. Despite this level of intimacy which Mary treats as superior to that of “so many gay” (line 13) relationships that she seems to present as frivolous and only seem to last for a short period of time, she still only uses individual pronouns which embody a display of uncertainty about her epistemic rights to make claims on behalf of her partner as well as herself about the meaning of their marriage; that is, their separate individual identities are implicitly produced and maintained on a moment-by-moment basis.

Hence, this case demonstrates how the use of individual pronouns can show an orientation to individual identities and rights. Mary can be understood to be displaying an orientation to her own epistemic rights over her own individual thoughts, desires, opinions and the like. At the same time, however, she implicitly orients to her partner’s individual epistemic rights by not speaking on Betty’s behalf. Hence, the use of the individual pronoun “I” or “me” is reserved

for these individual matters which is consistent with previous findings (Heritage & Raymond, 2005; Lerner & Kitzinger, 2007; Muntigl & Choi, 2010; Sacks, 1984).

Even though speakers can implicitly orient to certain epistemic rights as demonstrated above in Excerpt 2, the acknowledgement of epistemic boundaries and limits could also be overtly revealed by the speakers themselves (Glenn & LeBaron, 2011). Excerpt 3 is an example of how a speaker can explicitly demonstrate their sensitivity to matters of epistemic rights when making claims on behalf of their spouse, and how they could overtly display uncertainty about whether they have the right to make claims about their partner's experiences.

In this excerpt, when the couple (Thabiso and Liza) was asked whether they perceive a strong link between marriage and family, Thabiso responded that even though the first and most important step is commitment to each other, family support aids in the process. This leads to a discussion about some initial difficulties that Thabiso and Liza had experienced in the past with her family due to their cultural differences and the researcher then asks whether the couple often experiences such confrontations as shown in the excerpt.

Excerpt 3 (Thabiso and Liza)

- 1 R: How did you- do you often get confronted with that
2 that kind of (.) not just from your family from
3 other people? [Or did you never really
4 L: [No.
5 (..)
6 T: Nah:: [:::
7 L: [No, I never do (.) I never do (.) I never ()=
8 T: =[Eh:::
9 R: [You never
10 (.)
11 T: [Eh:::
12 L: [I don't. (.) I don't know if Thabiso
13 T: Nah, (.) I don't go to Boxburg and go chill.

In the researcher's question "How did you- do you often get confronted with that kind of (.) not just from your family from other people? [Or did you never really" (lines 1-3), the "you" is an ambiguous pronoun as it can refer to an individual or a collectivity. Hence, when answering "[No." (line 4) it is not clear whether Liza is speaking only for herself or whether she is also making a claim about Thabiso. Liza then elaborates on her answer, clarifying this

ambiguity through her use of the personal pronoun “I” in “**I** never do” (line 7) which she repeats another two times, thereby emphasising that her response is designed to apply only to herself.

Following her “[No.” (line 4) Thabiso also answers the researcher’s question in the negative (“Nah:: [:.” (line 6)) which could be interpreted as giving her indirect epistemic license to make claims for both of them, as he has demonstrated that his answer is consistent with hers. However, despite this, Liza continues to speak for herself by using the personal pronoun “**I**” (line 7). As she does this in overlap with Thabiso he stops talking. He then attempts to speak again but drops out when she continues in overlap once again (line 12) and where she overtly states: “**I** don’t know if Thabiso” (line 12). In doing so, she explicitly orients to being able to make claims about her own experiences, while having limited or no rights to speak for his. She thus claims that she does not know about his experiences with regard to criticism about their “cultural differences” and as her response to the question unfolds, and particularly following his attempts to begin his own response, she progressively moves towards stronger displays of an orientation towards limited epistemic rights in this regard.

Thabiso’s concurrent attempts to express his *own* opinion separately from hers (even if it is similar to hers) demonstrate his orientation to his own epistemic rights to answer for himself, and that the answer she has given (and continues to give) is not sufficient to answer for both of them. This is an example of a clear production of separate identities with separate rights to speak about their experiences, even though there is evidence that their responses to the question will be similar to one another.

So, by distinguishing the “**I**” very emphatically from “Thabiso” (line 12) Liza not only treats them as having two separate identities characterised by different access to different experiences, she also explicitly demonstrates her sensitivity to what she may or may not say on behalf of her partner by consistently using “I” after the initial “[No.” (line 4). Subsequently, she clarifies the initial ambiguity attached to the “[No.” reply (line 4) (which comes across as a final answer represented by the terminal intonation marked by the full stop on the transcript) by showing that she in fact, does not know about her partner’s experiences and was not talking on his behalf.

What emerges is the deep complexity of the treatment of epistemic rights embedded in interaction. Even though Liza could know that he agrees with her on not being confronted

with issues relating to their “cultural differences” because he says so just after she does, she still shows uncertainty with respect to her orientated-to rights to speak on his behalf. Interestingly, Thabiso does not contradict Liza, but he offers an explanation for why he has not encountered these conflicts. Even though his response agrees with hers, it is also produced through this use of personal pronouns as applying specifically to him (the individual producing it), rather than to both of them. This demonstrates a shared orientation to their individual identities and epistemic rights in responding to this particular question, and talking about these particular experiences (“Nah, (.) I don’t go to Boxburg and go chill.” (line 13)).

Whereas the above excerpts demonstrate either an implicit or an explicit orientation to individual rights the following excerpt provides evidence for how a speaker’s use of pronouns in producing a particular action can reveal a different orientation to identities and epistemic rights than that suggested by what they are talking *about* (cf. Schegloff, 2006). In this case, even while speaking directly *about* the importance of a shift “from ‘I’ to ‘we’” in the context of marriage, Thabiso displays through his use of the pronoun “I” that the claims he is making are designed to apply only to himself.

Excerpt 4 (Thabiso and Liza)

- 1 R: Ya, I suppose if if there’s just anything else (.)
2 like in terms of the idea or or what the marri- what
3 (.) a marriage- or your marriage means to you °not
4 a marriage but° your marriage means to you what it
5 (.) like (..) what kind of role it plays in your life
6 that kind of thing. If there’s anything you’d like to
7 still add (.) along those lines.
8 (...)
9 T: Eh:: what it means to::: me, I don’t know about
10 Squeeza⁹ (.) [but (.) mm:: it’s (...) ((shrugs)) (...)
11 R: [Squeeza, ha-
12 T: you know the balance,
13 L: M[m:- ((nods))
14 T: [the centeredness,
15 L: Mm: ((nods))
16 T: groundness, all that, that’s it [eh:::
17 L: [Ya same. **I would say**
18 the balance. ((nods))

⁹Thabiso’s nickname for Liza

19 R: Mm:: [in terms of?-
20 T: [And learning and growing and sharing and ya.
21 L: Mm:
22 T: And experimenting and ya.
23 L: [Mm:
24 R: [Mm:
25 T: Disagreeing (.) and ya
26 R: And balance? [in terms of (.) wh-what do you mean: wh-
27 L: [°Ya and growing°
28 R: what kind of balance?
29 L: **I think** male and female essentially=
30 T: =Well in uh well for me balance as in like **"I"** to **"we"**.
31 L: Mm: and that too [ya, exactly.
32 R: [Mm:
33 T: Ya.
34 L: Exactly.

A striking similarity between Excerpt 3 and Excerpt 4 is the use of the formulation “**I** don’t know” (line 9). In responding to the question in the present excerpt Thabiso claims to not know how his partner would answer (“**I** don’t know about Squeeza” (lines 9-10)) thereby orienting to not having the right to speak for both self and partner. As in the above excerpts, the speakers continue to use personal pronouns in responding to the question (“what it means to: : me” (line 9); “**I would say**” (line 17); “**I think**” (line 29); “for me” (line 30)).

A further similarity between Excerpts 3 and 4 is that in both cases the interviewer uses the ambiguous second-person pronoun “you” (and “your”) in the course of prompting the participants to talk about *their* marriage, as opposed to marriage *in general*. However, the speakers in each of these excerpts deal with the ambiguous “you” in different ways. Whereas Liza in Excerpt 3 resolves the ambiguity as she progressively moves towards stronger displays of an orientation towards limited epistemic rights (see above discussion of Excerpt 3), Thabiso immediately clarifies from the start that what he will continue to say will be only his opinion. Before he makes any claims about the meaning of marriage he instantaneously avoids ambiguity about who he is speaking for by declaring “what it means to: : me” (line 9) and further demonstrates his orientation to his own limited epistemic rights by overtly claiming that he does not know what marriage means to his partner, Liza (see lines 9-10). So, before he expresses his opinion he has manipulated the design of his turn to demonstrate his orientation to his own epistemic rights and the rights of his partner so that no one can treat what he will say next as a claim about Liza’s opinion (cf. Heritage & Raymond, 2005).

A significant feature of this excerpt is that (unlike the previous excerpts) the participants in this case explicitly talk *about* the collectivity formed through the act of marriage. This is made apparent through Thabiso's characterisation of the "balance" involved in marriage being "like **'I'** to **'We'**" (line 30). In the course of making this characterisation, however, Thabiso displays that he is speaking only for himself ("for **me**" (line 30)). It is interesting to note that even in the same turn he does not *do* what he is explicitly talking *about*: by claiming "for **me**" (line 30) just before describing "balance" (line 18) as a shift from "**'I'** to **'We'**" (line 30) he is expressing an individual opinion independently from his partner and so is separating himself ("I") from the two of them as a couple ("We"), as opposed to expressing an opinion on behalf of them both which might be one way of *doing* this shift from "I" to "we". Thus, even as he talks about marriage as a collectivity, Thabiso displays that in making this point he is only speaking for himself, rather than also speaking for his partner in the collectivity in question. He thereby implicitly produces an identity separate from his partner's and clearly expresses his individuality and related treatment of epistemic rights.

Thabiso's utterance illustrates two different but related ideas on marriage. First of all, the word "to" (line 30) clearly separates the "I" from the "we" and makes the relationship between individual and collectivity (i.e. the marriage unit) unidirectional: by saying that marriage embodies a move from "I" to "we" implies that marriage results in the replacement of an *individual* identity with the *unified* identity of the married couple. However, the use of the word "balance" (lines 12 and 30) serves to describe his relationship as one that is characterised more by a compromise and negotiation between "I" and "we". That is, it suggests that partners need to cultivate and maintain their individuality as well as contribute to the marriage unit and develop as much as possible as an intimate couple. Thus, Thabiso directly speaks about marriage as a balance between "I" and "we" or (more strongly) a shift from "I" to "we", but throughout the excerpt both partners consistently use the individual self-references "I" and "me", thereby producing themselves as independent individuals.

Also significant in this case are Liza's responses to Thabiso's unfolding talk, as she displays agreement with him, as shown by her affirmative "Mm:"s and nods (lines 13, 15, 21, 23 and 31) and even an overt "Exactly." (line 34). In addition, she states "[Ya same. **I would say** the balance." (lines 17-18). However, even though she has clearly demonstrated an agreement with Thabiso she still explicitly shows that this is also her *own* individual opinion and that she is not simply "going along" with Thabiso. She could have simply said "yes, balance" but

more strongly asserts her opinion on this as independently-held by formulating her answer as something *she* “**would say**” (line 17). Hence, just as Thabiso does, Liza produces an individual identity (with associated epistemic rights) for herself that is separate from his or from the identity of the marriage unit.

This differentiation is further produced by their divergent definitions of “balance”: Liza describes “balance” as: “male and female essentially=” (line 29) once again framing this as her own opinion (“**I think**” (line 29)) whereas “balance” for Thabiso is “**‘I’ to ‘We’**” (line 30) which (as mentioned above) he also introduces with “for me” (line 30). Thus, throughout the excerpt both speakers distinctly treat themselves and each other as individuals that have opinions and thoughts independent from each other. However, despite this consistent implicit orientation to their own individual epistemic rights, Thabiso still talks about balance in the context of marriage as a shift from “I” to “we” which, in the form of their implicit actions is nowhere to be found in the excerpt. Hence, discernible in this excerpt is the implicit maintenance of their two individual identities, sets of opinions and individual right to knowledge in the midst of their overt claims about marriage as involving a single unit.

The above excerpts (Excerpts 2-4) show cases of where partners treat each other as having independent identities and orient to their own and each other’s individual epistemic rights through the use of the personal pronoun “I” and related alternatives such as “me”. These excerpts demonstrate how members within a marriage unit express their own individual thoughts, feelings and opinions and are cautious when making these sorts of claims on behalf of their partners. By contrast, the following excerpt illustrates the complexity of this issue in the marriage context as married couples also use the collective self-reference “we”, in making claims regarding thoughts, intentions, motives, feelings, opinions and experiences for both themselves and their partner. This illuminates speakers’ orientations to collective, shared identities for which the boundaries of certain epistemic rights become blurred.

Excerpt 5 is part of a lengthy response from the couple, Don and Marcelle who tell the researcher the story of how they met and came to be in a relationship. In this case, unlike in the previous excerpts, Don consistently uses the collective self-reference “we”, thereby treating their actions as shared in the course of describing their progression from dating to marriage status.

Excerpt 5 (Don and Marcelle)

1 R: Ok. [How did that whole, [the whole proposal (..) and
2 D: [So, [so, i-
3 R: all of that go?
4 R: [Ha hahaha
5 M: [Ha hahaha
6 D: It was-
7 R: ha ha
8 D: It [was actually more-
9 M: [There wasn't (h) really one, ha ha
10 R: [Oh, ok, ha ha
11 D: [It was more of a natural progression than [a:::
12 R: [Mm:
13 D: distinct thing. It just kind of (...) f- we'd been
14 going out for so long and **we** knew each other for
15 s-s-so well that **we** felt it was natural that **we**
16 **wanted** to get married and spend the rest of **our** lives
17 with each other
18 ((8 sec omitted as Don continues his claims))
19 It was just kind of part of a conversation, I think.
20 M: [Ya
21 R: [A mutual agreement, kind of.
22 D: Ya.
23 (..)
24 M: Ya, I guess we kind of ended up talking about it quite
25 often (.) and (...) planning how things would work out.

Don attempts three times to answer the researcher's question about the proposal ("So, so, i-" (line 2); "It was-" (line 6) and then again "It [was actually more-" (line 8)) while being interrupted by either laughter or Marcelle's interjection: "[There wasn't (h) really one, ha ha" (line 9) where after he eventually succeeds at the fourth attempt to make his point about how their marriage was a result of "more of a natural progression than [a: : : distinct thing." (lines 11 and 13).

A significant feature of this excerpt is Don's use of the collective pronoun "we" even though he is describing feelings ("**we** felt" (line 15)) and desires ("**we** **wanted**" (lines 15-16)) which are usually described by individuals themselves who orient to their own independent individual epistemic authority over these matters (see Lerner & Kitzinger, 2007). In Excerpts 3 and 4, Thabiso and Liza, both express their opinions by orienting to their own individual epistemic rights as well as their partner's epistemic rights by employing the individual

pronoun “I”. They even, on separate occasions, go so far as to claim that they do not *know* about their partner’s claims on the matter at hand. By contrast, Don in this excerpt displays no sign of any doubt about his right to make claims about both *his*, as well as *his partner’s* feelings and desires. In doing so, he treats them as a collectivity; hence treating their feelings and desires as being the same and therefore speaking for both of them rather than only for himself. It is worth mentioning that he does this even when making claims about how they felt or what they wanted *before* being unified by the marriage contract. By employing the collective pronoun “we” (lines 13-16), he treats their identity with regard to this matter as a shared identity accompanied by a blurring of epistemic rights. This might even reflect the “natural progression” (line 11) he is referring to: a natural progression from two “I”s to one “we”.

This production of a shared identity is reflected in the sequence of the interaction: Marcelle and Don collaboratively produce a single response to the researcher’s question. As Don is attempting to make his point Marcelle interjects that there was no proposal (see line 9). He then goes on to state that the decision to get married was a “natural progression” (line 11) rather than a “distinct thing” (line 13); that is their proposal in this case. Hence, the couple collaborates in producing distinct parts of a single compatible answer as she confirms his claim before he can even provide it and therefore they answer the question as a collectivity with attendant oriented-to epistemic rights. In this way the content of these claims coincides with the identities that are being produced. Not only do both partners claim that their decision to get married was a “natural” (lines 11 and 15), mutual decision but they also produce this claim as a collectivity with Don using the collective “we” without hesitation. He does not orient to her or his own independent individual rights but instead treats them as having collective rights.

Furthermore, this couple is treated as a collectivity by their own collective claims. In the context of a conventional proposal: “Will you marry me?” the two individuals are separated as there is one partner asking the other to marry them. By Don and Marcelle claiming that they did not have such a proposal they treat their getting married as a mutual decision and so are unified before the marriage has even taken place.

Moreover, not only does Don orient to the couple’s collective identity and shared epistemic rights but his response also influences Marcelle’s opportunities for responding. First of all, he has responded on her behalf and so she treats this as an opportunity to either confirm or reject

his claims “It was just kind of part of a conversation, I think.” (line 19) followed by her “[Ya” (line 20). Furthermore, even though this is not an issue in their case because they happen to both agree on the matter, he has not provided her with many response options since the implications of her response might be detrimental and it could be heard as insulting to him if she were to reject his response or disagree with him. If she disagreed with him on what he has claimed about them, she would be effectively claiming that she did not (or does not) feel the same way about their relationship as he has described, which would amount to expressing a very serious misalignment in their orientations to the relationship.

However, Marcelle does not show signs of disagreement with Don’s claim about their marriage being a “natural progression” (line 11) and something that “**felt**” (line 15) right and something they “**wanted**” (line 16) as she supports these claims with an affirmative “[Ya” (lines 20 and 24). Their alignment with each other is particularly evident in these two adjacent utterances: Don makes a final claim about their proposal (or lack thereof) within his turn by saying “It was just kind of part of a conversation, I think” (line 19) after which Marcelle directly shows her alignment in the following turn by claiming: “Ya, I guess we kind of ended up talking about it quite often” (lines 24-25). Thereby, the couple collectively explains and agrees with each other that their marriage was the next level of the relationship and that they know this because of their many conversations on the topic.

Hence, at times married couples display attempts to retain their individual identities (as was shown in Excerpts 2-4) and at times they demonstrate an orientation towards a shared identity and treat themselves and their partners as having collective epistemic rights (as in Excerpt 5). Similar to the above excerpt, Excerpt 6 demonstrates how a speaker can orient to a collective identity and how married people can present themselves and their partners as having shared epistemic rights in relation to each other even when making claims about feelings, desires etc. In addition, the speakers in this case explicitly talk *about* the unification process of marriage (even before the actual marriage) as well as *produce* it through the practices through which they talk about it. Hence, the following excerpt also demonstrates how pronouns, in this case the collective pronoun “we” (or “us”), can be used to manage the couple’s oriented-to rights and identities with respect to their relationship. Furthermore, the excerpt provides an example of a situation in which the collective pronoun “we” is employed in order to present the nature of a marriage relationship appropriately.

Prior to this excerpt, the couple, Nancy and Vrajesh have expressed the importance of maintaining their individual identities within the marriage unit. Furthermore, they have declared on numerous occasions that the actual formal process of the marriage was of little importance to them whereas, for instance, moving in together or being committed to each other played a much more significant role in their relationship. The formulation of the researcher's question picks up on these things they have said before.

Excerpt 6 (Nancy and Vrajesh)

1 R: And so you could easily imagine (.) living together
2 for the rest of your lives (..) without that piece
3 of paper. Being committed to each other [and [all
4 V: [Ya.
5 N: [Ya.
6 R: that °without [that piece of paper°.
7 N: [°Ya°.
8 N: I think it's more scary- and that's why, I mean when
9 when I came up we bought property immediately and in
10 hindsight it was probably a very naïve thing to do
11 R: Mm
12 N: because we didn't know where the relationship was
13 going (.) um, even in terms o- not even (.) not
14 commitment wise but in terms of whether or not we'd
15 be able to sustain a re[relationship living together
16 R: [Mm
17 N: [and all of that (.) but (.) that's what I was
18 R: [Mm
19 N: saying, that's probably was the mos- that title
20 deed was probably more important to us than the
21 marriage certificate was (.) [because for us that
22 R: [Ok
23 N: was the sign of: "well now we're making this formal
24 commitment to
25 R: Mhm
26 N: **each other. We're** engaging in society to see us
27 basically as one party" (..) um, [and, you know,
28 R: [Mm.
29 N: **we're** carrying that forward.
30 ((8 sec omitted as the researcher repeats claims to
31 demonstrate understanding))
32 V: Cause I mean I still know where all my contracts
33 are (..) for our lease properties and cars. (.)
34 I don't know where our marriage certificate is.

The researcher's question about whether the couple could happily cohabitate without being married ("And so you could easily imagine (.) living together for the rest of your lives (lines 1 and 2)) once again, contains the personal pronoun "you" (as discussed above). However, in contrast to other excerpts this is less ambiguous due to the use of "each other" (line 3), thereby eliciting a collective response as opposed to an individual one. The question is in the form of a statement about their feelings that could either be rejected or confirmed by the couple as a collectivity which is precisely what follows: both agree with the researcher's interpretation of their previous claims with an almost simultaneous "[Ya." (lines 4 and 5). This collective agreement provides a warrant for Nancy to use the collective pronoun "we" (or "us") and her subsequent elaboration of their collaborative response is consistent with the warrant it provides¹⁰.

In this elaboration Nancy consistently employs the collective pronouns "we" and "us" to express a series of collective claims (similarly to how Don does in the previous excerpt) pertaining mainly to events prior to them getting married. These claims are a mixture of both shared actions (e.g. "**we** bought property immediately" (line 9)) as well as thoughts, feelings and opinions (e.g. "that title-deed was probably more important to **us**" (lines 19 and 20)) that would usually be expressed by the individual *for* the individual which makes the use of the collective self-reference "we" in this excerpt significant. She begins by describing a collective action indicative of their commitment to one another: "**we** bought property immediately" (line 9) and then moves to a description of collective knowledge or uncertainty by saying "**we** didn't know where the relationship was going" (lines 12-13). Subsequently she describes collective uncertainty about living together ("whether or not **we'd** be able to sustain a re[lationship living together" (lines 14-15)). Following this, she orients to her epistemic right to be able to know what was important to her partner at the time or what they both collectively prioritised: "that title-deed was probably more important to **us** than the marriage certificate was" (lines 19-21). She then talks about the significance and meaning of marriage for them both: "[because for **us** that was the sign of: 'well now **we're** making this formal commitment to **each other**. **We're** engaging in society to see **us** basically as one party' (..) um, [and, you know, **we're** carrying that forward." (lines 21, 23, 24, 26, 27 and 29).

¹⁰This is in contrast to what follows a collective agreement in Excerpt 3 where Liza frames her subsequent claims as *only hers* by using the personal pronoun "I" differentiating her identity and oriented-to epistemic rights from her partners despite their mutual agreement on the topic.

A significant feature of this series of collective claims is that it culminates in an overt declaration of them being regarded as “**one party**” (line 27) which she emphasises by placing stress on both words. Not only does she *implicitly* treat herself and her partner as a collectivity through the use of the collective pronoun “we”, but this is supported by the *explicit* statement of them being regarded as unified through the marriage. In this case there is alignment between what is talked *about* and the implicit production of identities resulting from the use of pronouns (in contrast to what happens in some of the previous excerpts).

Even though Nancy speaks on behalf of Vrajesh she does express slight caution when making these claims, especially when they include opinions or feelings about what is important to the couple. This is shown by her use of the word “probably” (lines 19 and 20) whereby she displays caution when making claims about Vrajesh's feelings or opinions, thus allowing for the possibility that he could subsequently exercise his own individual entitlement to accept or reject those claims. However, she positions her treatment of them as a collectivity as warranted because they are regarded as “**one party**” (line 27) through the marriage contract.

Interestingly, Vrajesh displays an agreement with her claims by responding: “I don’t know where our marriage certificate is.” (line 34). By responding in this way, Vrajesh aligns with the things she has been saying about both of them, thereby aligning with her oriented-to rights to speak on behalf of them in the way she has done and providing Nancy with assurance that she was indeed justified in making this claim on his behalf. Hence, they both respond that the marriage as such had little importance for them whereas their decision to move in together or their commitment was of far more value.

What is particularly noteworthy about the way in which the couple is positioned by Nancy as a collectivity is her employment of the collective self-referent “we” in the following: “**we** didn’t know where the relationship was going” (lines 12 and 13). The implications of what she would be saying about her feelings towards Vrajesh and their relationship at the time had she used “I” instead of “we” here provide a warrant for her use of the collective pronoun “we”. Had she used “I” instead of “we” she would have been vulnerable to being heard as proposing that it was *only* her who was not sure about where the relationship was going, even if he might have been similarly unsure which would risk implying a misalignment in their views and feelings for each other at the time. This could have led to subsequent interactional trouble for her since it could have been interpreted as an insult to her partner.

Whereas the above excerpts showed the employment of the personal pronoun “I” (or “me”) or the collective pronoun “we” (or “us”), the next excerpt demonstrates how shifts between these pronouns can illustrate the dilemma faced by married couples of when they treat it as appropriate to speak on behalf of their partner or when to speak for only themselves. It shows that even though couples present themselves as engaging in collective actions during the interview and act as a *unit*, it is nevertheless treated as important for each to still keep a certain amount of *individuality*, especially while expressing their opinions and thoughts.

Leading up to the Excerpt 7 Vrajesh and Nancy have been asked about their reasons for getting married and have responded in many different ways, the most significant of which is that they have both collectively reported viewing commitment as the most important part of their relationship and that the marriage contract itself plays a very minor role.

Excerpt 7 (Nancy and Vrajesh)

- 1 R: So (.) did you live together befo::re
- 2 N: Yes.
- 3 R: you were married?
- 4 N: Um, [for two?
- 5 V: [Ya about eighteen months.
- 6 N: Ya, eighteen mon[ths.
- 7 R: [And then the actual piece of
- 8 paper, the marriage, that was the commitment
- 9 (..) is that what you’re saying?=
 10 N: =No.
- 11 V: No. Not really. **We** [were committed before (.) even (...)
- 12 R: [It was just a-
- 13 V: the piece of paper.
- 14 N: Ya. **I** think what the marriage, for me, because **I**’m
- 15 an attorney (.) um, marriage was just the formal legal
- 16 process.
- 17 R: Ok.
- 18 N: So, notwithstanding the fact that **we** were in a
- 19 committed relationship, there’s certain benefits
- 20 that married couples still derive in our in (.)
- 21 unequal society, um, and probably that was just
- 22 the way to formalise it as well, **I** mean that
- 23 factored into it.

The couple collectively and collaboratively construct their response to the researcher's question about living together before marriage: Vrajesh aids Nancy in the process of establishing the amount of time they lived together before getting married ("[Ya about eighteen months." (line 5)). This collective response format is then employed once again as both partners respond to the researcher's follow-up question ("And then the actual piece of paper, the marriage, that was the commitment[?]" (lines 7 and 8)) almost simultaneously with a clear and confident "No." (lines 10 and 11) after the researcher interprets their previous responses (before the excerpt) to mean "the actual piece paper, the marriage, that was the commitment" (lines 7 and 8). Here, they collectively express their opinions about what the marriage did *not* mean to them; that is, they both claim that marriage did not symbolise a commitment in their case since, according to Vrajesh, they "[were committed before (.) even (...) the piece of paper." (lines 11 and 13).

However, what the marriage *did* then mean to them, if not a commitment, is not as clearly stated in their response to the question. Even though Vrajesh offers a short elaboration to their collective "No." (lines 10 and 11) ("**We** [were committed before (.) even (...) the piece of paper." (lines 11 and 13)), Nancy provides an additional extended elaboration of this statement: "Ya. **I** think what the marriage, for me, because **I'm** an attorney (.) um, marriage was just the formal legal process." (lines 14-16). Once again, this is a collaborative action since *she* agrees with and then elaborates on *his* claim. By doing this she orients to having the epistemic rights to elaborate on what he has said. However, this elaboration (which occurs immediately after his claim) demonstrates her orientation to herself as an individual separate from the collectivity by saying "for me" (line 14). Thus, just after collaborating with him in producing a response that is treated as applying to both of them she continues to speak for herself.

In producing this elaboration Nancy also identifies herself as part of another category external to the marriage unit, namely the category "attorney" (line 15). She presents this category "attorney" (line 15) as the reason (implied by the word "because" (line 14)) for why she views her individual motivation for marriage in this way. Hence, within the same turn she oscillates between orienting to her collective identity with her partner (indicated by the use of "**We**" (line 11)) and a completely different occupational identity ("attorney" (line 15)) external to the marriage unit, so that being an attorney serves as an account for why she might view marriage in this way but her partner, who is not an attorney might not. Therefore, she

employs the individual pronoun “I” to illustrate her orientation to her own (specifically occupation-related) identity and associated epistemic right as separate from her partner’s.

It is noteworthy that Nancy introduces her turn by stating immediately that she is talking only on behalf of herself as part of this group and not on behalf of her partner; she treats herself as having adopted this opinion specifically by virtue of being an attorney, thereby possibly implicitly treating her partner as potentially not holding a similar opinion by virtue of not being an attorney. Before the onset of any possible criticisms about how she could possibly regard marriage as nothing more than a legal process, she justifies her stance by the fact that she is an attorney and therefore it would make sense to view marriage in this way.

Furthermore, she claims that she regards marriage as “just the formal legal process.” (line 15 and 16) showing that she really does not treat the marriage process as intrinsically valuable and only displays an acknowledgement of its legal relevance.

It is noteworthy that directly after she has shifted to the use of the individual pronouns “I” (line 14) and “**me**” (line 14) (“Ya. **I** think what the marriage, for **me**, because **I’m** an attorney (.) um, marriage was just the formal legal process.” (lines 14-16)) she shifts back to the collective pronoun “we” when claiming that they *both* were committed before the official marriage procedure (“**we** were in a committed relationship” (lines 18-19)).

She thus shows that it was not just *her* at the time that was committed. This is similar to Excerpt 6, where if she had claimed it only about herself, she could have risked being heard as implying that he *did not* view the relationship in this way and that therefore, there was a “mismatch” between their views on things fundamental to a marriage; for example, commitment. This shift is also entirely consistent with what she is doing in identifying herself as an attorney (and individually) versus what she is doing here: she is an attorney or an individual (“I” (line 14)) when accounting for why she would view marriage in a more “legalistic” fashion, but she is part of a collectivity (“we” (line 18)) when talking about their (shared) commitment to the relationship.

In contrast to this display of certainty about each other’s commitment and what marriage did *not* mean to them, Nancy expresses a degree of uncertainty through the use of the word “probably” (line 21) (which is very similar to the “probably” used in Excerpt 6) when talking about what the marriage *did* mean to them. She thus displays uncertainty about this collective claim when saying that “probably that was just the way to formalise it” (lines 21-22). Vrajesh

also displays uncertainty about the meaning of marriage by saying “Not really.” (line 11) in response to whether the “piece of paper” (lines 7-8) represented commitment to them. Thus, not only does Nancy display caution about her partner’s motivations and thoughts (similar to what was seen in previous excerpts) but both demonstrate uncertainty even about collective claims. Hence, their collective “No.” (lines 10 and 11) contributes to their display of mutual certainty about what marriage did *not* mean to them, whereas they then orient to an uncertainty about what marriage then *does* mean to them both.

Hence, this excerpt demonstrates one of the ways in which an individual could treat their own identities as differentiated from their partner’s or their shared identity, namely by identifying with another group external to the marriage unit. According to Askham (1976), this level of interaction with others or identification with a group outside the marriage unit has been reported to be a crucial part in the individual’s identity formation. However, instead of aiming to make claims in a general sense about identity or epistemic rights, this excerpt is an illuminating example contributing to the main methodological focus of the present study; namely to see how this phenomenon (the shift from “I” to “we”) unfolds on a moment-by-moment basis: within the same turn even, from one speech unit to the next, Nancy constantly shifts between these pronouns depending on the immediate interactional context. Thus it is shown *when* and *how* such shifts may occur.

Similar to Excerpt 7, the following and final excerpt in this section is different from Excerpts 2 to 6 which contained either a consistent use of personal pronouns or collective pronouns. Excerpt 8 demonstrates a number of shifts between the personal pronoun “I” and collective pronoun “we” as on some occasions speakers display orientations to an individual identity while at other times making claims on behalf of their partners. Prior to this excerpt, Mary has narrated the story of how she and her partner, Betty, met and has explained that after cohabiting for over 12 years they got married shortly after same-sex marriage was legalised in South Africa.

Excerpt 8 (Betty and Mary)

- 1 R: And was it important to you? Like, what did it
- 2 mean to (..) [°to to get married°?
- 3 M: [It was important to me.
- 4 B: ((smiles and puts hand on Mary’s knee))
- 5 M: It was important um from a (.) a commitment

6 perspective; so **we** were committed to **one another** but,
 7 **I think**, that the relationship (.) it does become (.)
 8 closer [when **you** married and=
 9 R: [Ok.
 10 M: =an- interestingly what's changed even more for **us** is
 11 that this year **I** changed **my** surname. (..) And that's
 12 changed even (..) more- for me.

The introductory “And” (line 1) suggests that this question relates to Mary’s previous point. In her response, Mary claims that the *marriage* (as opposed to simply *living together* which is what she was talking about just prior to the excerpt) was important at the time, but is quick to add that this was her *individual* opinion; it was important for *her* (“It was important to me” (line 3)) clearly treating her view as independent from Betty’s. This treatment of her answer as independent from how Betty might respond to the same question is emphasised by the stress she places on the word “me” (line 3). In this way she treats her epistemic authority as limited and not automatically inclusive of Betty’s opinion on the matter.

However, when she subsequently speaks about a symbolic past *collective* action such as being “committed to **one another**” (line 6) she uses “**we**” (line 6). This demonstrates her orientation to both of their mutual collective commitment and does not provide any indication of doubt about Betty’s commitment to her at the time. Similar to the above cases (Excerpts 6 and 7) had she spoken only for herself her claim might have been interpreted as meaning that their commitment to each other was not mutual; that is, had she said “I was committed to her” it could seemed like she was saying that Betty was *not* committed at the time.

This first shift from “me” (line 3) to “**we**” (line 6) in her response is one of a series of pronoun shifts in the excerpt, the most striking of which is when Mary elaborates: “interestingly, what’s changed even more for **us** is that this year **I** changed **my** surname. (..) And that's changed even (..) more- for me.” (lines 10-12). With this statement she orients to her individual action and choice¹¹ to change her surname (“**I** changed **my** surname” (line 11)) as having significant consequences for *both* of them (“what’s changed even more for **us**” (line 10)) and that this change for the couple is linked to the importance of marriage which is

¹¹ Since there is an extensive discussion about the significance of the surname change during the interview, Mary later reveals, in fact, that she *informed* Betty of her decision to want to change her surname so that this is not merely presented as an individual *action* but also an individual *choice* and is not presented as something they decided to do as a unit.

what the researcher's question was originally about. So, what she treats as their *collective* action, that is being "committed" (line 6) or becoming "closer" (line 8) through the marriage is oriented to as having implications for *her* individually ("[It was important to me." (line 3)) whereas *her* individual choice and action (i.e. the surname change) has consequences for the couple as a collectivity.

However, she does exhibit uncertainty about this when she concludes her claim with "for me." (line 12) demonstrating sensitivity to her own and her partner's independent identities and epistemic rights. On the one hand changing her name was symbolic of their commitment since it is a post-marriage display of affiliation; while on the other hand it is *her* specifically who changed her name, so in that sense it is *her* individually for whom that change was most immediately significant. Thus, the series of pronoun shifts in this case seems to be oriented to the question of whether the surname change can be seen to have implications for Mary, individually or them both as a unified couple.

The above and final excerpt in this section provides an example of how an individual can treat their independent actions and choices as significant for the couple as a whole. It demonstrates that the shifts between individual and collective pronouns can happen from one moment to the next within the same turn. Shifts like this reveal the unsettled nature of whether and when married couples are (still) individuals in their own right, versus whether and when they are a collectivity or a unit. This "unsettledness" or uncertainty is what makes the "blurring" of epistemic authority here visible in particular stretches of interaction, as a matter that gets negotiated moment-by-moment as the interaction unfolds.

This section as a whole has illuminated the fundamental tension underlying a marriage relationship: how to negotiate between individual and collective identities as well as related oriented-to epistemic rights. Sometimes it is treated as warranted to speak for only oneself whereas at other times it is regarded as better to speak as a collectivity. Whereas this section focussed on verbal treatments (i.e. through use of pronouns) of this tension, what is to follow is a discussion of how this negotiation becomes apparent through nonverbal practices such as shifts in gaze direction.

5.2) Shifts in Gaze Direction

Similar to the actions produced through the employment of either individual or collective pronouns married people also recurrently make claims about their partners in conjunction with practices of gaze shifts that serve to display orientations to their individual or collective identities, and their associated epistemic rights. These gaze shifts seem to both invite participation from the gazed-at party as well as provide a place for this participation to occur, thereby making the orientation to epistemic rights relevant in different ways depending on their placement: i.e. *prior* to; *during* or *after* the production of an utterance. These shifts in gaze direction are evidence for how couples construct claims together and demonstrate how boundaries of epistemic rights as well as identities become blurred within a marriage relationship.

Goodwin (1979) explores the relevance of shifts in gaze direction for the action that the speaker (together with the recipient) performs, and demonstrates that speakers can modify the meaning of their constructed turn-at-talk by gaze shifts. Furthermore, Goodwin (1979) shows how this process is accompanied by an orientation to specific characteristics of the recipient of their gaze. Similarly, my data show that speakers seem to orient to their partner's characteristics; that is, their epistemic rights, by shifting their gaze direction towards them at particular moments.

It must be noted, however, that it is more challenging to make analytic claims about nonverbal actions such as these than to make claims about talk, because the evidence is less explicit and more difficult to be certain about. This problem will be addressed by analysing the talk and other practices that are accompanied by the looks in order to obtain a comprehensive picture of the actions performed by the speakers. In addition, robust findings across all of the interviews and the production of a significant number of gaze shifts across the data set contribute to making my claims about them plausible. Thus, although making strong claims about single cases may be difficult, having based my analysis on a large number of cases, all of which exhibit similar characteristics and are supported by varying additional verbal and non-verbal evidence, it is possible to be more confident about the robustness of the practice. A simplified transcription procedure based on conventions by Jefferson (2004) and Goodwin (1977, 1979) was used in order to represent the gaze shifts on

the transcripts¹². Those gaze shifts that are not relevant for speakers' orientations to epistemic rights have been excluded from the transcripts and the analyses.

Related to the previous section, Excerpt 9 demonstrates the employment of either individual or collective pronouns *in combination with* a shift in gaze direction, as both practices simultaneously contribute to the speaker's orientation to himself and his partner as either separate individuals or as a collectivity. This excerpt is an example of gaze shifts that happen in the context of where the speaker produces an initial response to the question but then displays uncertainty about how to continue with it. With the aid of the gaze shift the speaker thereby either invites his partner to collaborate with him in producing an answer, or pursues her alignment as well as requests verification from her at the end of the claim.

Immediately prior to this excerpt Thabiso has answered a question about his feelings towards and thoughts about marriage prior to getting married to Liza. He has claimed that due to his traditional family background he had based his views on marriage on what he "knew" (this is what the researcher refers to in line 3). The excerpt begins with the researcher's follow-up to this question as she asks about whether anything changed in their everyday lives once the couple got married.

Excerpt 9 (Liza and Thabiso)

- 1 R: And then once you were married? Did that change any-
- 2 in any way coz you were in it? Or was it still (.)
- 3 did you lead your married lives the way that you knew
- 4 it?
- 5 T: [X Liza_
- No no, uh::: once we got married (.) I think (.)

¹²In order to show details pertaining to the gaze shifts the following symbols adapted from Goodwin (1977, 1979) are used: a series of full-stops "." shows a gaze shift movement in the direction of the recipient; the exact moment where the gaze meets the recipient is symbolised by a square bracket "[" followed by a cross "X". This is then followed by the name of the gaze recipient. If there are full stops followed by only a square bracket and the name of the recipient, this means that the gaze had been moving towards the relevant recipient but had never reached this recipient; a series of commas "," indicates when a gaze is moving away from a recipient. A straight line "_____" indicates that the initiated gaze is being held on the recipient until the word above which the line ends. The speaker's gaze is represented above their own utterance while a recipient's or hearer's gaze is written underneath the utterance that is accompanied by the particular gaze in question. If there is nothing presented in between any of the above symbols it means that the relevant speaker or recipient is not looking at either the researcher or their partner. The gaze symbols are all presented in boldface in the transcript.

6 _____,
 eh::: ((looks upward)) (...) yes, you married but uh:::

7 [X Liza_____
 (.) we we've always wanted to keep maintaining

8 ', [X Researcher
 individuality

9 R: Mm:
 T: . [X Liza____

10 L: Mm:.

11 T: So (.) yeah, we are married but

12 it's it's not an issue of (...) ((shrugs))(...)

13 I du [nno.

14 L: [Putting boundaries.

15 T: [Yeah the-

16 L: [Yes, there are certain [boundaries

17 T: [Yeah yeah, there are but it

18 was the same as what we had in relationship [that's

19 L: [Ya.

20 T: even before we were married so nothing has [changed

21 L: [Ya

22 T: so it's the same before marriage but you kno-

23 L: Ya, it is it is, actually the same.

24 T: Ya.

Following from the couple's preceding answer, the researcher's question is about their thoughts, feelings and opinions about marriage. Significantly (and as discussed above) thoughts and feelings are things that only individuals are assumed to have epistemic rights over (Heritage & Raymond, 2005; Sacks, 1984). However, the researcher is asking about *both* of them and their "married lives" (line 3) (which is in the plural), so Thabiso's answer can be interpreted as an answer for both of them. By saying "No no" (line 5) first, Thabiso initially gives quite a definite response to a question about both of them. Then he displays uncertainty ("uh:::" (line 5)) about how to continue answering before eventually beginning

an elaboration with “once we got married” (line 5). He thereby initially expresses a collective position and does not demonstrate any visible signs of uncertainty about this, however when he continues to provide an opinion on the matter there are various ways in which he orients to his own, as well as Liza’s epistemic rights. It is significant that this uncertainty becomes evident as Thabiso looks at his partner (line 5) just before expressing his next opinion. On the word “once” (line 5) his gaze begins to shift towards Liza, thereby already giving evidence for an orientation to pursuing collaboration from her to help him produce his subsequent claim. During this gaze shift he also pauses (line 5) before saying “(.) I think (.)” (line 5) then pauses again (line 5), all of which possibly serve to display that he is in the process of thinking about, and therefore still slightly uncertain about, *what* to say as well as possibly whether he can make this claim on behalf of both of them.

Interestingly, his gaze then reaches Liza’s just on the word “think” (line 5) hence, it occurs at the moment just before he is about to get to the crux of what he is saying about both of them. He holds the gaze for a short while during the abovementioned pause (line 5) providing her with an opportunity to contribute to what he is in the process of saying. Subsequently, he starts to look away from her again as he contemplates his next claim (“eh::: (...)” (line 6)) (again indicative of his uncertainty), which he then utters by looking up and at no one in particular during a long pause (line 6).

He subsequently articulates that “yes, you married but” (line 6) while *not* looking at her directly although slowly shifting his gaze back to her during the pause just before “(.) we” (line 7). Hence, while he starts his claim with a general “you” (line 6), thereby implying that something generally *does* usually change when people get married, he does not look at her. However, his gaze *does* then reach her on the word “to” (line 7). Thus, he again looks at her (as in line 5) exactly at the point where he makes the crux of his claim, which is a collective opinion, namely that they *both* “always wanted to keep maintaining individuality” (line 7). By looking at her (at least until the end of the word “maintaining” (line 7) as he produces a claim about their collective desires), he can monitor her for any signs of disagreement, which would allow him to change course as soon as he sees that she disagrees or continue if he sees no sign of disagreement. Moreover, he can also display that his attention is on her so that she can intervene in any way she may see fit to. He thus implicitly includes her in the production of the claim by providing her with an opportunity to confirm or contradict his statements and thereby exercises caution about her epistemic rights in the context of making a claim about

both of them. This may be warranted especially by his use of the word “always” (line 7) which serves to claim that he has known this about his partner for a very long time but despite this, he orients to needing to check with her if she does indeed still feel this way.

However, similar to the first gaze shift in the excerpt it is crucial to examine what immediately precedes the gaze shift. In this case, Thabiso looks at Liza just after displaying that he is *about* to make a claim about their collective desires. So, he looks at her at crucial moments before producing the claims (after “once we got married” (line 5) and then again after “we we’ve always wanted” (line 7)); that is after introducing the *nature* of the collective claims to come, either as part of a collective action (“once we got married” (line 5)) or a collective desire (“we we’ve always wanted” (line 7)). Thereafter, the *content* of his claims in both cases is produced while looking at her. This means he can do the same things he did with the previous look, namely monitor her reaction to his claim.

He then continues with his claim about “maintaining individuality” (lines 7-8) while turning his gaze towards the researcher, whose gaze he meets at the end of the word “individuality” (line 8). After receiving acknowledgement (“Mm:” (line 9)) from the researcher, the recipient of his answer and accompanying gaze at that moment, he is quick to look back at Liza thereafter (line 9), thereby possibly implicitly requesting some form of verification on Liza’s behalf about the claim he has just made. Liza’s affirmative “Mm: .”¹³ (line 10) in response to this request is further evidence that this is indeed what his gaze shift was designed to do, and demonstrates an agreement and alignment with his claims.

This idea of maintaining individuality seems to be part of what Thabiso presents as taken-for-granted knowledge. It seems as if he regards marriage as a process that usually results in the “loss of” individuality or at least results in the boundaries between individual and collective identities to be blurred. This can be seen, for example, in his choice of words. In both claims about being married “yes, you married but” (line 6) and “yeah, we are married but” (line 11) the conjunction “but” illustrates that Thabiso treats married relationships to normally be characterised by *not* “maintaining individuality” (lines 7-8). This is emphasised by his stress on the word “are” (line 11). According to him, even though they “are” married they can *still* maintain their individual identities implying that married couples usually do not do this.

¹³The full stop shows her definitive intonation which demonstrates that there is no evident display of doubt in her agreement.

Subsequently, Thabiso provides Liza with an opportunity to participate through various gaze shifts either *prior* to a claim as a way of pursuing collaboration; *during* a claim in order to monitor her possible responses, or *after* the claim to be able to verify the accuracy of the claim with her. Hence, with this shift in gaze direction in combination with other practices he invites Liza to speak; particularly to complete the claim with him, collectively as a couple. Her subsequent response further supports this analysis since she does exactly this: she completes his sentence for him and therefore completes the idea that he set out to express with talking about “[Putting boundaries]” (line 14). Thereafter, the couple construct their answer collectively with many overlaps (lines 15-24) and affirmations (“[Yeah]” (line 15); (“[Yeah yeah]” (line 17) and “Ya” (lines 19, 21, 23 and 24)). They come to the conclusion together, as a unity that their feelings and thoughts about marriage before the marriage remained the same after the marriage which culminates in their final agreement in lines 23 and 24.

Excerpt 10 provides a further illustration of the use of gaze shifts in contexts of uncertainty. In this case, the speaker manages an ambiguous situation where it is unclear whether her claim expresses exclusively her own opinion or also her partner’s. By looking at him and inviting, and then receiving, his alignment it gets established that what she is saying actually does apply to both of them. Thus, the gaze shift provides evidence for, and serves to manage, her display of uncertainty about her own as well as her partner’s epistemic authority. In this way, it shows tension between the certainty of knowing about one’s own claims while demonstrating uncertainty about whether it is just one’s own view or also a view held by one’s partner.

Prior to this excerpt Cara and Pete have expressed the meaning of marriage for them as a commitment, a celebration and a process of making everything official. As Cara further expresses an opinion on the meaning of marriage she looks at Pete three times: once at the onset of the gaze shift *during* the production of her claim; once *before* an individual claim and then once *after* a claim.

Excerpt 10 (Cara and Pete)

- | | | |
|---|----|---|
| 1 | R: | And what what did the marriage then <u>mean</u> to you? (.) |
| | C: | <u>[X Researcher</u> |
| 2 | R: | So (.) what (..) you said already that it was a (.) it |
| | C: | <u></u> |

3 R: was a celebration of your relationship [and it was that
C: _____ ,
4 C: [Think it's a
5 R: official commitment-
6 C: . [X Pete _____ , _____
public declaration? Too.
7 P: Mm. ((nods))
C: _____ , ,
8 R: A public declaration, ok-
C: [X Researcher,
9 C: , . [X Pete _____
Ya. (.) And (...) probably °for me more than Pete°
10 _____ , , [X Researcher _____
it was a religious ceremony too, ya
11 R: Ok. Ok, so it was it had a religious umm (.) what's
C: , , . . [X Pete _____ , . [X Researcher _____
12 R: the word (.) religious importance [for you as well
C: _____ , [X Pete _____
13 C: [Ya.
14 P: ((nods))
C: _____ ,

The researcher draws on the couple's previous claims about how they have referred to the marriage as "a celebration" (line 3) and an "official commitment" (line 5) and then asks about any other ways they would describe the meaning of marriage, which Cara does not hesitate to answer. While making this claim about their marriage she seems to demonstrate uncertainty in several different ways about whether she can make the claim on behalf of them both and whether her partner will align with it. The most significant way in which this emerges is through her gaze shift towards her partner, the onset of which is on the word "public" (line 6). So, during her introductory statement ("[Think it's a" (line 4)) she is still looking at the researcher (who is also still speaking at this time) but, similarly to Excerpt 10, just at the moment where she arrives at the crucial part of what she is about to say ("public declaration" (line 6)) she looks at her partner. The questioning intonation of the word "declaration?" (line 6) together with the gaze shift both suggest that she is either uncertain of the claim itself or of her choice of words, or, more significantly, uncertain about whether she can make the claim on his behalf about *their* marriage.

Regardless of the reason for her display of uncertainty during this claim, the production of this gaze shift serves to provide her partner with an opportunity to respond as she continues to

look at him even after she has finished her claim (lines 6-7). In addition, there is evidence that the gaze was specifically designed to elicit a response. This can be seen in the abovementioned questioning intonation on “declaration” (line 6); the way in which Cara subsequently adds the word “Too.” (line 6) after not receiving an immediate response (which could thus be a way of pursuing a response); and the way in which she continues to look at Pete throughout this stretch of interaction. He then produces a response, thus providing evidence that he is treating her actions as a pursuit of a response. Moreover, his response (an affirmative “Mm.” and accompanying nod (line 7)) demonstrates his alignment with what she has claimed.

Therefore, this shift in gaze direction suggests a tension experienced by Cara with respect to the claim she concurrently produces: on the one hand she displays caution about making claims on behalf of her partner and thereby shows sensitivity towards her partner’s oriented-to epistemic rights. On the other hand, she uses the gaze shift as a practice to verify with him whether he might agree with her after all and to elicit an aligning response from him. Immediately thereafter, Cara starts to shift her gaze back towards the researcher who is talking at that moment (“A public declaration, ok-” (line 8)) and is therefore the appropriate recipient of her gaze. Also, the researcher is the one who asked the question and therefore the appropriate recipient of what Cara is about to say next.

During the subsequent continuation of her response, which is characterised by more signs of uncertainty preceding her next claim, in particular her pauses while producing “Ya. (.) And (...)” (line 9) she does not look at anyone in particular. However, following the last long pause (“And (...)” (line 9)), before producing the *content* of her claim about the two of them to the researcher she looks directly at her partner again on the word “probably” (line 9). The word “probably” (line 9) in itself is already an indication of her uncertainty which is also evident in her preceding long pause “(.)” (line 9). Also, by speaking softer as she makes the next claim (““for me more than Pete” (line 9)) she similarly demonstrates her uncertainty. She subsequently goes on to make a claim about Pete as well as herself, which retrospectively clarifies that these expressions of uncertainty and the gaze shift that accompanies them happened in the context of making a claim about him. The way in which Cara demonstrates that her opinion for the next claim is different and separate to Pete’s is explicitly discernable in the declaration ““for me more than Pete” (line 9) which differentiates their experiences especially by emphasising “me” (line 9) and then “Pete” (line 9). So, she claims that *she*

views marriage as a “religious ceremony” (line 10) whereas *he* does not or at least does not place as much importance on this aspect of marriage as she does.

However, by shifting her gaze towards him she demonstrates that she is not entirely certain whether he agrees with her in this respect. Hence, whereas the previous gaze shift occurs *at the point of* producing the crux of her claim “public declaration” (line 6) this gaze shift is employed *just before* the crux of her claim. So, she declares “probably °for me more than Pete” (line 9) while looking at him *just before* producing her main claim “it was a religious ceremony too” (line 10) where she shifts her gaze back to the researcher.

Thus, despite their different positions in relation to the crux of her claim (namely the answers to the researcher’s questions) the two first gazes seem to be managing the same thing with respect to the claims they occur concurrently with; first during “public declaration? Too.” (line 6); then during “probably °for me more than Pete” (line 9). That is they manage her uncertainty about whether she can make these claims on behalf of her partner by providing her with an opportunity to monitor his reactions while she makes these claims about both of them. They also provide the partner with an opportunity to produce an aligning or dis-aligning response, and may also (more strongly) serve to pursue a response.

Another significant gaze shift occurs while the researcher subsequently clarifies whether she has understood Cara’s claim correctly (lines 11-12). Cara then says “[Ya.” (line 13) and looks at Pete immediately after this at the onset of the researcher’s utterance of “as” (line 12). Moreover, Cara’s “[Ya.” (line 13) happens in overlap with part of the researcher’s request for confirmation (“religious importance [for you as well” (line 12)) and her accompanying gaze shift occurs just after the researcher has said “you” (line 12). This “you” (line 12) is potentially ambiguous as it may refer to her only or to both of them and may thus contribute once again to her display of uncertainty. So, it is possible that Cara’s look in this case, serves to make relevant a response from him to verify what she has previously said as applies to him too. He confirms that her interpretation of what she has claimed about him and their marriage previously is correct with a nod (line 14) suggesting that the above gaze shifts as well as other expressions of uncertainty were designed to elicit some sort of verification from him.

The above excerpt illustrates that through her gaze shifts, Cara has not only demonstrated possible uncertainty about what she has said, is about to say or is in the process of saying, but also has provided Pete with opportunities to either align himself with her opinion or reject

4 E: Y- ya.

5 N: to realise that we had to gi- you know, compromise or

6 E: There wasn't [that-

7 N: [change. [Ya

8 E: [Ya, there wasn't that step

9 . .[X Researcher _____ ' '

"oh now we've moved in and now this and that changes

10 or so" but

11 ((shifts gaze upwards from the end of "that" (line 9)

12 until after "No." (line 14))

13 R: Mm.

14 E: .[X Nick _____

No. (.)Not really, ne?

15 N: ((shakes his head)) (...) No. I- Not from my side.

E: _____

16 R: ((giggle))

E: _____

17 (...)

E: _____

18 N: Seems more from your side.

E: _____ , ,

Leading up to the first significant gaze shift, the partners both use the collective pronoun "we" (lines 1, 5 and 9) ("I think [we were too much in love" (lines 1 and 3); "to realise that we had to gi- " (line 5); " 'oh now we've moved in and now this and that changes or so" (lines 9-10)) to answer the researcher's question about experiencing any changes after they had moved in together. Erika agrees ("[I also never" (line 2)) with Nick's response about not noticing a change since he "never thought of it." (line 1). She also agrees with Nick's statement about being "too much in love to" (lines 1 and 3) have to "compromise" (line 5) by saying "Y- ya." (line 4) during the pause in which Nick chooses his words for his next claim. Thereafter, they both agree with each other as they claim (collaboratively and in overlap) that there was no "change" (lines 7 and 9) or "step" (line 8) where "this and that changes" (line 9). Thus, all of their answers in this section are consistent with and in alignment with each other. Their collaborative answers establish a context in which Erika can give her subsequent response with reasonable expectation that her partner would align with it. Moreover, by

saying “[Ya, there wasn’t that step” (line 8), she builds on what he was saying just prior to this. Hence, the gaze shift to follow has been preceded by the couple collectively demonstrating an alignment with each other about the fact that they both did not experience any change at the time of moving in together.

Interestingly, despite these signs of alignment and agreement, Erika nevertheless displays uncertainty about her subsequent claim after both her and her partner have provided the researcher with numerous reasons (while demonstrating their alignment with each other) for why they did not experience a change after moving in together. Not only have her own claims been confirmed by her partner’s alignment (through agreements or similar utterances) but furthermore, she seems to have treated herself as having gained an oriented-to epistemic right (albeit while being cautious about it) to make claims about her partner since they both report similar views on the matter.

A significant way in which her uncertainty emerges during the conversation is through her shift in gaze direction towards her partner (line 14). From the end of the word “that” (line 9) for the duration of the rest of her claim until the end of “No.” (line 14) she has her gaze turned upwards and is not looking at anyone in particular thereby apparently thinking about what she is saying at that point. She then looks at Nick only thereafter during the pause (line 14)) that succeeds her “No. (.)” (line 14). This pause is significant since it serves to provide her partner with an occasion to respond to her initially unmitigated claim. It also allows Erika (even if only for a brief moment) to monitor his response to her initially unmitigated “No.” (line 14) which is precluded by “but” (line 10); which in itself is already an expression that demonstrates uncertainty. Furthermore, as she expresses this “but” (line 10) she looks upwards thoughtfully which might possibly be interpreted as a demonstration of uncertainty about what she has just said or is about to say next. This is then later confirmed by her question, “Not really, ne?” (line 14). The word “really” in this line also seems to act as an expression of uncertainty or of reformulation of her answer: she moves from firmly claiming “No.” (line 14) (a definite statement) to demonstrating that she is not completely certain about this claim with “really” (line 14) (part of a question). Hence, in retrospect the pause after “No.” (line 14) not only serves as an occasion for her partner to respond but shows her oriented-to uncertainty. Considering that her gaze reaches Nick at the moment during the pause just before she utters the word “Not” (line 14), she can monitor his response to establish whether he will agree with her. She, hence, treats him as another “knowing

recipient” (Goodwin, 1979, p.100); i.e. as the appropriate recipient of her question “Not really, ne?” (line 14) since he would also have access to the experiences she is alluding to. Hence, the question and the gaze shift (as well as other abovementioned displays of uncertainty) are employed simultaneously to perform the same action. She has both explicitly (through the question) and implicitly (through the gaze shift) presented her partner with a request to verify her claim and has thereby provided him with an opportunity to either align with or reject her claim.

Furthermore, this “No.” (line 14) is produced with final intonation (shown by the full stop). This means that she could have been done after saying “No.” (line 14); that is, that could have been the full extent of her answer, and there is no indication at this point that she is going to subsequently continue her answer. However, she does continue after a pause “(.)” (line 14). The ensuing question “Not really, ne?” (line 14) following the pause “(.)” (line 14) might be in response to the way she has interpreted this pause. According to Pomerantz (1984), during certain moments in conversation pauses could be treated by the speaker as projecting disagreement. It might be possible that Erika treated this pause not as her own pause but as a hesitation and resultant projection of disagreement from her partner. Thus, this short pause *could* be taken to project disagreement, and the way she shifts her gaze towards him just after this short pause, along with the way she then (after having previously given a possibly complete, “final” answer) explicitly asks him if he agrees, provides evidence that she is treating this pause as having projected disagreement and is proceeding accordingly.

When Nick *does* subsequently express his opinion while answering Erika’s question by saying “(...) No. I- Not from my side” (line 15) he treats them as two separate individuals with potentially different opinions on the matter. So, they have previously constructed an answer together that shows that they are confident in claiming that they had both experienced no change when moving in together (see lines 7 and 9). Nevertheless, following Erika’s display of uncertainty, Nick still responds by speaking only for himself, thereby implying in turn that she may have a different opinion in this regard.

Another long pause (...) (line 17) ensues as Erika passes up on the opportunity to *disagree* with (and therefore tacitly *agrees*) with her partner that it is indeed *only his* opinion. Consequently, he provides a further clarification: “Seems more from your side” (line 18). This statement serves as retrospective evidence that his previous lack of immediate agreement with her (and her subsequent shift in gaze direction and explicit question to him)

may indeed have been a result of his uncertainty in this regard. However, through this utterance he proposes that his uncertainty was not about his own position on the matter, but rather that he is not certain about how *she* feels about it. This is plausible considering that she looks at him from the pause preceding her claim (“(.) Not really, ne?” (line 14)) for the whole duration of the last part of the transcript. This means that during two long pauses (lines 15 and 17) as well as two of Nick’s claims (“No. I- Not from my side.” (line 15) and “Seems more from your side.” (line 18)) which provide Erika with multiple opportunities to speak, she still does not respond in any way. Hence, her prolonged gaze gives him reason to doubt her previous unmitigated claim.

The above case is an example of how shifts in gaze direction, especially when used *after* a claim can be employed as a practice for “checking up” details of that claim with one’s partner. By looking at her partner the speaker can implicitly provide him with the opportunity to align or dis-align with her claims even after the speaker has been given reason to think that she is correct in making these claims on behalf of their partner. In combination with explicit verbal requests, a shift in gaze direction can express uncertainty about the content of the claims as well as whether it is treated as warranted to make claims on behalf of one’s partner.

The excerpts discussed up until this point include additional verbal evidence that suggests what it is that the gaze shifts were designed to do. However, as will be demonstrated in the next and final excerpt of this section, these gazes do not always result in an explicit display of the response they seem to be inviting. The abovementioned cases demonstrate speakers’ orientations to negotiating between individual and collective epistemic rights when speaking for *themselves only* or making *collective* claims. Excerpt 12 introduces a new dimension to this tension, namely how married couples manage the process of speaking not only for *themselves* but for *their partner* about *their partner’s* individual independent experiences. While making these claims, however, the speaker orients to her own epistemic rights as somewhat limited by initiating a shift in gaze direction towards her partner. So, this excerpt shows that while speakers within a marriage treat themselves as sometimes being able to speak on behalf of their partners they can also use gaze shifts as practices for “checking up” with their partner, thereby giving their partner an opportunity to either agree with or reject what is being said about them and giving themselves the opportunity to monitor their partners for incipient signs of agreement or disagreement.

Leading up to this shift in gaze direction, Vrajesh has explained that both he and his partner, Nancy, had decided that it was important to live together before getting married. This is part of a response to the researcher's question about whether the couple had experienced any pressure from their families to get married. The couple have both claimed that even though such a pressure might have been present they still wanted to live together first before getting married. During the course of making claims about Vrajesh's experience of pressure from his family, Nancy looks at him on two occasions: once *before* making a claim about her partner's individual experience, thereby demonstrating her uncertainty about whether she can make these claims on his behalf, and then once more *after* she has made the claim about him, apparently pursuing validation from him.

Excerpt 12 (Vrajesh and Nancy)

- 1 N: Mm: I mean we had- we were going out for four years
- 2 before we decided to move in together, though [I mean
- 3 R: [Ok.
- 4 .[X Vrajesh _____ , , . .
- 5 N: and I think fo::r like, for Vrajesh cause he
- 6 [X Researcher _____ , ,
- 7 comes from a more traditional background it was (.)
- 8 .[X Researcher _____ , . . [X Vrajesh
- 9 more of an issue [and a pressure.
- 10 R: [More of an issue.
- 11 N: , , [X Researcher
- 12 (.) Um (.) like my parents were easy
- _____ , , [X Researcher
- so (.) but I think it was more because they compromised
- on a lot of what they believed was correct [instead of=
- 11 R: [Also.
- 12 N: _____
- =imposing it on me.

Prior to Nancy's shifts in gaze direction towards Vrajesh she draws on taken-for-granted knowledge about what the acceptable criteria for moving in together might be; for example, having been "going out for four years" (line 1). In this case, "though" (line 2) treats what she has just said as a mitigating factor in what she has previously revealed about them living together before being married. Thus, it aids Nancy in her treatment of cohabitation as

something that could be viewed negatively (in this case by their families), but presents the length of their relationship prior to living together as mitigating this possible negative response. She does not look at her partner during these collective claims (that she makes while employing the collective pronoun “we”).

However, she starts moving her gaze towards Vrajesh on the words “[I mean” (line 2) to then reach his gaze on the word “and” (line 4) and then keeps looking at him while saying “I think fo:: r” (line 4) until the end of her elongated “fo:: r” (line 4) all of which occurs immediately prior to her claim about Vrajesh. At this point it seems that this shift in gaze direction towards him demonstrates a display of uncertainty about whether she can, in fact, make these claims about his individual experience. Hence, this gaze shift occurs before she makes a claim about knowledge about him that she does not have direct access to. This is in contrast to previous cases where speakers demonstrate uncertainty about making claims on behalf of their partner when describing *collective* claims that the speaker at least had partial access to. It is significant that she looks away again on the word “like” (line 4) further demonstrating that her look serves to show her possible uncertainty about what she is about to say and more specifically whether her partner would agree with her claims about his experiences.

Additional evidence for this uncertainty is demonstrated by “I think” (line 4) which is in itself an expression of uncertainty. In this way, before she even makes her claim about her partner, she mitigates her claim with “and I think fo:: r like” (line 4) and the accompanying gaze shift towards him, thereby demonstrating her uncertainty and orientation to a lack of direct access to the experience she is about to talk about (see Pomerantz (1984) for a discussion on how the ability to make a claim about an experience depends on the speaker’s access to that experience). Furthermore, the prolongation of the “o” in “fo:: r” (line 4) might also be a sign of this uncertainty as she contemplates what to say next.

She then starts to move her gaze away from him on the word “like” (line 4) and looks at no one in particular when stating “Vrajesh cause” (line 4) but then starts to move her gaze towards the researcher on “he” (line 4) and meets the researcher’s gaze on “comes” (line 5) which demonstrates an orientation to the researcher as the appropriate recipient of her gaze as she describes how Vrajesh “comes from a more traditional background” (line 5).

As she continues to present *her* opinion/interpretation of *his* experience (“[and a pressure” (line 6)) she starts to turn her gaze back to Vrajesh at the end of the “and” (line 6) and looks

directly at him as she says “pressure” (line 6). She thereby (as in Excerpts 9 to 11) apparently uses the gaze shift to pursue validation from him, to establish whether she can accurately use this term while describing his experience. More broadly, since this look occurs *after* most of the claim about him (“pressure” (line 6) is the last word in this excerpt that directly refers to *his* individual experience) she seems to use the look to “check up” on *her* own interpretation of *his* individual experience.

Further evidence in the excerpt suggests that this is what the gaze shift on the word “pressure” (line 6) was designed to do: after presenting this claim about him and after she has just looked at him there is a micro-pause “(.)” (line 8), an “Um” (line 8) and another micro-pause “(.)” (line 8) which provide her partner with an opportunity to verify her claims about his individual experience. In contrast to recipients’ responses in previous excerpts, however, he passes up the opportunity to do so¹⁴. This occurs prior to continuing with her individual claim about *her* individual experience (“like my parents were easy” (line 8)). By doing so she positions herself as separate and independent from her partner as both are treated as individuals who have contrasting experiences and interpretations thereof, while at the same time she claims rights to speak for him as well as about her own individual experiences or interpretations thereof.

Hence, Nancy presents the following orientations towards individual or collective epistemic rights: when talking about *collective actions* (“we were going out for four years before we decided to move in together” (line 1 and 2) or *individual experiences* (“like my parents were easy” (line 8)) her gaze remains consistently on the researcher. However, when making claims about her partner’s *individual experiences* that are different to her own (“I think fo::r like, for Vrajesh cause he comes from a more traditional background it was (.) more of an issue [and a pressure” (lines 4-6)) she looks towards her partner just before and just after these claims to display sensitivity to his epistemic rights over his own individual experiences.

This case is deviant in the sense that it not only offers an exploration of the blurring between epistemic rights but also demonstrates how it is possible for married couples to orient to their right to make claims about their partner as an individual with different experiences to them (albeit displaying uncertainty as well as requesting verification from their partner in the

¹⁴It could also be argued, though, that he passes up the opportunity to *reject* her claim and thereby tacitly aligns with it and with her oriented-to right to produce it. However, it might require more evidence to make this argument with confidence.

process). Thus, this excerpt shows how a speaker can make claims about their partner but does so in conjunction with practices of looking that serve to display uncertainty and blurring of epistemic rights.

The data I have examined in this section thus provide evidence that married people can claim the right to speak about their partners, either through collective claims about shared experiences or knowledge or through claims about their partner's individual experiences or opinions thereof. However, the display of certainty of such claims seems to be mitigated through gaze shifts. I argue that the position of the gaze shift in question seems to relate to the function of the gaze shift. The data suggest that a gaze shift initiated *before* a claim serves as a display of uncertainty about this claim and sometimes serves to tacitly invite the recipient (in this case, the speaker's partner) to collaborate, or pursues alignment from the recipient. A gaze shift and continuous look *during* the claim provides a way for the speaker to monitor the recipient's responses and a gaze shift that occurs *after* a claim similarly provides an opportunity to monitor the partner's potential response, while also possibly serving as a way of pursuing alignment with these claims.

Based on these findings, it appears that marriage relationships serve as a warrant for doing certain things (such as speaking on behalf of your partner) that people would not ordinarily orient to having the epistemic rights to do. However, this is still done in a context of displaying uncertainty about when and how married couples can make these claims.

6) Discussion and Conclusions

In this report I have demonstrated how different deployments of either individual (e.g. “I”) or collective (“we”) pronouns, as well as specific shifts in gaze direction and the sequential positions of these become relevant for identities and epistemics within interactions. The regularity with which married couples display orientations to managing the tension between individual versus collective identities, and the negotiation of associated oriented-to epistemic rights through these practices, supports the robustness of my analytic claims. The data suggest that there is no clear solution to such a dilemma and that participants tackle this dilemma from one moment to the next during talk-in-interaction through a range of practices including the use of pronouns as well as shifts in gaze direction, while manipulating turn designs in order to display and manage their caution and uncertainty about whether they are permitted to speak on behalf of their partners.

It is important to note that these findings should not be seen as providing an exhaustive typology of all the different uses and functions of these practices (as is the case with previous research (e.g. Askham 1976; Harter et al., 1997; Sahlstein & Dun, 2008; Shulman, Levy-Shiff, Kadem & Alon, 1997; Skowron, 2000)). Rather I suggest some systematic ways in which these practices can be employed to demonstrate how married people struggle with the dilemma described above and how the position of the practice in the course of the conversation can have a bearing on what action it ultimately performs. Moreover, I have examined some ways in which these verbal and nonverbal practices (as well as others within the data) can function on their own and in concert or close relation to one another to show how married people treat themselves and their partners in specific ways during conversation.

Some cases in my data set (e.g. Excerpt 2) are consistent with previous findings (e.g. Heritage & Raymond, 2005; Lerner & Kitzinger, 2007) that suggest that the individuals tend to make claims about their individual experiences, thoughts and opinions and speak for others mostly when these claims are based on collective or shared experiences; thereby demonstrating sensitivity to individual epistemic rights. On some occasions, married couples treat themselves and their partners as separate individuals by employing the personal pronoun “I” when expressing individual claims about thoughts, opinions and feelings. This observation becomes even more pertinent when speakers exercise this caution even in contexts where there would be minimal reason for doubt about being able to make claims

about their partner; for example, contexts in which the question made “we” responses relevant or cases in which an agreement between the couple was established from the beginning of the conversation.

However, some excerpts in my data set suggest that marriage relationships provide a context that offers insights into how these things can become more blurred than they ordinarily would be by the employment of the collective pronoun “we” (e.g. Excerpts 5 and 6) that is used to confidently make claims about their own as well as their partner’s experiences, thoughts and opinions. In these cases it becomes evident that sometimes married couples display an orientation to being able to confidently make certain claims on behalf of their partner based on the closeness of their relationship and consequent warrant for doing so.

However, many of these cases show that the confidence of these collective claims is mitigated in various ways and that married people grapple with the paradox of having oriented-to epistemic rights to make claims on behalf of their partner while nevertheless simultaneously trying to display their orientation to treating the two partners as independent individuals with separate epistemic rights. In cases involving an apparent uncertainty about oriented-to epistemic rights to make a claim on behalf of one’s partner, the use of pronouns and gaze shifts seem to be used in the execution of similar actions. When making claims on behalf of their partners, speakers either shifted between collective and individual pronouns or shifted their gaze towards their partner to demonstrate uncertainty about the oriented-to epistemic right to make such claims and in some cases they employed both of these practices concurrently to do so.

Specifically, speakers shifted their gaze towards their partners at crucial moments during their claims: when looking at their partner *before* making a claim about them, speakers seemed to pursue some type of collaboration from their partners. While looking at his/her partner *during* the production of their claim, this type of gaze shift seemed to serve as a means for the speaker to monitor their partner’s response and possibly stop producing this claim in the event of detecting any sign of dis-alignment from their partner, or being able to continue if agreement or alignment was apparent. Finally, a gaze shift could also occur immediately *after* a claim in order to verify with the recipient (in my case the marriage partner) whether he or she is in alignment with what the speaker has just said. Thus, as proposed by Goodwin (1979), the meaning of the speaker’s claim could be altered slightly

with a gaze shift to show that what is being said is open for discussion. Thereby, the gaze shift mitigates the claim slightly and is accompanied by the speaker's interpretation of their partner's oriented-to epistemic rights. This supports the position that individuals orient to primary rights to their own experiences and might exercise caution when making claims on behalf of someone else (cf. Raymond & Heritage, 2006).

Similarly, specific pronoun use seems to contribute to the same sort of action. A speaker may start a claim containing shared knowledge while employing the collective pronoun "we" but then during the course of the claim may shift to "I". This might demonstrate that this claim actually only applies to the speaker producing it. Hence, caution is exercised when assuming to have epistemic rights over his/her partner's knowledge and epistemic rights. As shown in my data, married couples even go as far as to comment on their partner's individual experiences, albeit in a mitigated way.

Hence, these practices are both especially evident in the context of a marriage relationship (which is still considered by many to be the ultimate form of a relationship), as they appear to provide speakers with a warrant (on some occasions at least) to perform a practice that seems to be something that people involved in other types of relationships would ordinarily not be treated as having the right to perform. The abovementioned practices allow them to do so while expressing various levels of uncertainty so that a certain level of individuality as well as oriented-to individual epistemic authority can be maintained for each partner. Thus, these practices allow for a more fluid navigation across epistemic boundaries within a marriage relationship and the blurring of these boundaries becomes visible through this demonstrated uncertainty.

Even though there were moments in the my data where speakers explicitly oriented to this dilemma by making direct claims about "not knowing" how their partner feels about a certain matter (e.g. Excerpts 3 and 4) and even though these examples serve as additional evidence for the uncertainty presented through the main practices under investigation, this kind of explicit reflection on the part of speakers was not the main focus of the study. In alignment with previous epistemic research (e.g. Glenn & LeBaron, 2011; Raymond & Heritage, 2006; Heritage & Raymond, 2005) the present study shows that these practices recurrently happen implicitly, without the speaker necessarily overtly displaying any signs of employing these practices intentionally. Hence, the view that epistemic authority is *implicitly* managed during conversation without this explicitly being the topic of conversation is supported in my data.

Furthermore, Heritage (forthcoming) proposes that an individual's orientation to epistemic rights becomes evident during conversation in relation to someone else's epistemic rights. In my analyses this becomes clear when the speaker acknowledges their own oriented-to epistemic rights in relation to their partner's. It seems that the claims they make depend significantly on how they view their partner's epistemic rights. The profundity of this treatment of epistemic rights becomes especially evident when speakers demonstrate uncertainty through these practices even when there has been sufficient evidence in the preceding talk that would warrant a speaker talking on behalf of their partner.

Both of the sets of practices I have examined demonstrate how married couples negotiate the tension between maintaining an individuality but at the same time cultivating a collective identity with their partner within a marriage unit, and how this tension is not easily resolved. There is a constant sensitivity (implicitly or explicitly displayed) towards their own and their partner's identities as well as epistemic rights.

A significant way in which the study I have presented contributes to existing research on the topic of individual versus collective identities within relationship contexts is demonstrated through the methodology used: in contrast to previous studies that aimed to establish typologies of these issues through quantitative methods or frequency counts, thematic content analysis or other qualitative or quantitative methods and rather than attempting to establish how married couples "usually" are (outside the interview context), I focussed on the moment-by-moment emergence of these issues through interaction. My study thus shows the moment-by-moment nature of these issues, in contrast to research that treats it as a matter of "aggregates" or as being a more enduring characteristic of relationships. This has implications for how these concepts are viewed theoretically. Instead of considering these concepts as measurable variables that are constant or relatively permanent this type of exploration allows the researcher to see them as fluid and contingent; that is, constantly emerging and possibly changing from one turn to the next- in some cases even varying from one speech unit to the next.

Moreover, the findings are consistent with the view (e.g. Raymond & Heritage, 2006) that oriented-to epistemic rights are not rigidly tied to identities. By looking at the details of interactions my analyses provide evidence for frequent changes in the treatment of identities to demonstrate how complex they are. At the same time, my data provide evidence for the complexity of the treatment of epistemic authority within a marriage context, and how this

complexity becomes evident from one turn to the next. My study shows some ways in which this becomes visible at particular moments without an attempt to find stable, constant character traits or identities.

However, it should be noted that further research may be required in order to investigate whether these findings reflect the actions performed (and the practices to do so) in other interactional contexts. Considering that the present study regarded the interview context as a constituent part of the actions produced within the interactions it would be illuminating to examine whether other interactional contexts produce similar findings.

Finding a balance between what constitutes individual versus collective identity can be understood as a fundamental part of what the emergence of particular forms of subjectivity or “selves” is all about; a part that may possibly be relevant for other collectivities aside from marriage. Further research in this regard could thus examine how identities and associated oriented-to epistemic rights are negotiated within other types of relationships where individuals are part of other types of collectivities. Hence, through the social organisation of these matters through seemingly mundane practices such as the ones I have examined, one might be able to develop deeper understandings of the emergent production and maintenance of particular forms of subjectivities or “selves”.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A:

Interview Schedule

Although these questions were asked, the participants were informed that both can answer at any time, and that it should be more of an open and interactive discussion.

- 1) Why did you get married?
- 2) Can you tell me the story of how you came to be married?
- 3) What does it mean to you to be married?
- 4) Before you met your partner how did you feel about marriage? What did “marriage” mean to you, in general?
- 5) After you met your partner but before you married them what did marriage mean to you in the context of your relationship?
- 6) How is married life different from how your relationship was before you got married?
- 7) How do your ideas of what marriage means to you now differ from ideas of what it meant to you before getting married?
- 8) Before you met your partner had you always regarded marriage as something you wanted to do?
- 9) Could you imagine living with your partner without being married, potentially for the rest of your life?

Questions related to the short video clip:

- 10) How did you respond to the criticisms regarding marriage in the video clip?
 - 11) What other kinds of criticisms of marriage have you encountered and how do you respond to these?
-

Questions for the purposes of implementing the snowballing technique:

- 12) Do you know of any other married couples or couples that are in a long-term committed relationship but have chosen (at least thus far) to not get married, who might be interested in taking part in this study? Can you think of couples who you think would respond totally differently to the ways in which you have responded?

Appendix B:

Participant Information Sheet



Psychology
School of Human & Community Development
University of the Witwatersrand
Private Bag 3, WITS, 2050
Tel: (011) 717 4500 Fax: (011) 717 4559



Hello.

My name is Angelika Ronge, and I am conducting research for the purposes of obtaining a Masters degree in Psychology at the University of the Witwatersrand. I am interested in investigating what marriage means to married people (or people in committed relationships who live together) and how they make sense of it. The focus is on how people who live married lives talk about marriage and how they respond to criticisms of marriage. I would like to invite you to participate in this study.

If you agree to take part in the study it will involve an interview (as a couple) that will be led by me. I will ask a few questions while encouraging open discussions about how you make sense of marriage. Interview session times and dates will be scheduled to your convenience in a room belonging to the department of Psychology at the University of the Witwatersrand where the interview will not be interrupted and the content of the interview will not be able to be overheard. If you prefer, however, the interview could take place in your home if this is more practical and comfortable for you.

The whole interview should not take longer than 1 hour, so 45 min to 1 hour of your time would be required. However, you are welcome to talk for as long as you would like to, so the interview may last longer than an hour if you feel that you have more to say. Participation is completely voluntary, and no individual will be advantaged or disadvantaged in any way for choosing to participate or not to participate in the study. If you do not want to answer any particular questions in the study you will not be forced to do so and you can stop the interview and withdraw from the study at any time without being disadvantaged in any way. If at a later stage after the interview has been conducted you wish to remove your interview from the data set this will be done.

Towards the end of the interview a short video clip (approx. 2min 30sec long) which contains possible criticisms of marriage will be shown. This video clip is simply used to stimulate further discussion and the interest is in your response to this criticism and other possible criticisms of marriage that you might have encountered. If you feel offended or experience any kind of discomfort while watching this video clip it will be stopped immediately.

With your permission, the interview will be videotaped so that it is easier for me to analyse the material. This video tape will not be seen by any person other than me and my supervisor, thus remaining completely confidential. The recording of the interview will only be used for research purposes and no identifying information such as images from the video recording of the interview or any personal details will be included in the transcript of the interview, or research reports and presentations based on the interviews. Even though direct quotes of what you have said might be included in the research report in order to illustrate a finding, there is no way to link it to you since pseudonyms (i.e. false names) will be used. If you would like

feedback after the study is completed you can contact me or my supervisor via phone or e-mail (details provided below), and a brief summary of the research findings can be made available to you or you can view the whole report.

Should you choose to participate in the study, you will be asked to sign consent forms indicating that you have agreed to participate and to be video recorded for the purposes of the study. These will ensure confidentiality; i.e. ensuring that there will be no way to link what is reported to you since no identifying information will be disclosed. You will also receive a separate form to indicate your permission to being video recorded for the entire duration of the interview.

There are no expected major risks associated with taking part in this study. If however you experience any psychological discomfort during the interview or in response to any of the content covered in the interview please contact this free counselling service for further assistance:

FAMSA:

famsa@global.co.za

National office: (011) 975-7106/7 or

Gauteng office: 011 892 4272/3/6

1stFloor

Old Town Hall Building

Cnr. Trichardt & Commissioner Streets

Boksburg

Your participation in this study would be greatly appreciated. If you have any questions or concerns, please contact the researcher or supervisor (details are provided below).

Kind regards

Researcher: Angelika Ronge

angiejozi@yahoo.com

079 575 4664

Supervisor: Kevin Whitehead

Kevin.whitehead@wits.ac.za

011 717 4530

Appendix C:

Consent Form



Psychology
School of Human & Community Development
University of the Witwatersrand
Private Bag 3, WITS, 2050
Tel: (011) 717 4500 Fax: (011) 717 4559



I,, consent to the participation in and video-recording of an interview, recorded by Miss Angelika Ronge, being used in her study on constructions of marriage.

Please tick the circles below to indicate your understanding of and/or consent to that item.

I understand that:

- ☐ There are no benefits for participating in this study.
- ☐ This is strictly a research project and I will not be receiving any form of counselling from the researcher.
- ☐ I may refuse to answer any of the questions.
- ☐ My interview will be video-recorded.
- ☐ The video tape (and its associated transcript) will only be seen or heard by the researcher and her supervisor. The tape will be stored in a lock up cupboard at all times, and electronic copies of the recordings will be password protected.
- ☐ The interview data will be stored securely under password protection from the interview onwards and it will only be used for research purposes.
- ☐ If I am not comfortable at any point while watching the video clip shown during the interview I can ask the researcher to switch it off.
- ☐ Direct quotations from my interview may be published in an academic journal along with the final results of the study. There is a slight risk that readers of these research reports may recognize me based on the quotations used in the reports.
- ☐ I will be assigned a pseudonym that will protect my confidentiality as my name or any other identifying information will not be reflected anywhere on the transcripts of the interviews or in the final research report.
- ☐ If at any time I do not wish to be a part of the research I may withdraw from the study and my interview will be deleted.

Signed

Date.....

Appendix D:

Ethics Clearance Certificate

UNIVERSITY OF THE WITWATERSRAND, JOHANNESBURG

HUMAN RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE (SCHOOL OF HUMAN & COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT)

CLEARANCE CERTIFICATE

PROTOCOL NUMBER: MRES/11/003 IH

PROJECT TITLE:

The construction of marriage through interactional and discursive practices.

INVESTIGATORS

Ronge Angelika

DEPARTMENT

Psychology

DATE CONSIDERED

15/04/11

DECISION OF COMMITTEE*

Approved

This ethical clearance is valid for 2 years and may be renewed upon application

DATE: 25 May 2011

CHAIRPERSON
(Professor M. Lucas)



cc Supervisor:

Dr. K. Whitehead
Psychology

DECLARATION OF INVESTIGATOR (S)

To be completed in duplicate and **one copy** returned to the Secretary, Room 100015, 10th floor, Senate House, University.

I/we fully understand the conditions under which I am/we are authorized to carry out the abovementioned research and I/we guarantee to ensure compliance with these conditions. Should any departure be contemplated from the research procedure, as approved, I/we undertake to submit a revised protocol to the Committee.

This ethical clearance will expire on 31 December 2013

PLEASE QUOTE THE PROTOCOL NUMBER IN ALL ENQUIRIES