

# Gay and Lesbian Issues and Psychology Review

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The Review is open to a broad range of material, and especially welcomes research, commentary and reviews that critically evaluate the status quo in regards to LGBTQ issues. The Review also seeks papers that redress the imbalance that has thus far focused on the issues facing white lesbians and gay men, to the exclusion of other sexual, gender and racial groups. The Review encourages the elaboration of an expansive approach to psychological research on people of a diverse range of sexual and non-gender normative groups, and publishes articles from across a range of disciplines including (but not limited to) psychology, social work, cultural studies, sociology, gender studies, politics, history and legal studies.

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# Gay and Lesbian Issues and Psychology Review

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## **EDITORIAL: MARRIAGE EQUALITY IN AUSTRALIA**

DAMIEN W. RIGGS AND JESSICA ROBYN CADWALLADER

It has been argued that marriage equality is *the* paramount issue in Australian LGBT politics (Marsh, 2011). Certainly the push for marriage equality has been at the forefront of political organising for the past three years, following on from successes in all states and territories in regards to rights for (certain groups of) lesbian and gay parents. At the same time, however, and as we have argued elsewhere (see Cadwallader & Riggs, 2012), the focus upon marriage equality can tend towards a very narrow agenda promoted by specific members of LGBT communities, an agenda that fails to truly encompass the diverse relationships and experiences of LGBT people. The papers in this issue highlight the diverse positions on marriage equality, both within Australia and internationally.

The issue opens with a paper by Matthews and Augoustinos, exploring how Australian politicians justify a position that may be broadly defined as against marriage equality. Matthews and Augoustinos' discursive analysis of politicians' speeches about marriage equality deftly highlights the complex ways in which politicians make claims to being inclusive and non-discriminatory, whilst nonetheless arguing against marriage equality.

Moving to the international arena, Epstein examines a corpus of children's picture books and young adult novels from the US, UK and EU in order to identify how these differing locales either include or exclude representations of LGBT marriage within such books. Epstein usefully highlights the ways in which differences between the locales may be framed in terms of either a focus on children's rights (broadly defined as the right to have their parents' relationships recognised) or a focus on

adults' rights to marry (which is not necessarily connected to the rights of their children).

The third paper by Cover examines general trends in arguments for marriage equality, with a specific focus on how such arguments centre the homonormative couple. Cover examines how the exclusive focus on couples relies upon a binary of coupledness/promiscuity that serves to marginalise a range of relationship forms.

The final paper by Webb and Chonody takes up the question of public attitudes towards marriage equality in Australia, through a quantitative study of the relationship between attitudes to same-sex parenting, and attitudes to same-sex marriage. The findings suggest that, having controlled for a range of demographic factors such as religiosity, age, education, and gender, attitudes towards same-sex parenting uniquely explain attitudes towards same-sex marriage, both which are influenced by homonegativity.

As a whole, then, the diverse range of standpoints, research methods, and theoretical frameworks represented in this issue highlight the fact that, even if marriage equality is accepted as an important issue facing LGBT politics in Australia and abroad, arguments in favour of marriage equality must take many forms. These include, but are not limited to, a focus on the psychological and wellbeing implications of denying marriage equality, how such denials are made, and the implications of marriage equality in terms of its capacity (or otherwise) to ensure the full inclusion of LGBT people in Australia (amongst other groups of people). Accounts of marriage equality - both within LGBT communities and in the general population - thus will be well served by ac-

knowledging the complex issues at stake in marriage equality arguments, and aim to promote more nuanced and careful considerations of the issue.

### **Author Notes**

Damien Riggs is a senior lecturer in social work at Flinders University. He publishes widely in the areas of critical race and whiteness studies, gender/sexuality studies, and family studies. He is the author (with Clemence Due) of *Representations of Indigenous Australians in the Mainstream News Media* (Post Pressed, 2011) and the editor of the *Gay and Lesbian Issues and Psychology Review*.

Jessica Robyn Cadwallader recently completed a postdoctoral fellowship at the University of Groningen in the Netherlands. Her work examines the relationships between normativity, embodiment and emotion in a variety of settings, with a particular focus on suffering and trauma in the context of medicine. She has published in journals including *Australian Feminist Studies*, *Social Semiotics*, *Somatechnics* and *The International Journal of Feminist Approaches to Bioethics*.

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## 'I DON'T BELIEVE IN DISCRIMINATION BUT... THIS IS JUST TOO FAR': POLITICAL DISCOURSE IN THE AUSTRALIAN MARRIAGE EQUALITY DEBATE

NATALIE MATTHEWS AND MARTHA AUGOUSTINOS

### Abstract

*This paper examines how heteronormativity operates in the context of debates over marriage equality, despite an apparent underlying ethos of egalitarianism. The data analysed in the present study were a corpus of 44 transcripts from Australian politicians who oppose the legalisation of non-heterosexual marriage. We utilised a synthetic discourse analysis to identify a predominant discursive repertoire that constructed opposition to non-heterosexual marriage as non-discriminatory, often coupled with a subject position that portrayed politicians as heroes rather than oppressors. Although politicians opposed to non-heterosexual marriage were found to openly agree that non-heterosexual people deserve rights, their accounts functioned to depict marriage for non-heterosexual people as being a step 'too far'. In positioning themselves as non-discriminatory heroes, politicians' views against marriage equality were depicted as the only means in which to protect mainstream society from the 'perils' of non-heterosexual marriage. Our analysis highlights the subtleties of contemporary prejudice as a practice which no longer focuses on the deficits of the oppressed group, but rather solely on the more highly prioritised needs of the heterosexual majority. In the marriage equality debate this enabled politicians to appear as egalitarian and non-prejudiced whilst simultaneously arguing against laws that would grant non-heterosexual individuals greater rights in Australian society.*

**Keywords:** marriage equality debate, Australia, discrimination, discourse analysis, heteronormativity.

### Introduction

In 2004, the Howard Liberal Government of Australia amended the Marriage Act of 1961 (Australian Human Rights Commission, 2009). The amendment was specifically aimed at defining marriage so that it excluded any relationships other than those between one man and one woman.<sup>1</sup> In doing so, people in non-heterosexual relationships became legally restricted from participating in the institution of marriage. To date, this controversial amendment still stands. However, more recently both political and public debate has arisen over the need to change the Marriage Act so that it no longer excludes non-heterosexual relationships (The Age, 2010). The debate has been fuelled from increasing international pressure, as nations such as Canada, Norway and some states of the U.S.A. lift bans on non-heterosexual marriage, as well as a shifting public attitude towards non-heterosexual marriage. For example, a 2012 public opinion poll conducted as part of a Senate inquiry on marriage equality found that 64% of 276,437 respondents were in support of marriage equality (Australian Marriage Equality, 2012). Non-heterosexual communities have taken varied views towards the issue, with some queer theorists purporting that as marriage is historically an oppressive and cruel institution, non-heterosexual people should take no part in its celebration (see Marsh 2011 for a more comprehensive discussion of this). Overwhelm-

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1 This refers specifically to non-heterosexual couples. Couples where one partner identifies as intersex or transgender and who has legally changed their sex and is now involved in an opposite-sex relationship are still legally entitled to marry.

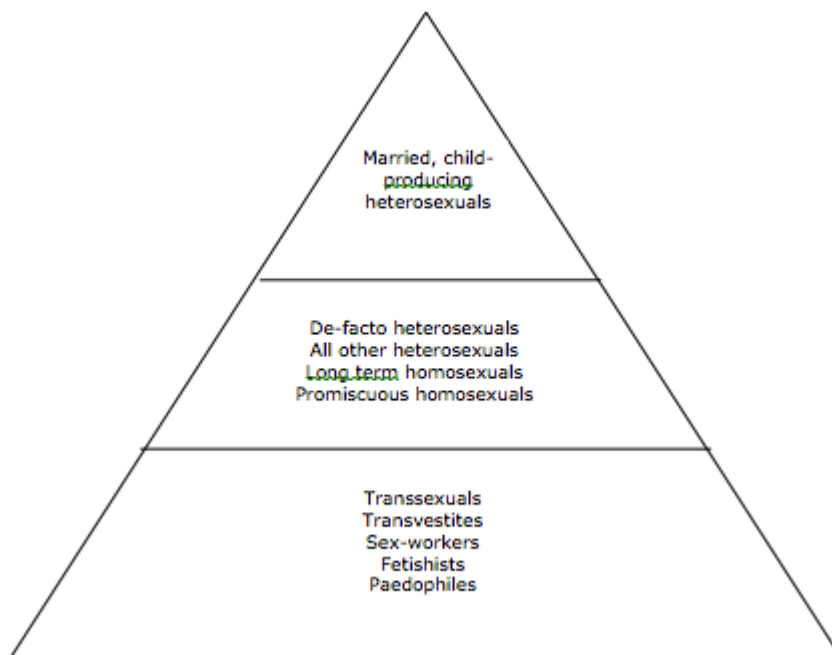
ingly, however, non-heterosexual people have seen the prohibition of marriage as just another instance of discrimination (May, 2011).

Yet despite this slow shift in public attitudes and the desire of many in non-heterosexual communities to marry, resistance to marriage equality continues, including amongst Australian politicians. Many researchers (e.g., Brow, 2009; Harding & Peel, 2006; Kitzinger & Wilkinson, 2004) have suggested that this ongoing resistance to marriage equality extends far beyond the act of marriage itself, and is instead, at its core, part of a broader heteronormative ideology prevailing in Western society today. The term 'heteronormativity' is derived from Rubin's (1984) theorisation of the sex-gender system, and explains the fact that in Western society the monogamous heterosexual relationship is given the greatest value. According to Rubin, Western society has an implicit, hierarchical system of sexuality, conceptualised in a pyramid-like fashion, whereby social status progressively decreases from the tip to the base, as illustrated in Figure 1.

This pyramid of sexual value not only stands to segregate sections of society based on sexuality alone, but also provides the means by which power and privilege are dispersed and sexual inequality is maintained so as to favour heterosexuality above all else. Indeed, the main implications of heteronormative ideology are not only that heterosexuality is valued as normal, legitimate and superior, but that other forms of sexual relationships (such as non-heterosexuality) are polarised as being abnormal, illegitimate and inferior.

Despite the entrenched nature of heteronormative ideology, researchers have long examined the ways in which heteronormativity and other pervasive ideologies within society are constructed, maintained, and legitimated through discourse (e.g., see chapters in Wilkinson & Kitzinger, 1993; Peel, 2001). In terms of challenging heteronormativity, Speer (2005) suggests that this will only occur through deconstructing the dominant discourses which function to normalise heterosexuality as the epitome of all sexual behav-

Figure 1. Rubin's Triangle of Sexual Value





our. Such challenges, however, become increasingly more complex as the ways in which heteronormativity is enacted adapts. In the past, it could be argued, identifying prejudicial discourse was far easier, as overtly racist and sexist sentiments were regularly expressed in the talk of politicians, media, and everyday citizens. Today, however, overt expressions of prejudice are no longer the norm, and as Masser and Phillips (2003) state; "It is generally accepted within society today that one should not be openly prejudiced or discriminatory towards members of minority groups" (p. 184).

According to Crandall, Eshelman and O'Brien (2002), this shift in expressions of prejudice is due to changing social values, which they label as the 'egalitarian' and 'non-prejudice' norms. The egalitarian norm dictates that a good person will treat everybody else as an equal despite their race or sexuality, therefore making blatant expressions of prejudice no longer socially desirable (i.e., a non-prejudice norm). Although the majority of people in Western society now adhere to these norms, it does not mean, however, that racial or sexual discrimination has been eradicated, but rather pushed 'underground'. As Masser and Phillips (2003) suggest; "Contemporary expressions of prejudice have generally mutated to more subtle, symbolic or covert forms of expression generally focusing on issues of 'fairness' and 'equity' rather than individual characteristics of people" (p. 184). In terms of heteronormative ideology, this means that the ways in which the ideology maintains heterosexual privilege or non-heterosexual marginalisation are now much harder to detect, as speakers or writers strive to appear as egalitarian whilst implicitly conveying heterosexist sentiments.

Previous discursive studies attuned to the maintenance and reproduction of heteronormativity have nonetheless managed to illustrate the more subtle ways that heteronormativity continues to be upheld. Peel (2001), for example, conducted a conversation analysis on peer sexual education sessions, and observed that even those who openly supported

non-heterosexuality still portrayed it as being an unfavourable deficit. Peel's work found frequent comments which contrasted non-heterosexual individuals to other shunned members of society. For example, "I suppose it's just the same as like (.) bringing up a child where (.) I don't know where (.) the father's an alcoholic or something they accommodate to it" (p. 548). In Similarly, Surtees and Gunn (2010), who focused on heteronormativity in early childhood, found that children are often shielded from discussions of any sexuality other than male-female relationships, thus normalising the heterosexual nuclear family as the epitome of sexual behaviour. Surtees and Gunn used Walt Disney movies as a prime example, where many classics contained happily-ever-after endings that are only finalised through a female and male character falling in love or having a baby.

Another new, but common, discursive practice identified in empirical studies (including Riggs, 2011) has been labelled by Smith (2007) as 'refusing diversity'. This is said to occur when non-heterosexuality is only accepted when it conforms to the social ideals of mainstream society. Smith, who analysed heteronormativity in the legal context, found that successful international cases that won non-heterosexual partners the right to marry were done so only on the basis of non-heterosexual assimilation to the heteronormative ideals of monogamy, commitment and social responsibility, casting acceptable non-heterosexual relationships as only those which are the same as heterosexual ones

As the authors summarised above would suggest, it is precisely because of the increasingly implicit maintenance of heteronormativity that further research in this area is warranted. Understanding how heteronormativity is maintained is the best means by which to mobilize social change by educating people to challenge or at least identify such inequalities as they arise (Speer, 2005). Undeniably, the current controversy surrounding marriage equality in Australia is an important and interesting medium through which to analyse the mainte-

nance of heteronormativity, providing a text book example in which heterosexual privilege must be defended by political speakers who oppose marriage equality in ways that appear neutral, unprejudiced, and free from vested and discriminatory intentions, yet at the same time arguing for ongoing marginalising legislation for non-heterosexual people. As such, the goals of the present research were to critically analyse political discourse surrounding the legalisation of non-heterosexual marriage in Australia, with a focus on how heteronormativity is maintained and constructed in such debates.

### **Method**

The discourse analysis presented in this paper was conducted using a synthetic approach as informed by Wetherell (1998). The synthetic approach aims to integrate the traditionally separate strands of critical discourse analysis and conversation analysis into a more holistic approach which overcomes the pitfalls associated with each method on its own. Currently, this contemporary approach is advocated and utilised in a range of discursive research, including the topics of gender and heteronormativity (Wetherell, 1998; Wetherell & Edley, 1999). As the present research primarily focuses on deconstructing heteronormative ideology, the more critical form of discourse analysis predominates and allows for the identification of interpretative repertoires and subject positions which are mobilised by politicians in their talk.

The data corpus included transcripts of political speeches, parliamentary debates or interviews regarding marriage equality that had occurred from January 2009 – June 2011. Only politicians who opposed marriage equality were included in the data corpus as these individuals were the ones whose views toward non-heterosexual marriage could be seen as potentially violating the egalitarian and non-prejudice norms. Overall, 44 transcripts were identified as appropriate under the above criteria. The audio or video of these transcripts were then obtained, either directly from the

internet (e.g. ABC's Q&A program has direct audio of interviews), or by requesting Hansard video files of parliamentary debates in the Australian Parliament. Data selected for closer analysis were then transcribed in more detail using simplified Jeffersonian conventions (ten Have, 1999).

The main analytic objective was to identify the predominant discursive repertoires and strategies which appeared in the talk of politicians who opposed marriage equality. Discursive repertoires relate to "recurrently used systems of terms used for characterizing and evaluating actions, events and other phenomena" (Potter & Wetherell, 1987, p. 203). They are smaller than the broader term of discourse, and thus attuned to "placing more emphasis upon human agency within the flexible deployment of language" (Edley, 2001, p.202). The analysis attended specifically to how this oppositional discourse was put together in ways that denied discrimination and prejudice towards non-heterosexual relationships, and at the same time managed speakers' identities as fair and egalitarian. Over all, the analysis identified two predominant repertoires and one subject position. However, the reporting in this paper (due to word constraints) is limited to discussion of only one repertoire and the subject position.

### **Analysis**

#### ***'This is Not Discrimination'***

Within the marriage equality debate, both in Australia and overseas, pro-gay supporters have argued that the denial of marriage equality constitutes a form of discrimination, in which equal rights are being withheld on the basis of sexual orientation (Harding & Peel, 2006). Those opposed to non-heterosexual marriage are thus challenged with the delicate task of justifying their opposition whilst simultaneously managing their accounts as being free from discrimination. This is especially the case for politicians who need to be seen as upholding the values cen-

tral to a liberal-democracy. In our data corpus this was typically achieved by politicians' drawing on a pervasive repertoire that denied that opposition to non-heterosexual marriage was discriminatory. This careful discursive negotiation of what does or does not constitute discrimination thereby allowed speakers to deny that their position was indeed a form of discrimination against non-heterosexual people. Woolgar and Pawluch (1985) labelled this kind of discursive strategy 'ontological gerrymandering', a rhetorical strategy by which interlocutors "manipulate a boundary making certain phenomena problematic whilst leaving others unproblematic" (p. 214). Potter (1996) has since extended this notion to explain how discursive descriptions often work to only focus on a "particular range of phenomena as relevant" (p. 184) whilst ignoring others. Both extracts 1 and 2 below involve the speakers attempting to situate their position against non-heterosexual marriage as one that falls outside the parameters of problematic and not-to-be-tolerated discrimination. Instead, their prohibition on non-heterosexual marriage is given attributes that were non-characteristic of each interlocutor's construction of the category 'discrimination'. This functioned to rhetorically position each speaker's argument as being free from prejudice, whilst still working to discretely construct non-heterosexual people as inferior to heterosexuals and therefore unworthy of marriage.

Extract 1 is taken from the ABC's *Q & A* program, on the 16<sup>th</sup> of August, 2010, just days before the Australian Federal election in which Mr. Abbott, the current Liberal Opposition Leader, was running for Prime Minister. Here, Mr. Abbott is addressed by Mr. Thomas, the father of a gay son who questions Mr. Abbott's views against marriage equality.

Mr. Thomas's question can be seen to construct two main realities. First, it works to define discrimination as the unfair treatment of the 'innocent'. In this case, Thomas is able to use his subject position of 'abiding citizen' to highlight the injustice of how, despite long years of serving his nation (l.1-2), his family faces marital discrimination in relation to the denial of his son's right to marriage (l.-3). Second, Thomas's account attributes discrimination as arising from ignorance and fear: Thomas's personal journey of revelation in which he was previously homophobic but then suddenly 'saw the light' functions to portray Abbott's views against marriage as being similarly discriminatory and ill-informed. Thus Thomas's account functions to construct the opposition to marriage equality as a form of real life discrimination which must be overcome, and results in Thomas questioning whether Abbott will ever change his mind to give people, like his son, the "dignity and respect" (l.7) they deserve.

**Extract 1: Tony Abbott**

- 1 Geoff Thank you .hhh I am a Vietnam veteran (.) I have been a plumbing contractor for 37  
 2 Thomas years (.) I support with a social conscience (.) the Liberal philosophy .hhh I have a  
 3 gay son (.5) when I was confronted with that situation in a very short (.) amount of  
 4 time and with due (.) consideration I accepted his position and I overcame my  
 5 ignorance and my fear of (.) of gays and the idea of gay marriage .hhh when will you  
 6 Mr Abbott (.5) take up the sa- [audience applause] (.) will you sir overcome your fear  
 7 and ignorance (.) of gay people (.3) and give them the dignity and respect (.) that  
 8 you'd happily give to all other Australians
- 9 Tony Well Geoff I absolutely agree with you (.5) that people have got to be given dignity  
 10 Abbott and respect (.) and I would always try to find it in my heart (.) to give dignity and  
 11 respect to people regardless of their circumstances (.) regardless of their opinions .hhh  
 12 uh so that is absolutely my position (.4) but ?I think that uh (.) there are lots of  
 13 terrific gay relationships lot::s of terrific (.) uh commitments between gay partners but  
 14 I just don't think (.) that (.) uh marriage (.) is the right term to put on it.

Abbott's response is structured in a way that conversation analysts have found to be common amongst interlocutors undertaking a dis-preferred response (Pomerantz, 1984). That is, he agrees with Geoff at first that non-heterosexual people deserve "dignity and respect" (l.9, 10, 11), before disagreeing that they should be allowed to marry (l.14). This kind of discursive work is important, as not only does it "shift the ontological boundaries of the argument with minimal interactional trouble" (Fogarty & Augoustinos, 2008, p. 547), but it also allows Abbott to defend himself from the accusations of prejudice made by Mr. Thomas.

Instead of immediately refuting Mr. Thomas' accusations, which may be viewed as a guilty defence, Mr Abbott instead aligns himself with Thomas' views on equality, thus affirming his disapproval at treating non-heterosexual people unfairly. Indeed, from lines 10-12 Abbott highlights his strong attitudes against discrimination, and towards a society where everyone is treated the same. The amalgamated presence of words like "dignity" (l.9, 10), "respect" (l.10,11), "heart" (l.10) and "regardless" (l.11) taps into the ideological resource of morality, in which treating others differentially is seen as problematic and unethical, thus enabling Abbott to construct himself as a person who strives for equality. Referring to the word "heart" (l.10), for example, indicates that Abbott is not a person who is cold to the feelings of others, but rather is sensitive and intuitive and thus more likely to act in a morally accountable manner.

Abbott also uses maximisation, illustrated by words like "absolutely" (l. 9,12) and "always" (l.10). According to Potter (1996), maximisation occurs when people attempt to exaggerate a description in order to more easily "justify, accuse or argue some conclusion" (p. 188). In this case, maximisation anchors the fact that Abbott 'absolutely' (l. 9-12) understands and 'always' (l.10) has - the precise boundary line between discriminatory and non-discriminatory behaviour. Indeed, in line 13, Abbott's talk can be seen to positively ap-

praise non-heterosexual people and their relationships through repetitively using words like "terrific". This functions to protect Abbott from Thomas' accusations of fear and ignorance, and instead positions Abbott as somebody who knows how successful non-heterosexual commitments can be, and is thus not ignorant of the matter.

All of the discursive work outlined above is important, as it ensures that when Abbott finally asserts his disagreement to non-heterosexual marriage: "but I just don't think (.) that (.) uh marriage (.) is the right term to put on it" (l.13-14), it follows an account that has already positioned him as strongly opposed to discrimination. This functions to quarantine Abbott's views from belonging to the category of discrimination, and instead the prohibition of non-heterosexual marriage is constructed as deriving from an issue of "terms" (l.14). By denying that the opposition of non-heterosexual marriage is discrimination, Abbott's account also legitimates the differential treatment of non-heterosexual people under the Marriage Act as being socially acceptable. After all, not only does this account strive to maintain a society whereby non-heterosexual people are deemed unworthy of marriage, but it simultaneously ensures that the anti-prejudice norm appears unviolated by legitimating Abbott's views against non-heterosexual marriage as being 'normal' and 'ok'. Extract 1 therefore demonstrates how the privileged and unique status of heteronormativity is maintained. Although non-heterosexual relationships are deemed as "terrific" (l.13), they are nonetheless deemed unworthy of marriage.

Extract 2 (over page) is a speech by Shayne Neumann (Labor) that occurred on November, 2010, in the House of Representatives. Here members were engaged in a formal debate regarding a motion which called "on all parliamentarians to gauge their constituents' views on the issue of marriage equality" (Australian Politics.com, 2011).

**Extract 2: Shayne Neumann**

1 Shayne .hhh like many in this place I have relatives (.) in same-sex relationships  
 2 Neumann and numerous friends (.) in same-sex relationships .hhh Deputy speaker  
 3 (.5) uh families come in many shapes and sizes (.) and love between  
 4 consenting adults is to be cherished (.) and honoured (1.5) .hhh <I have  
 5 always (.) believed that> we should end discrimination between (.5) uh  
 6 against same-sex ↑couples hhh uh always (.) taken the view in flo:ra in  
 7 internal ALP that we need to ↑end the egregious and outrageous (.)  
 8 discrimination in relation to >taxation social security (.) health aged care  
 9 family law and employment< .hhh Deputy Speaker (.) .hhh I do not  
 10 believe that there is a community consensus in relation to the issue (.)  
 11 and I do not believe many in our community are ready for same-sex  
 12 marriage .hhh uh for personal (.)religious (.)philosophical .hhh and uh (.)  
 13 traditional relasons hhh I (.) was ple::ased when the uh (.3) previous (.3)  
 14 uh (.7) Labor (.) uh gov- uh (.) opposition uh adopted the attitude they  
 15 did in relation to the amendments to the Marriage ↑Act .hhh and  
 16 supported the position that national conference that we took (.) in  
 17 rela<sup>tion</sup> to (.) uh (.) marriage between a man and a wom?an (.) .hhh and  
 18 uh that is based on the classic Hyde definition which uh (.) .hhh of the  
 19 19th century which Justice Brennan of the case against the Queen  
 20 against L uh adopted and recognised .hhh Its a position adopted (.) in  
 21 the Family Law as we'll.

Neumann's speech was delivered following a string of pro-gay marriage speeches where opposing marriage equality was represented as being an unfair violation of equality. Neumann, therefore, had to attend to the previous criticisms, namely that his opposition to marriage equality was motivated by prejudice. He does this through explicitly denying such claims. Denials of prejudice have been well documented within discursive research on racism. According to van-Dijk (1992), they are a form of "face keeping or positive self presentation" (p. 89) which functions to position interlocutors as adhering to egalitarian norms of tolerance and acceptance.

In Extract 2 the denial is first delivered in the form of a subtle disclaimer. Mr. Neumann is positioned "like many in this place" (l.1) as having "relatives (.) and numerous friends (.) in same-sex relationships" (l.1-2). This disclaimer works by aligning Neumann with other pro-gay marriage supporters as having a vested interest, or stake, in ensuring that non-heterosexual people do not experience discrimination. Potter (1996) identifies stake as occurring when a "...speaker has something to gain or lose" (p. 124) in the outcome of an account. Therefore, managing stake is an important aspect of a description as it can work to either undermine an account or make it rhetorically robust to criticism.

Indeed, without Neumann's prior disclaimer, his speech could easily be taken as motivated by personal and political opposition to marriage equality, and thus being disinterested to the rights of non-heterosexual people. Instead, his concerns for the well-being of his family and "numerous" (l.2) gay friends are made salient. This functions to obscure negativity or possible perceptions of discrimination in Neumann's account, as the categories of family and friends elicit notions of love, loyalty, and positive appraisal. As indicated by Potter (1996), friends and family are not "people to be attacked and criticised" (p. 128), and thus Neumann's stake in the marriage equality debate is protected against appearing negative, and instead constructed as concerned with meeting the needs of those he loves.

In comparison to the talk of Mr. Abbott - where the characteristics of discrimination are vaguely defined - Neumann's account functions to explicitly define boundaries by constructing a precise list of six areas where non-heterosexual people are treated unfairly. These are reified in line 8-9 as including ">taxation social security (.) health aged care family law and employment<". Strategically, however, marriage is not included. The six part list of areas in which discrimination prevails (l.8-9) functions to construct Neumann

as having a thorough and complete understanding of the concept of discrimination. By listing six specific areas of society where non-heterosexual people are treated differently to heterosexual people, Neumann positions himself as somebody 'who knows the facts', an expert on matters pertaining to sexual discrimination in Australia

Discrimination in these six areas is then assessed negatively as being "egregious and outrageous" (l.7), and this works to position Neumann as opposed to the discrimination that non-heterosexual people face. Indeed, the emphasis Neumann places on these adjectives works to reinforce Neumann's outrage at this discrimination. Moreover, Neumann's declaration that he has "always (.) taken the view" (l.6) of opposing inequality constructs him as principled and consistent. Such identity work functions to portray Neumann as the kind of person who is opposed to discrimination and therefore would not condone it in any way. Thus when Neumann affirms on line 17 that marriage should be restricted to heterosexual relationships ("between a man and a woman") his views are protected from appearing prejudiced

Instead, Neumann's opposition to non-heterosexual marriage is depicted in l.9-12 as motivated only by the needs of the heterosexual community, who Neumann suggests are not ready for marriage equality for a host of reasons including religion, philosophy and tradition (l.12-13). By positioning himself as someone whose motives are aimed towards conserving the rights of the heterosexual majority, rather than withholding the rights of non-heterosexual people, Neumann's talk functions to not only deny that his views are prejudiced, but further works to simultaneously construct his identity as heroic, rather than oppressive. This subject position of 'politician as hero' will be discussed in the next part of the analysis, and indicates how both repertoire and subject position rarely function in isolation, but frequently occur in conjunction with one another.

### ***Politicians as Heroes***

This section focuses on the discursive means by which politicians construct for themselves a subject position of hero rather than oppressor. According to van-Dijk (1992), the need to be judged in a good light is a common feature of social interaction, whereby "people try to act, and hence to speak, in such a way that their interlocutors construct an 'impression' of them that is as positive as possible" (p. 90). In this sense, political discourse against marriage equality can be seen to orient against the identity of a 'bad guy' constructed by pro-gay marriage supporters, and instead creates a reflexive position of a 'good guy' whose motives are not to oppress but rather to protect and uphold community values and norms. The predominant way that this is achieved is through the formulation of a narrative in which the victims are no longer non-heterosexual people who are denied of marriage, but rather some other interest group – namely children or married couples. Within this narrative, the politician is thus constructed as trying to protect these groups from the violation or alleged danger presented by marriage equality. In comparison to extracts 1 and 2, the act of discrimination is thus not denied, but rather "explicitly asserted to be justified" (van-Dijk, 1992, p. 93).

The following extracts were chosen because they are representative of the main reason utilized by politicians when justifying their position against gay marriage (i.e., (the need to protect)). In each of these, political discourse is put together in ways that enable the speaker to oppose marriage equality (and thus legitimating heteronormative views), whilst still emerging as a hero whose underlying motives are to represent those in need.

Liberal Senator Guy Barnett's speech took place on the 23<sup>rd</sup> of November, 2010, during a Senate proceeding on marriage equality. Barnett outlines his strong opposition to non-heterosexual marriage, for a variety of reasons including 'the best interests of children'.

**Extract 3: Guy Barnett**

1     Guy     In my view every child (.) entering this world (.) .hhh should have a  
 2     Barnett   reasonable expecta<sup>†</sup>tion (.) all things being eq<sup>u</sup>al (.5) of a mother (1) and  
 3             a father (1) I believe this strongly (1) and deeply (1) .hhh Proponents of  
 4             same-sex marriage have sought to underplay the importance of male and  
 5             female role models in the upbringing of children. hhh and to discount the  
 6             importance of children in <sup>†</sup>any consideration of whether same-sex  
 7             marriage .hhh should be sanctioned (.3) .hhh um they have sought instead  
 8             to argue that marriage is primarily about two people's comm<sup>†</sup>itment to  
 9             each other (.) and they <ignore (.) children's (.) rights> hhh while I  
 10            recognise that commitment is essential in a marriage relationship the  
 11            raising of children in the best possible environment <.hhh can never (.) be  
 12            (.) taken> out of the equat<sup>†</sup>ion

Barnett's account can be seen to reframe the issue of marriage equality as one concerning the rights of children rather than non-heterosexual people *per se*. This can be seen to start immediately in line 1, where Barnett outlines his views on what "every child (.) entering this world (.) .hhh should have" (l.1). By limiting the issue of marriage equality to the needs of children alone, Barnett constructs a child-focused argument, in which opposing gay marriage is based on the pervasive repertoire of the 'Best interests of the child' (Fogarty & Augoustinos, 2008). Use of this repertoire can be frequently observed in the area of child custody disputes and is used to strengthen an argument through situating it as concerned with only the welfare of children. Invoking the category of 'children' and their 'interests' is a powerful rhetorical strategy, as children are historically and culturally situated in Western society as innocent, voiceless and in need of protection, thus making the 'Best interests of the child' repertoire almost impossible to oppose.

In Barnett's speech, the best interests of the child are specifically delineated as being their need to have both "male and female role models" (l. 4-5) in the form of a "mother (1) and father" (l. 2-3). As this is something that non-heterosexual relationships are typically argued to lack, these statements stand to indict non-heterosexual marriage as potentially damaging to children through denying children opposite sex parents and thus "the best possible environment" (l. 11) in which to be raised. By implying that non-heterosexual relationships are not good for bringing up children,

this account also functions to uphold heteronormativity through constructing a healthy family unit as being comprised solely of heterosexual relationships. In turn, this works to discretely polarise non-heterosexual relationships as being inferior and less valuable to a society that relies on healthy family environments in which to raise children for the future.

By highlighting the dangers marriage equality poses to children, Barnett's account also functions to construct those who support marriage equality as adhering to the oppression of children. This strategic reversal can be seen most clearly in line 7-9 where Barnett states that "... they [proponents of gay marriage] have sought instead to argue that marriage is primarily about two people's comm<sup>†</sup>itment to each other (.) and they >ignore (.) children's (.) rights<". Through this statement Barnett is able to position those who support marriage equality as being selfish, self absorbed, and only concerned with the needs of adults and their relationships, to the detriment of children and their rights. Indeed, the way that Barnett's talk slows down to emphasise the words "<ignore (.) children's (.) rights>" functions to represent children's rights as a more salient concern than the rights of non-heterosexual people.

Consequently, in lines 9-12, when Barnett most strongly asserts his stand against marriage equality, his position is constructed as the only reasonable and responsible thing to do if children are to be protected. In comparison to marriage equality supporters who have been depicted as ignorant of the needs of chil-

dren, Barnett's position is contrasted as heroic and child-orientated. This works to shift the focus away from what Barnett *hasn't* allowed for non-heterosexual people (i.e., marriage), and instead to what he *has done for children* (i.e., provide them with protection, albeit on heteronormative and discriminatory terms). Potter (1996) defines this form of justification as an appeal to loyalties (i.e., I had to do this for the children), and through this Barnett is descriptively constituted as somebody with high, rather than low, moral attributes, whose loyalties lie in the right order according to the social norms of putting children first, or in Barnett's words into "the equation" (l. 12)

The second example of politicians positioning themselves as 'heroes' is demonstrated in Extract 4 and occurred on the 16<sup>th</sup> August 2010, in the House of Representatives at the same sitting in which Extract 2 was derived. Here the Liberal MP Bruce Billison stands to oppose marriage equality on the basis that it will discriminate against those who are already married.

One interesting aspect of this account is the way it is put together using irony, whereby supporting marriage equality is reworked so as to appear as a form of discrimination in itself. Ordinarily, irony is defined as words which are

used in the opposite way to their true meaning, but Potter (1996) defines ironising discourse as "undermining discourse", that is a discourse which "turns the material thing back into talk which is motivated, distorted or erroneous in some way" (p. 107).

Whilst proponents of marriage equality have attempted to construct those who oppose it as unfair and prejudiced, Billison's account functions to portray supporters of marriage equality as rash, illogical and oblivious. Use of the word "<charge" (l. 5), for example, metaphorically constructs the campaign for marriage equality as similar to a charging bull – so focused on its target that it is unaware as to the path of destruction it leaves in its wake. Appealing to notions of "irony" (l.4) and "logic" (l.7) in this context thus constructs those engaged on this "charge" (l.5) as illogical, too self-interested in their campaign to gain non-heterosexual equality that they have ironically become discriminators themselves.

Indeed, this account actually functions to construct heterosexual people, rather than non-heterosexual people, as the true victims of the marriage equality debate. Indeed on lines 6-17 Billison appeals to fight for the rights of those "who have chosen to designate their relationship .hhh as a traditional marriage" (l.

**Extract 4: Bruce Billison**

1 Bruce But the important thing is that if we are to move forward (.) with this  
 2 Billison recognitjion (.)we can't do so by diminish::ing (1.3) .hhh <the sense of  
 3 rights> (.5) and designation .hhh that people who have (.3) married (.5)  
 4 have chosen for thems?elves (.3) .hhh I think it's quite (.) ironic (.) that this  
 5 <charge (.3) for rights> (.5) it's actually being pursued b::y .hhh  
 6 diminishing the rights of th::ose .hhh who have chosen to designate their  
 7 relationship .hhh as a traditional marriage(.3) I do not understand that logic  
 8 (.3) people who have entered into (.) a marriage as it is defined and  
 9 recognisjed .hhh under the law whether it be .hhh by way of tradition  
 10 custom conservatism .hhh or religious orientation .hhh have done so  
 11 consc^iously .hhh knowing that that is the designation they have s^ought  
 12 .hhh that that will be the designation they will see^ure .hhh and that the  
 13 nature of the relationship they have entered into .hhh will be recognised as  
 14 such by the broader community .hhh (.5) We sh^ould not seek to remove  
 15 that from peo^ple (.) who have chosen that pathw::ay .hhh and have  
 16 operated within the current definition of marriage (.) which as I've said (.) I  
 17 agree with.



6-7). This is done through the use of the same kind of 'equal rights repertoire' documented in a lot of pro marriage equality discourse, but reversed to protect the rights and entitlements of heterosexual people, specifically already married couples. Take for example lines 13-14, where Billison replaces the frequent argument that non-heterosexual people deserve the right to have their relationships recognised in society, with the idea that heterosexual people deserve the right to have their marriages recognised in the community. Or lines 14-16 where Billison constructs this issue as one that does not concern the rights of non-heterosexual couples, but rather how Australian society should not "seek to remove" rights from those already married. Here, the notion of "diminishing the rights" (l.6) is assigned - not to non-heterosexual people - but rather to those already married. In this account, the issue of equal rights is thus not denied, but rather constructed as exclusively concerned with heterosexual married couples, rather than non-heterosexual people wanting marriage.

Consequently, what this subject position functions to achieve is to ironise or undermine the accounts of pro-gay supporters through constructing them as individuals out of touch with reality, whose motives are blinded by an irrational urge for what they think equality is. Through this construction Billison's talk reworks the marriage equality debate into an abstract issue where opposing marriage equality is no longer a concrete example of oppression towards non-heterosexual people. Instead, Billison's views are presented as logical and heroic and solely aimed at trying to protect heterosexual 'victims' from gay marriage supporters who have gone 'too far' and wish to undermine the institution of marriage. Thus, whilst Billison's account functions to blatantly oppose marriage equality and portray the rights of non-heterosexual people as being inferior and secondary to the needs of heterosexual people, Billison's position is still constructed as egalitarian and heroic.

## Conclusion

The findings presented here were aimed at deconstructing the common discursive resources utilised by politicians to justify their position against marriage equality in ways that allowed them to avoid accusations of prejudice and homophobia. This was done in order to identify what discursive strategies work to uphold heteronormative ideology within the Australian marriage equality debate. In this paper we have demonstrated 1) how politicians justified their opposition to marriage equality and legitimated this position as non-discriminatory, and 2) how political speakers typically constructed for themselves a heroic subject position by defending the rights of stakeholders in the debate such as children, heterosexual couples and even non-heterosexual people themselves.

Although we examined these patterns of talk separately, as is evident from the extracts above, typically they co-occurred, as illustrated in Extract 2. This produced an intricate but powerful anti-gay marriage discourse that functioned to position speakers as not only being non-prejudiced but simultaneously heroic, whereby the needs of non-heterosexuals were marginalised as being detrimental to the well-being of the status quo. Indeed, what emerged frequently throughout the data corpus was the consistent construction of non-heterosexual relationships as ones that should and could be tolerated, *but only* if they did not stand to compromise the broader and more important needs of the predominantly heterosexual electorate. Thus, the motives of political speakers became defensible as ones that concerned the wellbeing of the broader society, rather than condemnable as ones specifically aimed at discriminating against a non-heterosexual minority.

Indeed, in line with the concept of heteronormativity more broadly, the analysis reveals how Australian politicians consistently depicted heterosexual marriage as a fundamental aspect of Australian society, thus implicitly functioning to construct non-heterosexual

marriage as something that could potentially undermine the 'Australian way of life'. Although speakers openly asserted that they did '*not believe in discrimination*' (as the title of this paper suggests) and enthusiastically agreed that non-heterosexual people deserved rights too, the legalisation of non-heterosexual marriage was represented as being a '*step too far*', as it privileged the needs of non-heterosexual partners over and above people that mattered more (i.e., the heterosexual majority). In turn, and as argued by Rubin (1984), this construction functions to create a discursive hierarchy between the 'important' heterosexual people and the 'less-important' non-heterosexual people, which could then be used to justify differential treatment between the two groups including the prohibition of non-heterosexuals from the institution of marriage.

The political discourse examined here thus functioned to maintain heteronormative ideology without explicitly violating egalitarian or non-prejudice norms. In this case the subtleties of more contemporary discursive prejudice has been identified, and illustrated as no longer focusing on the deficits of the oppressed group, but rather only on the more highly prioritised needs of the majority group, needs which often conflict with those of the minority. Consequently, this new form of subtle prejudiced is often underpinned by an opportunity-cost type of rhetoric (whereby non-heterosexual couples have to miss out on marriage for the benefit of heterosexual society) that appears logical and rational, compared to explicit forms of prejudice which frequently shunned and personally attacked non-heterosexual groups as being abnormal or disgusting.

In relation to the marriage equality debate more specifically, it seems that despite these changes away from 'in-your-face' sexual discrimination, achieving non-heterosexual rights is now perhaps even more complicated and difficult than ever before. Discourse opposing non-heterosexual marriage in Australia operates under a rhetoric of denial whereby any

negative sentiments towards non-heterosexual individuals is vehemently denied. Consequently, achieving non-heterosexual marriage rights now involves having to oppose arguments which appear rational and heroic and are thus more easily justified as legitimate. In order to overcome this inequality, identification of these discursive strategies, and education aimed at teaching the public about how these seemingly innocent repertoires and subject positions still function to oppress and discriminate against non-heterosexuals, is vital if Australian society is to progress and become the equal and egalitarian place it needs to be.

### Author Notes

Natalie Matthews completed her undergraduate degree in Psychology last year, where this paper was written as her Honours thesis. Currently, she is a PhD student in the School of Psychology, University of Adelaide where she is doing a combined Masters / PhD degree in Organisational Psychology and Human Factors. Her PhD aims to explore the effects of precarious employment on the mental and physical health of the Australia's workforce and she hopes to utilise qualitative methods as part of her research strategy.

Martha Augoustinos is Professor of Psychology and Co-Director of the Fay Gale Centre of Research on Gender at the University of Adelaide. Martha has published widely in the field of social psychology and discourse, in particular on the nature of racial discourse in Australia. This has involved mapping the trajectory of the 'race debate' in Australian public discourse since 1995 and has included an analysis of how Indigenous Australians are constructed in everyday conversation and political rhetoric. More recently this work has been extended to analysing public discourse on asylum seekers and refugees. She is co-author of *Social Cognition: An Integrated Introduction* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed, Sage, 2006) with Iain Walker and Ngaire Donaghue and co-editor with Kate Reynolds of *Understanding Prejudice, Racism and Social Conflict* (Sage, 2001).

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## THE NUCLEAR GAY FAMILY: SAME-SEX MARRIAGE IN CHILDREN'S BOOKS

B.J. EPSTEIN

### Abstract

*The debate regarding same-sex marriage is polarised in a number of countries. The UK government, for example, is currently holding a consultation about civil marriage for same-sex couples, and Barack Obama - the first sitting US president ever to speak up for marriage equality - was just re-elected president of the US in an election that also saw voters in several states approve same-sex marriage. These changing political views of same-sex marriage led me to wonder whether and how gay parents and their children are reflected in children's literature, and whether the amount of books that feature same-sex marriage map onto public discourse about same-sex marriage in a given country. In other words, is the political made personal in children's literature? In this paper I analyse a number of children's books from English-speaking countries to explore how the topic is portrayed, and then I briefly compare this to such books from northern European countries. I find that, whilst as expected there are higher levels of representations of same-sex marriage in northern European texts, there are actually more books published in less liberal countries featuring children of same-sex couples. What makes the difference, I argue, is how child-centred the countries in question are, so countries with strong provision for gay parenting - no matter if they allow same-sex marriage - are more likely to feature such family set-ups in literature, even if they do not feature married parents. Thus here I combine literary analysis with sociocultural and legal analysis.*

**Keywords:** children's picture books, young adult fiction, same-sex marriage

### Introduction

The UK government currently is holding a consultation about civil marriage for same-sex couples, and Barack Obama - the first sitting US president ever to speak up for marriage equality - was just re-elected president of the US, in an election that also saw voters in several states approve same-sex marriage. These changing political views of same-sex marriage have led me to wonder whether and how gay parents and their children are reflected in children's literature, and whether the amount of books that feature same-sex marriage map onto public discourse about same-sex marriage in a given country. In other words, if there is cultural momentum towards allowing full marriage (or even just civil partnerships) for same-sex couples in some countries, this might mean that we start seeing more same-sex couples in books for young readers, and that some of these couples might be married or at least planning to get married or civilly partnered. In other words, do books for children and young people indicate something of a move towards representation of what might be called the nuclear gay family?<sup>1</sup> In this paper, then, I will analyse a number of American English-language children's books and books

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1 By "nuclear", I mean two parents and a child or several children. I must say here that I am not passing judgement on whether the so-called nuclear family is the best set-up or not. But there is no denying that it is the most common arrangement in English-speaking countries and therefore it is worth analysing. The norm is generally a heterosexual nuclear family, but my question is whether non-heterosexual nuclear families are depicted in literature and how this relates to laws in a given society.

for young adults<sup>2</sup> with LGBTQ characters in order to explore the non-existence of the nuclear gay family, and I will compare this to a small corpus of British English-language children's books and several northern European<sup>3</sup> children's books with LGBTQ characters. What the findings suggest is that marriage or civil/domestic partnership is not particularly common in the American books, but that it is more accepted in European and more specifically northern European children's books. This makes sense, given that there are more options for same-sex couples to marry in northern European countries, as will be discussed in more detail below. Hence, children's books appear to reflect the current political situations where and when they are written, and in this case, that means that they either see same-sex marriage as a way of creating a gay nuclear family, or they do not. Whilst by necessity the legal analysis here is superficial, what I hope to show is that the political does affect the personal, and that the larger legal, cultural situation influences literature.

### Background

Whilst there is no space here to analyse LGBTQ children's literature and/or LGBTQ parenting and/or LGBTQ marriage in any great depth, it is worth saying that these issues are both recent and somewhat under-researched. Literature for young readers that features non-heterosexual characters has only begun appearing in the past few decades. Throughout

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2 By children's books, I am referring to any books that seem to have been written and published for readers under the age of eighteen. Hence, I will look at both picture books (which tend to feature LGBTQ parents) and books for young adult readers (which tend to feature both LGBTQ parents and LGBTQ teenagers). For some reason, there are many fewer middle-grade books featuring LGBTQ characters.

3 Following Merin, I am using "northern European" to refer to the Nordic countries, plus the Netherlands (see Merin, 2002:2-3, among other places).

the 1980s and early 1990s, most of the books with LGBTQ characters published were picture books, aimed at young children. Perhaps this was the case because more gay couples were having or adopting children and they wanted books to read aloud to their children that featured families like theirs, suggesting that these books were meant to mirror those families. The works I analyse below were taken from a large corpus of texts in English that feature LGBTQ characters; this corpus includes over 40 books, and I have analysed them to search for references to marriage. This forms a small part of my larger research project, which will be published in book format in 2013.

Whilst some of the newest research in the field of children's literature looks at the issue of diversity in children's books (see, for example, chapter 6 in Travers and Travers, 2008), often this is in terms of race and religion and sometimes ability, but not sexuality. Travers and Travers cover the topic of sexuality in only one page (2008, p. 287). Gender is mentioned (such as Lerer's analysis of books for boys versus books for girls, 2008), but I have not found an in-depth analysis of sexuality, especially non-heterosexuality, in children's books. If sexuality is not studied much, then diverse forms of sexuality are certainly rarely discussed, although this is starting to change, with new works such as *Over the Rainbow*, edited by Michelle Ann Abate and Kenneth Kidd.

In terms of research on LGBTQ parenting, this to date has focused primarily on lesbian and gay parenting (i.e. not bisexual or transgender parenting<sup>4</sup>), and even more specifically on white, coupled, middle-class lesbians. Often, such work seems to attempt to reassure read-

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4 Books such as by Hicks, 2011; Goldberg, 2010; Johnson and O'Connor, 2002; and Spilsbury, 2011 that refer to same-sex/LGBTQ parenting do not mention bisexual or transgender parents whatsoever, even if their relationships can fall into the category of same-sex.

ers that children can be raised into healthy, happy adults by LGBTQ parents. As Johnson and O'Connor suggest, it would be better to focus on parenting techniques, say, or values, rather than on using heteronormative approaches to the topic (2002, p. 3). One might worry that this would take us into the realm of homonormative approaches, but there is still quite a long way to go in regard to this. Regardless of the current research focus, the fact is that same-sex couples are indeed having children; as Hull puts it, "gay and lesbian couples increasingly seek to form viable family units of their own, either by acting as co-parents to children from previous marriages or by becoming parents together" (2006, p. 5). Also, laws in countries such as the US are increasingly helping them achieve this through legislating for fostering, adoption, insemination, and other relevant procedures.

There has been little research into how same-sex parenting is portrayed in children's literature, although this is beginning to change. One interesting example is from Jane Sunderland's book *Literature, Gender and Children's Fiction*, in a chapter co-written with Mark McGlashan on two-mum and two-dad families. One of the analyses she carries out there is to look at the visual representations in picture books in order to see how much physical contact is portrayed (2010).

As this is not the place to rehash the arguments for and against same-sex marriage (see "Arguments For and Against Same-Sex Marriage", in "The Ideological Structure of the Same-Sex Marriage Debate (And Some Post-modern Arguments for Same-Sex Marriage)" by William N. Eskridge, in *Wintermute*, 2001, for a brief review of the discussion), I will simply assume an accepting stance towards the subject. What is relevant is that some same-sex couples are married or want to get married, and that some of them also have or plan to have children. The legal arguments regarding this do not need to be analysed in any detail; rather, below I will refer just superficially to the legal situation in each region in order to understand how this relates to what

is portrayed in children's literature.

Coontz claims, "Only a small minority of gays and lesbians are interested in marrying at this point." (2005, p. 275) Coontz does not say where she gets her statistics, but one could point out that the rush of same-sex couples who got married in California and elsewhere in the US suggests that she is wrong, and that many gay and lesbian couples do indeed wish to get married. Coontz does say that marriage "remains the highest expression of commitment in our culture and comes packaged with exacting expectations about responsibility, fidelity, and intimacy" (p. 309). If this is the case, then it stands to reason that same-sex couples, too, might want to express their commitment in the same way, notwithstanding Coontz's previous assertion that only a "small minority" do. The reasons for this are both cultural and legal. Hull writes that "marriage is increasingly available to American gay and lesbian couples in *cultural* terms, but remains mostly inaccessible in *legal* terms" (2006, p. 2, emphasis original). In her research she explores, among other topics, how same-sex couples can create commitment ceremonies or marriages, even without legal sanctions, which again puts pay to Coontz's heteronormative claim.

Coontz also refers to the cultural importance of marriage, when she writes that the

relationship between a cohabiting couple, whether heterosexual or same sex, is unacknowledged by law and may be ignored by the friends and relatives of each partner. Marriage, in contrast, gives people a positive vocabulary and public image that set a high standard for the couple's behavior and for the respect that outsiders ought to give to their relationship" (2005, pp. 309-10).

Yet despite the beneficial effects of such "positive vocabulary", the legal status of their relationship clearly matters to many couples, and some of the research into this topic specifically refers to how legal marriage can affect children (obviously, the lack of legal marriage can affect the partners themselves in many

ways, as in Spilsbury, 2011). Hull (2006) discusses how couples with children or plans to have children are often more concerned with legal protection, insurance, financial protection, and other legal issues, and she writes that one argument for same-sex marriage is that children get legal recognition and protection, plus they feel more societal acceptance. She writes that parents refer to "three distinct concerns about the impact of lack of marriage rights" on children with same-sex parents (p. 177). The first is that a child in such a relationship "lack[s] full legal protection within their family without marriage. This frames marriage as a legal issue that impacts both adults and children." (ibid.) The next is that children might not "understand a marriage substitute such as domestic partnership." (ibid.) The third concern is that having "parents who could not marry would mark [the child] as different and therefore not "equal" and "part of a larger community."" (ibid.)

What all this suggests is that some same-sex couples wish to get legally partnered or married, and that this is especially the situation for those who have or intend to have children. The reasons are both cultural and legal. But this discussion mostly refers to LGBTQ adults. Since I am analysing young adult works as well, it is interesting to see whether young LGBTQ people hope for or strive towards marriage. In one book that looks at "emerging adulthood", or that stage when people are in their late teens to early twenties, the author discusses marriage in detail, but never in connection to LGBTQ emerging adults. Arnett writes, for example, that "[t]oday's emerging adults spend more years single and dating than young people in previous generations, but the great majority of them eventually make their way to the altar." (2004, p. 97) He later reassures the reader again that "[n]early all emerging adults want to get married eventually" (p. 100), but his entire discussion refers to male-female couples, especially in connection to their supposedly differing desires and opinions about marriage (see also Jay, 2012, for a similar discussion, which never

once mentions non-heterosexual couples). A question here is whether such researchers and writers simply do not consider the LGBTQ community, or whether their findings suggest that LGBTQ young people do not hope to get married; if the latter, then one assumes that this would be stated in the findings, so the former seems more likely. I am not trying to argue that a twelve-year-old would be eager to get married, but only to make the reader aware that legal ceremonies for LGBTQ couples are not even mentioned as an option, especially when it comes to younger people.

### American Books

The US is a particularly interesting and contradictory place to study, because whilst many of the English-language LGBTQ children's books I have found were published there (which suggests a certain level of acceptance of LGBTQ people), in 2004 US Congress passed and former US President Bill Clinton signed into law the Defense of Marriage Act, which nationally declared that marriage is between a man and a woman (Pinello, 2006, p. 29), so even though the individual states have some independent jurisdiction, the overall attitude in the US seems to be against same-sex marriage. Wolfson suggests that "opponents are antigay, not just anti-marriage equality. What's transforming the country is coming to terms with, and accepting, gay people and their love on terms of equality" (quoted in Pinello, 2006, p. 23). However, this seems to be a slow process. On the other hand, in the November 2012 election, Barack Obama was re-elected as president, and he has publicly stated his support for marriage equality.

When it comes to children, Polikoff explains that the "number of planned lesbian and gay families skyrocketed in the United States in the 1990s, bringing unprecedented visibility in the media, in schools, in churches and synagogues, and in the courts" (2001, p. 165). More specific statistics come from Pinello, who writes that the "2000 [US] census reveals that 34 per cent of lesbian couples and 22 per cent of gay male couples have at least one child



under the age of eighteen living in their home, compared with 46 percent of married opposite-sex couples having minor children at home" (2006, p. 156). Interestingly, there seems to be more legal support for same-sex parenting in the US than there is for same-sex marriage, which suggests a child-centred culture without support for marriage equality. As Merin writes, "[d]espite the general shift toward delinking procreation and marriage in the West, the United States is still very much a child-centered society" (2002, p. 261). He also explains that in the United States, "same-sex couples enjoy many rights concerning parenthood: various levels of courts in almost half the states have recognized second-parent adoptions, some jurisdictions allow same-sex couples to jointly adopt unrelated children, and nowhere in the United States are artificial conception services for lesbians prohibited" (2002, p. 254). This information may explain why there is a largish number of children's books featuring LGBTQ couples and their children published in the US, but few children's books with same-sex marriage.

Many of the characters in LGBTQ literature for children are parents. So it is worth analysing how these parents are portrayed and if any of them are married or engaged. Most LGBTQ picture books, such as Michael Willhoite's *Daddy's Roommate* (1991) – which relies on the euphemism of "roommate" rather than employing "boyfriend", "partner", or, yes, even "husband" – do not seem to consider the possibility that the two mothers or two fathers could actually be wife-and-wife or husband-and-husband. Other picture books with same-sex parents mostly have storylines about bullying or acceptance of a two-mother or two-father family as "normal"<sup>5</sup> and do not mention marriage. Examples include Rigoberto Gon-

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5 By "normal" I mean that these books write from the perspective of confirming that two-mother or two-father families are just as acceptable as other family set-ups. In no way do I personally endorse ideas of "norms".

zalez's *Antonio's Card* (2005) or Ellen Wickers' *Anna Day and the O-Ring* (1994). Despite the fact that many of these books with two mothers or two fathers have a clear reference to one or more "mommies" or "daddies," these same-sex parents are rarely married or planning on being married. Whether this is because authors believe that LGBTQ couples should not get married or because they think that there is no need for it is hard to say.<sup>6</sup>

If one looks at the preeminent queer writer for children Lesléa Newman's oeuvre of picture books (including *Mommy, Mama, and Me; Daddy, Papa, and Me; and Heather Has Two Mommies*), it is only in her most recent book, *Donovan's Big Day*, which was published this year, that one finds marriage (2012). In this book, the focus is on the main character, Donovan, as he prepares for his mothers' wedding. It is thus told from the child's perspective, perhaps enabling a child reader to better imagine him/herself in that situation. It is not didactic or overly explanatory; rather, Newman's book just accepts the possibility of same-sex marriage, allowing a reader to do so as well. Newman writes:

I wanted to write a book that was a true celebration, capturing all the joy and excitement of the day without any issues whatsoever. All families deserve a wedding day of pure joy, and I wanted to give that to kids who have two moms. I hope that there will be many more books featuring kids with two moms or two dads in the years to come (personal communication, 2012).

Perhaps there will be more books from the US that are "true celebration[s]" in the future, if same-sex marriage becomes more widely legalised.

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6 I have subsequently learned of, but not been able to get a copy of, a second, follow-up book by Willhoite entitled *Daddy's Wedding*. Reviews on amazon.com were not positive, because they felt the book was more political than literary, and it no longer seems to be in print. I cannot comment on it further though, unfortunately.

Whilst there appear to be few married LGBTQ parents in children's literature, I wondered if there might be more same-sex marriage in young adult novels. After all, as mentioned above in reference to emerging adults, young people may be growing up with more hopes and expectations because of the changed political situations, versus adults who may simply have accepted that they will get fewer rights as LGBTQ people. Alas, this does not seem to be true. Many young adult (YA) novels with adolescent LGBTQ characters do not mention being committed to another person beyond boyfriend/girlfriend stage (see Sanchez, 2001; Levithan, 2003; and Selvadurai, 2007, among others). Those that do consider the concept do so in a pessimistic way.

Robin Reardon, who has written several YA novels with gay male protagonists, has her main character, Jason, in *A Secret Edge* consider gay marriage. He thinks, "I've never given [marriage] much thought before. But now - I guess it's out of the question for me. I mean, you hear about two guys getting married, sort of, but it seems a little far-fetched to me. And suddenly a lot of things most people take for granted seem a little far-fetched for me. Living with someone you love. Having kids" (2007, p. 56). Jason's sad ponderings might make a reader pity gay people and their limited opportunities for a happy and fulfilling romantic relationship. Jason's uncle, who raised him, is sorely disappointed when he learns that his nephew is gay. He thinks, "No one should have to live like that. He'll be hated, ostracized. He won't be able to marry or have children" (2007, p. 90). Like Jason's uncle, Liza's father in Nancy Garden's (1982) *Annie on My Mind* worries about what being gay will mean for his daughter. Although not as disgusted by her lesbianism as some of her teachers are, Liza's father says that he does not want this for her, because it will mean she can never marry or have children. In the same novel, there is an older lesbian couple that Liza and Annie look up to, but these women are not married, do not have children, and eventually lose their jobs. In both these books, then, not only can LGBTQ people not

marry, but they also apparently cannot have children, and may even have employment difficulties, so they are even more pessimistic than the picture books (though in the case of Garden's book this may be at least partly a product of the publishing year).

In most YA novels, the gay characters and their parents assume that marriage is, as Jason put it, "out of the question". One young character bucks the trend by realising that there are ceremonies for gay people. In Maureen Johnston's *The Bermudez Triangle*, Avery thinks about her girlfriend, "What if Mel wanted to get married and have a commitment ceremony and play Ani DiFranco and k.d. lang songs and have cats as bridesmaids? That would be great for Mel, but it just wasn't something Avery could picture. The thought scared her. A lot" (2004, pp. 204-5). Whilst it is positive to see that there is some recognition that there are opportunities for gay couples to show their commitment to one another, this passage stereotypically mocks what lesbians are like (cat-mad avid Ani DiFranco-listeners) and also suggests that the idea of a ceremony is not too appealing.

So in US-published YA novels, too, there are few indications that LGBTQ people might want or be able to have civil partnerships or marriages. Either their response is negative, as above, or the topic is never mentioned (as in Levithan, 2003, or Sanchez, 2001, 2006, and 2007, among others). This analysis implies that in American books with LGBTQ characters, it is acceptable to a certain extent to show same-sex couples, and particularly same-sex couples with children. However, marriage seems to be a step too far.

### UK Books

As a very brief comparison, we can look at English-language books from the UK. One of the few picture books from the UK to feature same-sex marriage is Ken Setterington's *Mom and Mum Are Getting Married* (2004). The story here is about how Mom and Mum just want a small ceremony whilst their daughter

Rosie wants to be the flower girl in a big event. It is a refreshing change to see a picture book accept gay marriage and show a gay couple making a legal commitment, and this book is one of the few in English to depict this, along with Newman's latest book and Wilhoite's. The UK has civil partnership nationally, rather than in just a few jurisdictions, as in the US, so perhaps it makes sense that it would seem more acceptable in British children's books. On the other hand, another British book, Hedi Argent's *Josh and Jaz Have Three Mums* (2004), does not refer to marriage.

There are fewer YA books in the UK featuring LGBTQ characters and the arguably preeminent author of such books, Aidan Chambers, does not include marriage, although some of his works are dated now. Philip Pullman's *The Broken Bridge* has a gay teenaged character, but he cohabitates with his partner, with no discussion of marriage (1990). In short, then, same-sex marriage is not very common in English-language books from the UK.

### Northern European Books

Finally, we can turn to northern European books. As Merin (2002) points out, northern Europe has much more liberal, comprehensive, and non-discriminatory laws than many other parts of the world, which means there are more options for same-sex couples. For example, Merin writes that "the northern European registered partnership acts attempt to place same-sex couples on an equal footing with opposite-sex married couples." (pp. 2-3). As there have been options for partnership or marriage for same-sex couples in northern Europe longer than elsewhere, one would perhaps imagine that children's literature would reflect this. We can look first at Sweden.<sup>7</sup> As

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<sup>7</sup> I am currently undertaking a larger research project, comparing LGBTQ books in Scandinavia to those in English-speaking countries, and I have chosen Scandinavia not just for its more liberal laws, but because I know those languages.

Ytterberg says, "Sweden is the country within the Nordic family which has gone the furthest down the road of introducing specific, civil law, family legislation on non-marital cohabitation" (2001, p. 430). This might suggest that one would see more unmarried couples in Swedish work than in books from other countries, where cohabitation is less approved of or supported. In fact, same-sex marriage does appear with some regularity in Swedish books for children, which perhaps suggest that Swedish authors, editors, and/or publishers want to reassure readers that they are accepting of all relationship choices.

In Bodil Sjöström's *Trollen på regnbågsbacken* [Trolls of Rainbow Hill] (1999), for example, two female characters are married to one another. Another character questions this and receives the response, "Alla som älskar varandra kan gifta sig...Därmed inte sagt att alla gör det. Man måste inte." (1999, n.p.) This translates to, "Everyone who loves each other can get married... That doesn't mean that everyone does it. You don't have to" (my translation).

Another Swedish text that portrays a same-sex marriage is called *Malins mamma gifter sig med Lisa* [*Malin's mama marries Lisa*] by Annette Lundborg and Mimmi Tollerup-Grkovic (1999). An afterword in the book by the authors captures the situation and the goal:

It is more and more common that homosexuals choose to become parents. In Sweden today, there are around 40,000 children that have at least one homosexual parent.

Many homosexuals have children from previous heterosexual relationships, but evermore homosexuals choose to have children with their partners or as single parents.

A life as a homosexual no longer stands in opposition to a life with children! (1999, n.p.; my translation)

From this afterword, one can suppose that if it is true that it is "more and more common that

homosexuals choose to become parents" then those parents and their children would like to see themselves reflected in children's literature. Also, as Susanne Bösché pointed out in regard to why she wrote the Danish picture book *Mette bor hos Morten og Erik* (translated to English as *Jenny lives with Eric and Martin*), such families "shouldn't come as a shock to anybody" (2000, n.p.). So the goal of this kind of book seems to be two-fold. Also, as with Newman's English book, in Lundborg and Tollerup-Grkovic's book the focus is on the marriage and the child protagonist's feelings about it. Thus, the two Swedish picture books mentioned here both seem to take the normality of homosexuality for granted. They do not attempt to confirm that LGBTQ people are as good or as human as heterosexuals, the way many English-language texts do; they just accept that that is the case.

Merin (2002) puts the Netherlands together with the Nordic countries because he feels that northern Europe is distinctly different in its outlook regarding same-sex partnerships than other European countries or indeed countries in other parts of the world. As he points out, the "northern European model of registered partnership, to say nothing of same-sex marriage, in the Netherlands, is very different from the American domestic partnership model" (p. 250). Waaldijk goes into more detail when he writes "[t]he Netherlands appears to be the first country in the world where a legislative proposal to open up marriage to same-sex couples has become law and come into force" (2001, p. 437). He proudly states:

Although not always first, the Netherlands can certainly be ranked as one of the most gay/lesbian-friendly societies and jurisdictions in the world. Is there any other country where, since the early 1980s, the percentage of the population agreeing that homosexuals should be as free as possible to live their own lives, and should have the same rights as heterosexuals in such fields as housing, pensions and inheritance, has been 90 per cent or more? (p. 439)

That the Netherlands is a country that is supportive of same-sex marriage is revealed in a picture book by Linda De Haan and Stern Nijland, *King and King* (2002). This was first written and published in Dutch, but has been translated to English, although no translator's name is given,<sup>8</sup> and it is the translation that is being discussed here. In this book, a prince is told by his mother, the queen, that it is time for him to get married. She parades a series of princesses in front of him, but none appeal to him. One princess is accompanied by her brother and the protagonist falls for him. The two princes get married, and there is no confusion regarding this or any objection to their relationship; it is accepted that the two male characters have fallen in love and should be married. There is a sequel, *King and King and Family* (2004), where the two princes adopt a little girl.

These few northern European children's books seem to indicate a greater acceptance and more frequent occurrence of same-sex marriage than in English-language children's books, and the secondary materials on these topics likewise support this idea.

### Conclusion

As Hull puts it: "Marriage: Personal commitment. Pillar of civilization. Spiritual covenant. Legal bond. Political football. Source of social status. Site of gender inequality. Tool of sexual regulation. Dying institution. Partnership for reproduction and childrearing. Path to material gain. Reflection of divine love. Legalized prostitution" (2006, p. 1). Regardless of how one sees marriage, the fact is that it still is an existent and important institution, and that it is only open to same-sex couples in a small number of countries. What I have attempted

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8 As a translator myself, I object to translators being made invisible. I wrote to the publisher to complain, and received a most unsatisfying response, saying that they had no idea who the translator was and that it was in any case not their problem.

to do here is to look at children's books from those countries in order to explore whether, and if so how, same-sex marriage is portrayed, and to reflect upon how this might relate to the laws in those countries.

Merin writes that "[m]any U.S. states protect gay and lesbian parenting without recognizing gay and lesbian couples, but we find an opposite trend in Europe, where some countries extensively regulate same-sex partnerships but provide very little recognition of gay and lesbian parenting" (2002, p. 253). This means that the US has more liberal laws about children and about same-sex couples adopting, creating, and raising them, but Europe, particularly northern Europe, is more liberal about marriage/partnership. If one believes that literature reflects society, then it would make sense that northern European children's books feature more same-sex marriages or partnerships than American children's books. In Hull's research, one person referred to the lack of same-sex marriage as "state-sponsored prejudice" (2006, p. 177), and perhaps here we could add that it seems to be literature-sponsored prejudice as well.

It is essential to note that despite referring extensively to the LGBTQ community in this article, in reality I have only discussed the L and the G (i.e., lesbians and gays). I have not found any picture books with transgender or bisexual parents, so I cannot comment on their marriage status. It is plausible that an author may have imagined a parent to be bisexual or transgender but for this not to have come up in the plot, but that means that readers (or the read-to) will not see same-sex marriage for bisexual or transgender characters.

Further research is needed here in general. For example, I have scarcely touched on the UK, where civil partnership currently exists but civil marriage might come into play; it would be interesting to know why there are fewer LGBTQ books for young readers published there. And I have not referred to other English-speaking countries at all, such as Canada

(which does have equal marriage and was the first country in the Americas to instate that), Australia (which recognises cohabiting pairs of any gender as couples but does not have equal marriage), and New Zealand (which has civil unions and is considering equal marriage). And although I know the Scandinavian languages and have referred to some Swedish books here, more research should be carried out into other European countries and their literatures. Perhaps further research would even find whether American publishers are more likely to publish children's books featuring same-sex parenting than European books, if the EU is indeed less child-centred than the US, as was briefly discussed above. All this is to say that this is only a start.

To conclude, then, LGBTQ children's books do seem to reflect the realities of the countries and cultures they are written, set, and published in. Same-sex marriage is not nationally accepted in the US, and thus it appears seldom in children's books there. Civil partnership is a fairly new option in the UK, and therefore there are not yet many books that refer to it. On the other hand, northern Europe has longer-standing laws regarding domestic partnerships and same-sex marriages, and consequently it is not surprising that books from Sweden and the Netherlands might have more accepting, maybe even blasé, attitudes towards it. One rather sad note is that young adult books seem much less optimistic than picture books, which suggests that emerging LGBTQ adults are not yet looking ahead to marriage; this may, of course, reflect a decline in opinion regarding marriage in general rather than toward same-sex marriage in particular. In sum, based on a review of a selection of books, northern Europe seems to be more supportive of the nuclear gay family than English-speaking cultures, but this may change as new laws come into place. In the meantime, we should consider the messages that young people are getting from these texts.

### Author Note

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## MARRIAGE, A 'COUPLE' OF QUESTIONS: SAME-SEX MARRIAGE, COUPLEDOM AND IDENTITY

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### Abstract

*Public and legislative debates, queer community activism, and partisan political policy on same-sex marriage rights have opened question as to the different ways in which marriage and relationships can be conceived. However, always marginalised in these discourses is the figure of 'coupledom', built on what can be considered the heteronormative 'marriage model' and deployed to uphold all sides of same-sex marriage debates. 'Coupling', as the means by which relationships are defined, remains under-theorised. This article begins by showing how the notion of the 'couple' can be de-naturalised by post-structuralist queer theory, before going on to consider the ways in which a coupledom/promiscuity binary functions in same-sex marriage debates in order to uphold the primacy and naturalness of the concept of the romantic couple as a kinship unit. It then demonstrates how 'coupledom' operates as a performative mode of identification to which sexual subjects form a passionate attachment in order to stabilise sexuality and maintain sexual subjectivities. The article demonstrates some of the ways in which the matrix between sexual subjectivity and a coupledom/promiscuity binary excludes alternative sexual and romantic arrangements (celibacy, polygamy and other forms of attachment that are not primarily defined by coupledom on the 'marriage model'). The article concludes with a brief coda examining how pro and con arguments for same-sex marriage have utilised concerns around queer youth suicide whilst unwittingly pushing for various normativities of coupledom.*

**Keywords:** same-sex marriage, coupledom/promiscuity binary, heteronormativity

### Introduction

Public and legislative debates, queer community activism, and partisan political policy on legalising same-sex marriage have opened a number of questions as to the different ways in which marriage and relationships can be conceived. However, one element which remains central - yet frequently made invisible - is the potent figure of 'the couple' (Riggs, 2011, p. 3). The supposed naturalness of this figure is built on heteronormative concepts of marriage and remains intact despite same-sex marriage's capacity to critique institutionalised heterosexuality.

'Coupling' as the means by which relationships are defined requires critique, investigation, dissection; yet the sacrosanct position of coupledom has rendered this figure both invisible and monolithic in debates about marriage, relationships, kinship, sexuality and family. This article begins by discussing some of the ways in which the notion of the 'couple' can be de-naturalised from a post-structuralist queer theory perspective, and considers how a coupledom/promiscuity binary functions to uphold the *primacy* and *naturalness* of the concept of the romantic couple as a kinship unit. Turning to the question as to why a passionate attachment to coupledom runs through heterosexual and homosexual relations, I argue that this attachment results from coupledom's capacity to performatively stabilise, and thus maintain as coherent, certain recognisable and socially-demanded sexual subjectivities. In light of this, the call for same-sex marriage is, then, no critique of heterosexuality, but rather upholds and reifies heterosexual marriage as a cultural institution, not only through reiteration of heterosexual



normativities by same-sex persons, but at - and *as* - the very kernel of the concept of marriage.

### **Tolerance and the Logic of Coupledness**

The conceptual 'logic' that underpins coupledness as the basic argument for state-sanctioned marriage rights has been grounded in the perceived 'naturalness' of heterosexual normativity in the form of the joining or bonding of two subjects of different genders. Within conservative heteronormativity, these two genders are considered to be oppositional and complementary within an active/passive dyad that is formulated in reference to the respective genitalia presented as having a mutual 'fit' (Gagnon & Parker, 1995, p. 12). This is what Joan Copjec has referred to as the foundationalist myth of the twoness of sex (Copjec, 1994, p. 17). The naturalness of heterosexual coupledness was put in question with early Gay Liberationist discourse which aimed not only to forge a space of liveability for non-heterosexual persons, but to critique the established social and institutional norms that had excluded non-heterosexuality from legitimacy (Altman, 1971). The extent of this critique, of course, became marginalised during the 1980s as queer political organising shifted from radical activism to an assimilationist lobbying politics built on homosexuality as a discrete identity (Epstein, 1990). Nevertheless, the increasing public profile of lesbians and gay men maintained a criticism of heterosexuality as the only natural form of sexual expression whereby "the apparently natural coupling of male and female lovers, are unstuck by the existence of lesbians and gays" (Grosz, 1995, p. 227). Religious and ultra-conservative opposition to same-sex marriage certainly understands the legitimisation of homosexuality through marriage rights as the destabilisation of the apparent naturalness of heteronormative coupledness. Liberal perspectives on same-sex marriage, however, reincorporate coupledness as the 'standard' and 'natural' form of affective relations regardless of the genders involved. This reincorporation, I argue, estab-

lishes the conditions for same-sex marriage to masquerade as opening the field of sexual possibility whilst, in effect, shutting down possibility by further centralising and reinforcing heteronormativity as both model and framework for understanding contemporary sexual relationality. In other words, arguments for same-sex marriage may seek to de-couple relationships from the perception of 'oppositional' twoness but, as critique, obscure in political, social and queer cultural discourse the concepts of sexual and affective relationships as available to be practised in alternative ways beyond being conditioned by such twoness.

Within this critical framework, gay and lesbian liberal politics have effectively entrenched an approach in which the criticism of heterosexual institutions is submerged in favour of purchasing into an institution which not only allows participation in heteronormativity but reinforces it. In other words, the only variation same-sex marriage enables in coupledness is the gender of the partners involved. Whilst both conservative and liberal perspectives understand this as either radical or reformist, the *fact* of the centrality of coupledness renders it neither. Indeed, sex, gender and sexual relations have been removed from same-sex marriage in order to solidify the appeal to legitimation by representing same-sex coupledness as relationships that perfectly mirror heterosexual normativity. Indeed, as Mariana Valverde has demonstrated in her analysis of same-sex marriage campaign advertisements and legal trials about same-sex couples, sexuality itself "is completely erased" (2006, p. 161). For Valverde, the same-sex couple is not comprised at all of two homosexual persons. Rather, it might be argued that the same-sex couple foregrounds coupledness - which may or may not take the form of household domesticity - over sexual difference in a form that makes same-sex marriage not only conservative but wholly de-sexualised such that it loses the potency of critique of heteronormativity.

With the rise of post-structuralist queer theory

in the 1990s, new tools became available by which to critique the ways in which lesbian/gay community politics were withdrawing from the criticism of heterosexual institutions and purchasing into these same institutions through a politics that Dennis Altman once described as seeking a "share of the cake" (1971, p. 129). This has also been put in terms of being a politics of the "piece of the pie" (Epstein, 1990, p. 290) and in the Log Cabin Republican's politics of ensuring conservative queer persons have a "seat at the table" (Wagley, 2011). Such food metaphors are instructive in exploring how language used in minority politics establishes different intelligibilities in the context of the distinction between tolerance and queer critique, not least if we imagine the normative site of the domestic marital table (rather than the sexualised marital bed) as the signifier of relationships. This criticism can be seen as continuous from early Gay Liberation through post-structuralist and post-modern accounts of sexuality, particularly seen among writers of queer theory. For example, Judith Butler, who has long critiqued identity politics as the basis for political organising, points to the dangers of the "normative goal of tolerance" by asking if the existing language of normativity is sufficient as a means for dialogue between different or opposed groups or identities (2009, pp. 140-141).

Other writers have, in a similar way, critiqued tolerance and pointed to its dangers as a formation of politics and community. Zygmunt Bauman, for example, has pointed to the problematic use of the term "human rights" as a recognition-claim for the "right to remain different", arguing that, within the normative framework of tolerance, human rights approaches fail to sediment any form of solidarity in the social world, and instead set goals for various forms of connecting and disconnecting among people who, together, would have political force (2011, p. 430). Such a tolerance is a turning away of one group or one identity from another for, as Derrida notes, this form of tolerance lacks the affirmation that comes through a Levinasian "duty of hos-

pitality" that would open "the way of the humanity of the human" (1999, pp. 72-73). Instead, group differences are depicted, and as Joan Scott has put it, "categorically and not relationally, as distinct entities rather than interconnected structures or systems created through repeated processes of the enunciation of difference" thereby failing to consider the language and frameworks that are used historically to construct and reproduce asymmetries of power (1995, p. 9). The critique of tolerance as a political goal and methodology thus targets a series of norms, which includes normative identity frameworks, political institutions, national cultures, and activist politics. Although tacit, key to those critiques is the way in which tolerance maintains an unequal distribution of inclusions and exclusions in what constitutes norms, identities, humanity and acceptability. In the context of queer youth suicide, for example, it can be said that tolerance produces inequities for younger queer persons in what constitutes a liveable life; these inequities operate, as I will go on to show, across a number of different sites from media representation and stereotyping of queer persons to queer community formations and institutional practices. The framework of tolerance thus mandates a certain ignorance (Butler, 2009) of the complexity of sexual subjectivity, whereby the naturalised concept of coupledness remains the sacred element that must not be put asunder.

At the same time, then, the manner in which tolerance operates as a 'turning away' is given the alibi of coupledness as permission for a 'turning towards'. That is, coupledness operates as a regulatory practice in which affection between two individuals that was previously deemed sinful, illegal or improper is a turn that interpellates a subject in a manner which obscures the possibility of an ethics of a broader community engagement, a point to which I will return below. While poststructuralist queer theory has posited alternative kinships as an investigative standpoint, it has often been reticent to take to task the historical and contingent formation of coupledness to its fullest extent within a framework of ethical

possibilities is testament to the coupledness's sovereign dominance in governing the interpretation of sexuality and relationships.

### **Question One: How is Coupledness Framed by its Promiscuous Others?**

The forms of heterosexual or same-sex coupledness that underpin the claimed right to state-sanctioned marriage are produced conceptually through coupledness's others. For want of a better, less-loaded term, this can be referred to as 'promiscuity': casual sex, anonymous sex, sex-without-attachment, sex-without-love, non-committed sex, the one-night-stand. Michael Schofield, in his study of sexual behaviour, defined promiscuity as "sex without love, casual sex - all those occasions when two people have sexual intercourse without committing themselves to loving each other for ever or living together for life" (1976, p. 11). His study indicated that the word has traditionally held a variety of meanings, but that underlying any definition was the fact that it was regarded as "the antithesis of love" (pp. 15-16). At the same time, his definition involved a numeric component that betrays this historical form of the concept and the decade in which his research was undertaken: "anyone who had had more than one partner in the last year was regarded as promiscuous" (p. 130). Schofield points out that traditionally, the promiscuous were considered "unfortunate, and to be pitied if not censured" (p. 17). The connotations that emerge from figures such as the extent of casual sexual encounters or number of casual partners is, of course, historical, and today the term promiscuity is rarely deployed to indicate a negative reaction towards or disapproval of casual sexual relationality. In a contemporary twenty-first century culture in which the articulation of pleasure has been justified as an end in itself, casual sexual relations are no longer labelled with the negative connotation of the term promiscuous, and certainly gay male culture has historically been marked by an emphasis on casual sexual relations over longer-term commitments (not without criticism, e.g., Bell & Weinberg, 1978; Sullivan,

1997). This is not to suggest, however, that the discourse of coupledness is one which wholly disavows casual sex. Rather, the discursive primacy of coupledness as the framework for social and affective relations (regardless of gender) permits and embraces casual sex, although this is primarily to figure it as a 'stage' leading to coupling, and in which casual encounters are posited as the 'lesser alternative' to coupledness. This, of course, obscures the fact that both coupling and casual sexual encounters can occur among the same subjects: coupledness nevertheless is depicted as a 'natural' state of equilibrium for affective and sexual relations that casual sex may either lead towards or problematically disrupt.

Coupledness - regardless of the genders that comprise that couple - is signified oppositionally to promiscuity by an emphasis on the cultural practice of commitment which includes the performative expression of the wedding ritual, declarations or practices of longevity, domestic habitation (Whisman, 1996), the sharing of financial resources and assets, and usually (although not necessarily) sexual fidelity. Within certain formulations of same-sex marriage, then, coupledness effectively repeats heterosexual complementarity through deploying the signifiers 'duo' or 'pairing', 'other half', 'soul-mate'. The heterosexual matrix (Butler, 1990) that discursively links the constructs of bodily sex with gender with sexual desire in a trajectory that seeks to naturalise heteronormativity operates in this case through a concept of coupledness as the mechanism by which it is upheld. That is, while the heterosexual matrix that supports coupledness has been re-figured in contemporary western culture by the *addition* of same-sex relationships to a level of legitimacy (within a tolerance framework that gives the conditions whereby state sanction of same-sex marriage can be debated), the matrix remains coherent and intact through this form of repetition. That is, 'complementarity' is a central element of the matrix and while the genders involved shift, the complementarity of the 'duo' remains in order that the matrix continue to reproduce

sex/gender coherence retroactively.

Although tacit, it can be argued that the coupledness/promiscuity binary operates much like the hetero/homo binary does according to Eve Sedgwick (1990): as conditioning the authorship and interpretation of texts, discourses, behaviours, kinship practices and dominant cultural emergences. Indeed, it is found across an array of everyday practices and contemporary western legislation governing family, child-rearing, access to child-rearing technologies such as IVF and adoption, the biopolitics of immigration decisions, and social security. In ways less-related to the governance technologies of power, the distinction between coupledness and promiscuity constitutes certain practices of relationality from, say, the form of invitation to a dinner party to decisions on sexual behaviour. Using different terminology, it emerges as a primary introductory question on social networking sites (relationship status).

At the same time and as with other binaries, coupledness/promiscuity excludes other forms of relationality: one can either express sexuality and domestic relationality through a coupled relationship or through a series of casual encounters, but the notion of celibacy which, although of course commonly practised (often but not always willingly), has been socially discouraged since the second half of the twentieth century (Jeffreys, 1990) and is represented as suspicious and threatening (Mills & White, 1997). Likewise, the alternative to coupledness and casual promiscuity that takes the form of multiple long-term relationships and sometimes labelled as (formally) polygamous marriage or (informally) polygamous relationships and polyamory, is not uncommon yet is treated with enormous suspicious and legislative restriction with both Christian-religious and social-taboo justifications (Blevins, 2005; Haritaworn et al., 2006). Yet the conceptual cause of multiple relationships' exclusion from being understood in western culture as a legitimate sexual and affective practice is the result of its failure to fit within coupledness or its recognised other as promiscuity. Both celi-

bacy and polygamy, neither of which can necessarily be said to be unethically violent in and of themselves, are effectively victims of the 'duo-centrism' (Cover, 2010) which gives coupledness a monolithic primacy in contemporary culture, not only as justification for all sorts of rights to marry, but as the mechanism by which contemporary subjectivity is conditioned in terms of sexual and affective performativities.

While a coupledness/promiscuity binary works in disciplinary ways to make intelligible the different forms of sexual and affective relationalities, at the level of governance the norm of coupledness operates in somewhat more complex ways, allowing us to account for anomalies, types of multiple relationships, open relationships, forms of non-monogamous coupledness and casual promiscuity as a phase leading to coupledness. In the framework of the contemporary biopolitical imagination of statistical and demographic social governance, subjectivities are revealed in "their lawfulness by standard distribution; the norms and averages of population" whereby exclusion, othering, disavowal or immorality are posited not as oppositional in a binary formation but in the degree of *deviance* from the imagined "distributional norm" (Warner, 2009, p. 291). This is to suggest that coupledness as a normative framework does not operate exclusively in contemporary culture within a disciplinary and institutional separation of the normal (coupledness) from its 'non-natural' other (promiscuity). Rather, it draws attention to the importance of contemporary biopolitics as a technology of power that makes populations and multitudes its object through measurements and depictions of ratios, rates, forecasts and estimates (Foucault, 2004). For Foucault, norms circulate between the disciplinary mechanisms of power that, through institutions surveil and normalise individual bodies, and through biopolitical mechanisms which seek to regulate larger bodies or groups of people through the regularisation of processes of life and living. Where disciplinary power mechanisms distinguish between the normal and the abnormal, the regulatory functions of

biopolitical power technologies plot the normal and the abnormal along "different curves of normality" whereby certain distributions are considered to be "more normal than the others, or at any rate more favorable than the others" (Foucault, 2007, p. 63). What this means for sexual relationality is that, in some contexts including the contemporary neoliberal formations of governance through which contemporary dominant social attitudes towards sexuality are produced, the extent of tolerance depends wholly on the extent to which one's social, sexual and relational practices are at a distance from the norm.

Coupledness, then, is discursively articulated as normative, and non-normative (or, in this case, what is sometimes depicted as culturally less 'desirable') sexual behaviours such as casual encounters are non-normative by nature not of *opposition* or *abnormality* but of distance from normative coupledness along a curve. For example, a married heterosexual couple is given as the norm within the heterosexual matrix and discourses of heteronormativity; a lesbian domestically-committed and monogamous couple might, within this framework, be perceived as being at a step's distance from the norm; casual sexual behaviour when in one's early twenties is moderately close on the curve to the norm.

A couple of any gender who have an open relationship might be at some distance but tolerable on the basis of a persistent return to the domestic home that signifies coupledness. However, a group of five individuals of multiple genders who co-habit variously, engage in sexual relationality in complex ways and who consider themselves to be in a relationship together - as an atypical example - are deemed unintelligible by virtue of a significant distance from the culturally-given ideal on a normative curve. This is not, of course, to present a typology of tolerable and intolerable behaviours, only to point to the fact that normativities are never fully exclusive and dichotomous, but rather are wholly constructed in discourse in terms of a given, constructed historical, and changeable norm. Coupledness

fulfils that role, and its 'others' are various gradients of proximity, available to have its meanings and capacity for tolerance productively activated in terms of a confluence of discursive strategies.

Indeed, the normative figure of the couple takes on such potency that it can be understood as having its own subjectivity. McWhirter and Mattison (1984) found that life-long coupled relationships have been endowed with such high cultural and conceptual value that the inability to maintain a lasting relationship is represented as a threat not to either party in the couple, but to the couple-ness itself. Referring to same-sex male couples in a way that can be extrapolated for coupledness regardless of the gender of the parties involved, they represent the coupled relationship itself as a child: "Its birth, more often than not, is a joy. Its development through the lifetime may cause the couple unnecessary anxiety. Like all growth in nature, its development can be observed and assisted" (p. 13). What is evident here is an acknowledgment of the institutional nature of coupled relationships, something considered essential for maintaining the longevity of the relationship. The connotations of surveillance and normalisation - "observed and assisted" - suggests the institutional requirement for longevity, and their characterisation of the relationship itself as a *child* strongly implies that any end to the relationship would constitute infanticide. Hence the cultural injunctions on participating in the destruction of a domestic relationship or a marriage through performing, whether knowingly or unwittingly, as the third party in an illicit affair, for example. Marriage and same-sex marriage in this framework thus presents governmentality with a 'child protection' role. The question is not one of same-sex marriage as a right or as a mechanism to end homophobia, but as a means of re-balancing the coupledness/promiscuity binary in the normative direction of the former while excluding the destabilatory alternatives to coupledness as the prime western cultural form of sexual and affective relationality.

### **Question Two: How is the Figure of Marital Coupledness Deployed to Uphold Coherent (Hetero)Sexual Subjectivity**

Both the figure of coupledness (in marriage) and its 'authorised' other of casual sexual expression or behaviour (promiscuity) operate today as modes of identification that are deployed to establish the fixity and coherence of both heterosexual and homosexual identities. Although sexual identity comes to stand for far more than an identification with an 'other' as the object of sexual attraction or the long-term object of affection, it is through that identification of an attraction *to* a specific gender and *by* a specific gender that a subjectivity is reiteratively performed in accord with discursive norms. It operates to maintain and stabilise that subjective position - the named sexual identity categories of *straight* or *lesbian/gay*. As queer theory has shown, heterosexual and homosexual identities are tenuous, historical and contingent, always at risk of slippage, and are upheld through mechanisms of performativity and discourses of sexuality that aim to ensure the continuation of heteronormativity. In that context, sexual identity cannot be understood to stand alone as a magical 'thing' or 'event' which simply occurs as the result of an encounter with a discourse which performatively enacts that identity, but is reliant on a continuous stabilising repetition (Butler, 1993). Sexual identity is presented within two authorised possibilities of 'hetero' or 'homo'. The coherence, intelligibility and recognisability of either of these sexual identity positions or 'orientations' depends on a reiterative performance of desire-as-attraction to an 'other' (sometimes depicted as an 'other half' in coupledness) that is stabilised over time, lending the illusion of that the sexual identity results from an innate, inner identity core (Butler, 1990). The performance of desire as attraction is a particular *mode* of performativity - it is one that is constructed not only in the coherence of past experiences, desires, expressions, articulations or behaviours, but is figured also in a futural temporal trajectory by

the signification and declaration of an attraction to an other as a *gendered* subject. That is, the base-line requirement of coherent sexual identity is not that there is an attraction to another subject or body, but that the attraction is by a gendered body towards another gendered body.

It is through the notion of 'identification' that attraction to an 'other' as coupling or as fleeting sexual act can be understood as a *process* for the shoring up of queer or straight subjectivity. 'Couple', as a term, signifies *two*, a *duo*, two-together as one. What is a 'lesbian' or 'straight' sexuality without a notion of identification expressed as desire and attraction? In other words, without the concept of interaction there is no social possibility of sexual identity. Identification *with* another is such a mode of performativity. The 'gay man' or the 'straight woman', if following the dominant authorised models of sexual behaviour laid down by a discursively-given coupledness/promiscuity dichotomy, partakes in an identification *with* another who is 'other' at one moment, but not 'other' when compared with the third-party 'others' that are from *outside* or *beyond* the relationship or the sexual act. This identification is a *process* as opposed to a declarative act. As Butler cogently points out, identification is never accomplished but is always the "phantasmatic staging of the event" that must be repeated in order to be occurring (Butler, 1993, p. 105). Within this understanding, a lesbian woman does not identify with her partner in an act of getting together and thereby constituting and completing her identity. Instead, it is an identification with the other-in-couple or *with* the other-in-sexual-relations - an ongoing reiterative performativity constituting the sexual self. This identification - absolutely central to the project of a sexual identity in terms of the hetero/homo binary - can only occur through prescription to one side or another of the coupledness/promiscuity binary. Such identification is produced as the discursive code by which sexual performativity is regimented. Because sexual identity is governed by a cultural demand for coherence, fixity and intelligibility, in spite of

the many formations in which obscurity, slippage, passing, transformation, desiring 'incorrectly', mistakes and inarticulability occur, the hetero/homo binary is policed to the degree that self-governance of sexual desire is a requisite project of contemporary subjectivity. One must, in one's behaviour, produce a coherent *pattern* of behaviour which in order best to lend the illusion of an inner identity core (Butler, 1990, p. 143).

Attachment is not to the object of sexual attraction (in casual sexual formations) or affection (in coupledness and marriage), but to the available channels through which sexuality is conceived and performed as normative, tolerable and in proximity to the norm of the domestic, married couple. This is a passionate and necessary attachment that is vital to meet the cultural demand for coherent sexual identity as heterosexual or homosexual. The point here is that out of the two options of 'coupledom' and 'promiscuity', the former is seen as the most effective for self-governance and articulation as a coherent sexual identity and thereby as a coherent gender from which that sexuality is understood to emanate. Performativity, as Butler points out, "must be understood not as a singular or deliberate 'act,' but, rather, as the reiterative and citational practice by which discourse produces the effects that it names" (1993, p. 2). If either coupledom or promiscuity will serve adequately as a mode of identificatory behaviour that reiteratively performs a sexual identity, then it is by virtue of *linear* performativity that coherence over time is best established. There is utility here in drawing on the terminology of digital communication technologies: coupledom can be likened to an analogue performance whereas a series of promiscuous sexual encounters is digital. The analogue performance cites the culturally-given codes of intelligible sexuality, it *corresponds* and *represents* (as the Greek root *analogia* indicates—proportion, analogy) the discursively given signifier of sexuality and, like the analogue sound-wave or the analogue photograph, it is a smooth wave; ongoing and uninterrupted. Promiscuity, on the other hand, is

digital: like a digital recording or a digital photograph, it is a series of 'offs' and 'ons', close enough to appear a coherent image or sound, but upon very close examination (like the photograph in newsprint) not coherent at all. In other words, where promiscuity is founded on the idea of multiple sexual acts in succession, it is a performance that requires repetition of what are culturally perceived as *repetitive acts*, thus too easily betraying the *possibility* that such an act *may not be repeated*. While no repetition is every wholesale, intact or a coherently self-same citation, the requirement to persist under the myth of repetition produces the conditions in which coupledom operates as a mechanism for coherent sexual identity.

For a more stable, linear and analogue performativity, coupling provides a temporal long-term trajectory which, in contemporary society, feeds into a multiplicity of lifestyle decisions and choices of the performative subject, particularly in its definitional requirement of 'longevity' (Penas, 1997; Bell & Weinberg, 1978). There is the occasional cultural claim used to destabilise gay/lesbian subjectivity by suggesting that one is only lesbian or gay when actually in the process of fucking. Coupledom, however, operates as a performance which creates a long-term and stable *public* definition ('my partner and I' or 'we'). It is established, steady; and although its identification depends on performative repetition, it is *not* repetition in the sense of relying on visible repetitive acts in order to articulate an intelligible hetero or homo sexual subjectivity. Marriage affirms, confirms and reinforces the analogue wave pattern of coupledom, further consolidating sexual identity in a performativity that removes sexuality from the frame but crosses between the public and the private in the declaration and practice of everyday affective relations.

### **Conclusion: Ethics, Coupledom and its Others**

Coupledom thus operates as the normative centre that governs the coherence, intelligibil-

ity and extent of tolerance of sexual behaviours and sexual identities more generally, and it does so in a manner which, as with other norms, is deployed in over-regimented and regulatory ways that can exclude from community, cultural participation and subjectivity those who are unable or unwilling to perform sexualities through the narrow conceptual perspective of domestic coupledness. In addition to the ways in which coupledness acts as the defining factor in sexual relationality by signifying the marker of normativity against which all other sexual and relational behaviour is measured by scales of proximity and distance, it effectively closes the field of possibilities for the emergence of alternative, communitarian, radical and, indeed, 'queer' relational formations.

Given the potency of the coupledness/promiscuity binary and the biopolitical centering of domestic marriage as normative ideal, the notion of a gendered subject desiring a gendered object is maintained as a means by which a 'heterosexual' or 'lesbian' or 'gay' subjectivity is reiteratively constituted and performed. Other than through deconstruction of the coupledness/promiscuity binary, from where can such a radical critique be made? And how are such critical practices risky in terms of the extent to which they are marginalised in contemporary culture?

Celibacy, for example, is often (albeit not universally) deployed in contemporary discourse as the encoding of failure, stagnation. The rhetorical figures of the 'spinster' and the celibate 'priest' are depicted as laughable or rejected figures that fall outside a coupledness/promiscuity and, in biopolitical terms of identity performativity, are at a distance from normative coupledness. This, of course, is historical: prior to the First World War there was a strong and (presumably) celibate spinster class throughout western nations. Marriage increased between 1911 and 1960 from fifty to ninety-five percent of all persons, an increase which significantly marginalised those who did not couple (Jeffreys, 1990). Priestly celibacy, which of course is more complex and

not separable from contemporary concerns over the high rates and cover-ups of institutionalised sexual abuse, is a further example of the ways in which celibacy as a (non) trajectory of desire or sexual identification has little cultural legitimacy today and becomes, instead, a site of suspicion (Monbiot, 2000). Yet there is no ethical reason why celibacy ought be disavowed in a contemporary sexualised sociality.

At the same time, those who can (or, perhaps, must) express sexual relationality through the radical assertion of polygamy as a polymorphous fluidity. Polygamy is illegal in most state-laws. There is, however, no ethical reason by which polygamy or polyamory should be relegated to the margins, frowned-upon or fought against by the institutionalisation or rearticulation of the performative 'couple' - other, of course, than its traditional usage in certain cultural formations to legitimate a series of wives as property in sexual slavery. Here the strategic use of possibilities of what Browning refers to as "different kinds of families" (Browning, 1997, p. 133) de-lineates and questions the coupledness/promiscuity binary via the very *terms* of social organisation. Such de-lineation permits the imagination of alternatives to the contemporary norms of living-arrangements, households, child-rearing, definitions of 'the family', arrangements which destabilise monolithic gender as much as the notion of the 'couple'.

### **Coda - Is it Ethical to Argue that Same-Sex Marriage Saves Lives?**

If same-sex marriage is, indeed, an inevitable political outcome of the processes which problematically incorporate non-heterosexual sexualities within contemporary social frameworks of tolerance, then it is worth ending briefly on a point about the process by which arguments for-and-against same-sex marriage operate not only as strategies to uphold heteronormative coupledness but how those strategies deploy the potent figure of vulnerable queer youth in order to produce particular standpoints. The suicidality of more vulnerable non



-heterosexual youth remains a political, policy and population health issue and there is an argument that same-sex marriage is a problematic distraction from that important, complex and urgent issue. However, rather than being an issue that is over-written by the politics of rights claims for same-sex marriage, it has been deployed as a justification both for marriage rights and against them—that is, both for the legitimisation of non-heterosexual coupledness and its de-legitimisation.

Amanda Villis and Danielle Hewitt (2012) from Doctors for Marriage Equality, for example, have argued that there are indeed health benefits for younger non-heterosexual persons that will result from legislating for same-sex marriage for GLBTIQ adults. Rightly, they pointed out that there is no evidence same-sex marriage is harmful to heterosexual marriages. However, it remains the case that the relationship between the solidification of coupledness through the legalisation of marriage for non-heterosexual partners and queer youth health and well-being is more complex than assuming legislative amendment will lead directly by itself and in a linear fashion to a reduction in youth suicidality. While the actual rate of queer youth suicide and self-harm is not fully known - since as sexuality can often remain hidden and not all suicide attempts are disclosed (Cover, 2012) - it has not dropped significantly despite a host of other legislative changes and protections that have similarly contributed to the domestication of queer sexuality and coupledness, whether decriminalisation of homosexuality, anti-vilification laws or institutional anti-discrimination policies in schools and youth recreational organisations. While Villis and Hewitt are right to point to the benefits of same-sex marriage for adult population health, we are yet to have evidence that there are any direct benefits for younger persons who are struggling to cope with being bullied, humiliated, shamed and cannot (yet) envisage a liveable life and a happy future—let alone a marriage ceremony. That is, same-sex marriage may have many benefits for certain queer adults and possibly for reducing dis-

crimination (this cannot be known in advance), but it should not be considered a “magic bullet” that will reduce the high rates of queer youth suicide.

However, on the other hand, arguments have been made that suggest a legitimisation of same-sex marriage ought not be validated on the basis of queer youth suicide in that the latter is evidence of flawed individuals who do not warrant participation in coupledness. In a 2012 opinion piece, Australian Marriage Forum president David van Gend cited queer youth suicide research to bolster his argument against the legalisation of same-sex marriage. It is, naturally, a concern that an opponent of same-sex marriage draws on such an important and troubling topic as youth suicide to make a case to exclude non-heterosexual persons. Van Gend, rightly, points out that some non-heterosexual persons have a lowered expectation of leading a long life. Yet such a view is misguided in arguing that this is evidence of a flawed subjectivity. Instead, the difficulty many young and vulnerable non-heterosexual youth have in forging a liveable life is the result of the social conditions of intolerance that manifest in many forms from intolerant commentary to bullying to physical violence to the deliberate reinforcement of shame. Rather than looking to the complex array of social factors, Van Gend’s non-critical opinion is that queer youth suicide is due to “the sense that something has gone wrong deep inside; the depressing effects of what he might experience as compulsive sexual behaviour; the unresolved anger where he sees the cause of his sexual confusion to be childhood abuse by a trusted adult”. While deploying an outdated and damaging stereotype, the argument that state-sanctioned coupledness should not be extended on the basis of suicide rates and reduced longevity is an attempt to re-discipline the already-changing boundaries of what constitutes normative coupledness. Van Gend may well be right to state that same-sex marriage is not “the cure”, for the real effect on young queer persons is not knowable in advance, regardless of whether or not there is social value in the bourgeois institutionalisa-

tion of same-sex marriage. Yet his alternative views are not a cure either, but contribute to the social environment that makes life unliveable for many queer youth.

In both cases, what we witness is an attempt to utilise youth suicide and other complex social problems that impact on queer youth life expectancy to re-dress the boundaries of what constitutes the norm whereby normative coupledness becomes the primary element that must be protected at all costs. In other words, while these are diametrically competing claims about the relationship between youth suicide and the state sanction of coupled relationships, both actively produce, stabilise and reinforce the performative force of coupledness as normative over other political, social and subjective conditions of living.

### Author Note

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## MARRIAGE EQUALITY IN AUSTRALIA: THE INFLUENCE OF ATTITUDES TOWARD SAME-SEX PARENTING

STEPHANIE N. WEBB AND JILL CHONODY

### Abstract

*A limited understanding about the influential predictors of attitudes toward same-sex marriage in Australia exists in the literature. The aim of this study was to investigate the influence of attitudes toward same-sex parenting on attitudes toward same-sex marriage, above and beyond that of demographic variables. A community sample (N = 790) ranging in age from 18-78 (M = 30.01, SD = 12.49) completed an online questionnaire assessing attitudes toward gay men and lesbians, same-sex marriage, same-sex parenting, and basic demographic information. Results indicate that participants who reported negative attitudes toward same-sex parenting were significantly more likely to hold negative attitudes toward same-sex marriage. Attitudes toward same-sex parenting also explained the most variance of attitudes toward same-sex marriage when controlling for the influence of religiosity, sex, number of gay, lesbian or bisexual friends, attitudes toward gay men and lesbians, marital and parental status, age, and sexual orientation. This study illustrates important implications for Australian marriage policy and the lives of many same-sex couples. Future research should continue to explore factors influencing attitudes toward same-sex marriage to further the knowledge base and influence social policy.*

**Keywords:** Attitudes, same-sex marriage, same-sex parenting, Australia.

### Introduction

Prior to the 1990s, negativity towards homosexuality and lesbian and gay civil rights was the dominant viewpoint in Western societies (Loftus, 2001); however, antigay bias has pro-

gressively decreased over time in Australia (Kelly, 2001). Nonetheless, prejudice and issues surrounding social injustice for minority groups are still evident, despite the current age of liberalism and democracy. Issues related to lesbian and gay rights are becoming increasingly prominent, and even though there has been a gradual amelioration of such negative attitudes, this tolerance does not seem to extend to attitudes toward same-sex marriage (SSM; Brumbaugh, Sanchez, Nock & Wright, 2008; Edwards, 2007; Ellis, Kitzinger & Wilkinson, 2003; Herek, 2006).

Researchers have found several factors related to attitudes toward lesbians and gay men and SSM, including religion (Olsen, Cadge & Harrison, 2006). Leaders of organised religion that convey a negative message about homosexuality have long been at the forefront of the fight against the acceptance of SSM, with a vested interest in upholding religious values and preserving marriage for opposite-sex couples (Brumbaugh et al., 2008). In many studies over the past 30 years, religion has been found to play a significant role in influencing attitudes toward lesbians and gay men and SSM (Brinson, Denby, Crowther & Brunton, 2011; Brown & Henriquez, 2008; Cardenas & Barrientos, 2008; Edwards, 2007; Olsen, Cadge, & Harrison, 2006; Whitehead, 2010). More specifically, religiosity (the importance of religion in shaping personal beliefs) impacts attitudes toward lesbian and gay civil rights more than identifying with a particular religion per se (Ellison, Acevedo, & Ramos-Wada, 2011). However, a study by Anderssen (2002) found that despite the majority of the sample exhibiting low to no levels of religiosity (74.1%), approximately half of the participants exhibited anti-gay bias. Therefore, religiosity alone may not fully explain negative attitudes toward lesbians and gay men.

In addition to the impact of religiosity on attitudes to lesbians and gay men, evidence from contemporary American literature consistently indicates that people who have little contact with lesbians or gay men (Herek, 2006; Hopwood & Connors, 2002; Lewis, 2011; Wood & Bartkowski, 2007), have minimal exposure to information about lesbian and gay rights (Case & Stewart, 2010), are male (Anderssen, 2002; Herek, 2002b), have little education (Smith & Gordon, 2005), and are older (Brumbaugh et al., 2011; Herek, 2002a) commonly hold negative attitudes toward lesbians and gay men and SSM. Being married or a parent has also been found to play a role in attitudes toward lesbians and gay men and SSM (Brumbaugh et al., 2008; Chonody, Rutledge, & Siebert, 2009), but these associations are often modest. Similar findings are also evident among the Australian population (Galaxy Research, 2010; Newspoll Market Research, 2006), yet a proportion of the variance in attitudes is not explained by these socio-demographic factors, suggesting that alternative explanations may further explicate this complex relationship of variables. Although a great deal of research has focused on demographic factors that influence attitudes toward lesbians and gay men, the majority of these studies were conducted with an American sample. Cultural overlaps between the US and Australia are clearly evident; however, the role of religion, social structures and ideals as well as the political milieu is significantly different (Moslers, 2002; Newman, 2001).

Research also indicates that attitudes toward lesbians and gay men are likely related to gender-role beliefs (Kite & Whitley, 1996; Polimeni, Hardie & Buzwell, 2000; Whitley, 2002). Traditional gender role beliefs support the notion that men and women hold specific masculine and feminine gender attributes (e.g., roles, traits and psychical appearance), which are then consistently displayed across all areas of a person's life. These culturally prescribed gender-norms may explain why some people perceive lesbians to be similar to heterosexual men, and gay men to be similar to heterosexual women (Avery, Chase, Johansson, Litvak,

Montero, & Wydra, 2007; Goodman & Moradi, 2008; Kite & Deaux, 1987).

Furthermore, support for SSM is affected by shifting social norms and cultural discourses. Lewis and Gosset (2008) explored the divergence between government policy makers and the general population and found that the positive shift in attitudes toward SSM correlates with cohort effects and social change. For example, changing socialisation patterns and constructed meanings along with age have been found to significantly influence attitudes toward SSM. Not only are younger generations developing increased tolerance towards sexual minorities, but progressive inclusion of positive images of lesbian and gay people in the media is leading to more support for SSM (Becker, 2006; Levina, Waldo & Fitzgerald, 2000). Similarly, McDermott and Blair (2012) explored the effects of cross-cultural effects on attitudes toward SSM and found that attitudes in Ireland, UK, USA and Canada varied significantly. These differences could not be explained by demographic factors alone, which suggest that cultural differences may help to account for the attitudinal variability.

In addition to ongoing negative attitudes towards SSM, attitudes towards same-sex parents (SSP) are predominantly negative in Australia (Morse, McLaren & McLauchlen, 2007; Pennington & Knight, 2011; Rowlands & Lee, 2006). Many lesbian and gay couples are confronted by prejudice within the community when they start a family (Camilleri & Ryan, 2006). Therefore, negative attitudes toward SSP may be influencing attitudes toward SSM based on the assumption that legalised SSM would lead to increased acceptance of parenting and adoption rights for lesbian and gay couples. For example, Brennen (2011) and Redding (2007) found consistency within the general population regarding child rearing as a constitutive right of marriage (only between a man and a woman), and Meezan and Rauch (2005) suggest that child rearing is more socially accepted within marriage than non-marriage. Therefore, people's attitude towards

SSP may be having an impact on their attitudes toward SSM, contributing to the continued societal prejudice and marriage inequality in Australia. Regardless of public attitudes, SSP are a reality in Australia, with at least 5% of gay male couples and 20% of lesbian couples raising children (ABS, 2005; Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission, 2007; Millbank, 2006; Pennington & Knight, 2011). Negative perceptions of SSP are thus a significant issue (Ellis, Kitzinger & Wilkinson, 2003; Morse, McLaren & McLachlan, 2007; Rowlands & Lee, 2006), and do not to date appear to have been effectively influenced by empirical evidence demonstrating that SSP do not negatively impact the welfare of children (Amato, 2012; Camilleri & Ryan, 2006; Patterson, 2009; Tasker, 2010). For example, Australians have been found to rate opposite-sex parents more favourably than same-sex parents (Morse, McLaren, & McLachlan, 2007). In one study, which utilised a combination of first year psychology students and the Australian general population, heterosexual mothers were rated more favourably than lesbian mothers (Rowlands & Lee, 2006). Research indicates that these negative attitudes may involve the assumption that opposite-sex parents produce a more secure home life, support more emotional stability (Crawford & Soliday, 1996; McLeod, Crawford & Zechmeister, 1999) and produce a balance of gender roles, which are believed to be important parental attributes when raising children (Meezan & Rauch, 2005). Therefore, societal concerns about the welfare of children raised in lesbian and gay families may be influencing support for SSM (Eggebeen, 2012). Yet despite this possible relationship between attitudes towards SSP and SSM, there is a dearth of evidence in regards to the impact of the former upon the latter in Australia.

Given that a gap exists about the extent to which negative attitudes toward SSP and SSM exist within the Australian population, and whether attitudes toward SSP do have an effect on attitude toward SSM, the purpose of this study was to investigate how much of an influence (if any) attitudes toward SSP have

on attitudes toward SSM, above and beyond what is already explained by other factors. Based on the review of the literature the following hypotheses will be tested:

**H1:** People with lower levels of religiosity, higher levels of education, more contact with lesbians, gay men, and bisexual people, are younger, and are female will exhibit more positive attitudes toward SSM.

**H2:** Attitudes toward SSP will uniquely contribute to explaining attitudes toward SSM, controlling for the following demographic variables: sex, sexual orientation, religiosity, social contact with lesbians, gay men, and bisexual people, education, age, marital and parental status, and attitudes toward lesbians and gay men.

## Method

### *Sample and Data Collection*

Given the research was conducted within South Australia, an initial Google search of Adelaide (capital city of South Australia) organisations was conducted using the following key terms: Adelaide\* Community, Organisations, gyms, churches. Of this, a selection of nine community organisations along with members from Facebook were approached and invited, via online sources, to participate. Psychology, Social Work and Social Policy students and faculty from the University of South Australia were also contacted via email and invited to participate. Chain referral was utilised to increase sample size; participants were asked to forward the email and study link on to other potential participants across Australia.

Ethics approval from the Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC) was obtained prior to data collection, which occurred during June -July, 2012. The study link directed participants to an online survey hosted by Survey-Monkey, whereby participants voluntarily completed an anonymous questionnaire. Comple-

tion of the survey was considered consent to participate. Participants were informed of their rights to withdraw and that participation was voluntary. To protect the anonymity of participants, occupation and/or where they had been recruited was not included in the survey.

### **Measures**

#### **Modern Homonegative Scale (MHS)**

A modified version of the MHS (Morrison, Kenny & Harrington, 2005) was utilised, which is presented in two parallel subscales with a total of 16 items— 8 items to assess attitudes toward lesbian women (MHS-L) and 8 items for gay men (MHS-G; e.g., '[gay men/lesbian women] should stop complaining about the way they are treated in society and simply get on with their lives'). Four items in the scale were found inappropriate for an Australian sample; thus they were removed (e.g., '*the notion of universities providing students with undergraduate degrees in Gay and Lesbian studies is ridiculous*'). A 6-point Likert scale (1=*strongly disagree* and 6=*strongly agree*) was utilised for this study, and items from both subscales were summed to create a global MHS score. Scores range from 12 to 48 with higher scores representing more negative attitudes. Reliability for the MHS in this study was excellent ( $\alpha = .96$ ).

#### **Demographic Variables**

*Age* was reported as a continuous number. *Sex* was recorded categorically as male, female, or intersex; however, only 7 participants identified as intersex. Therefore, this sample was too small for reliable analysis and was recoded. Sexual orientation was measured using a modified version of the Kinsey Heterosexual-Homosexual Rating Scale (KRS; Kinsey, Pomeroy, & Martin, 1949). A series of one-way ANOVAs were conducted to determine how attitudes were different based on self-identified sexual orientation. The MHS-L, MHS-G, MHS-T, SSM and SSP items were utilised as dependent variables and across all tests, the findings indicate that 'mostly heterosexual'

participants were only significantly different from 'completely heterosexual' participants. Therefore, sexual orientation was dichotomized for the purpose of analysis as completely heterosexual and sexual minorities (mostly heterosexual, mostly homosexual, completely homosexual, bisexual, unsure, neither homosexual nor heterosexual). *Level of education* was recorded as primary school, some secondary school, completed secondary school, additional training, undergraduate and postgraduate tertiary education. *Marital and parental status* was recorded as two dichotomous items. *Religious affiliation* was reported as *not religious or spiritual, agnostic, Catholic, Muslim, Buddhist, spiritual, Protestant, and other*. *Religiosity* was determined by: "To what extent does your religion guide your personal beliefs?" and utilized a 10-point scale (1 representing *not at all* and 10 representing *completely*). Participants who reported being not religious or spiritual were not required to answer this item and were coded as 1 for *religiosity* so that those respondents were included in the final analysis. *Contact with gay, lesbian, or bisexual* individuals was assessed by a dichotomous (no/yes) survey question that inquired whether the respondent has ever had any friends/relatives who are lesbians, gay men and bisexuals. If respondents indicated yes, they were asked to report the number of lesbians, gay men and bisexual friends and relatives they have. Due to insufficient data in lesbian, gay men and bisexual relatives item, this study only focused on lesbian, gay men and bisexual friends.

#### **Same-sex Marriage (SSM) and Same-Sex Parenting (SSP)**

*Attitudes toward SSM* was assessed with a single-item indicator (e.g., 'Marriage should be legal for same-sex couples') using the same 6-point Likert scale as the MHS with a higher score representing a negative attitude. A two-item indicator using the same 6-point Likert scale was used to assess *attitudes toward SSP* with a separate question for gay men (SSP-G) and lesbians (SSP-L; e.g., 'A gay male [lesbian] couple should have the legal right to

raise children'). Higher scores represent a negative attitude. The SSP items were summed to create an overall attitude toward SSP score.

### ***Design***

The study employed a correlational design whereby participants were exposed to every item in the questionnaire. The primary predictor variable was attitudes towards SSP and the extent to which that predicts attitudes toward SSM over and above what is explained by sex, age, degree of religiosity, level of education, friends with lesbians, gay men and bisexuals, sexual orientation, marital status, parental status and attitudes towards lesbians and gay men.

### ***Data Analysis***

All relevant statistical assumptions were met prior to analyses. Data analyses were completed using SPSS 20.0 and. Distributions for all variables can be found in Table 1. Continuous variables were assessed for outliers, and 38 participants were identified as multivariate outliers; thus, they were removed prior to analysis. An additional 12 participants indicated not living in Australia at the time of data collection and were also removed. An additional 12 participants had missing demographics; however, the data was allowed to remain missing.

Due to a high correlation between SSP-L and SSP-G ( $r=.95$ ,  $p<.001$ ), these two items were combined to create a total attitudes toward SSP. Bivariate correlations and independent samples t-tests were conducted to examine the relationship between all predictors and the outcome variable and to determine which predictors would be included in the final analysis. The hypothesis that attitudes toward same-sex parenting would predict attitudes toward same-sex marriage, above and beyond identified demographic factors, was tested using hierarchical multiple regression. The first step evaluated the effect of age, sex, religiosity, lesbian, gay men and bisexual friends, educa-

tion, sexual orientation, MHS, marital status, and parental status on attitudes toward SSM. In step 2, attitudes toward SSP were added to the model.

### **Results**

#### ***Demographics***

The final sample consisted of 790 participants (202 male and 568 female) with age ranging from 18 to 78 ( $M=30.01$ ,  $SD=12.49$ ). The majority (68.5%) of participants identified as completely heterosexual. Just under half the population were Atheist or Agnostic (49%), and just over 70% of the sample had an undergraduate education or higher. Participants were recruited from across Australia, but most were from South Australia (87.5%). The current study found a strong positive skew in attitudes toward SSM with just over 86% of the sample either strongly agreeing, agreeing, or somewhat agreeing. Table 1 (over page) provides additional demographic information and distributions for all variables.

#### ***Preliminary Analysis***

Bivariate correlations and independent samples t-tests were used as preliminary analysis for key study variables. Results indicate that, as hypothesised, older people, people with less lesbian, gay men and bisexual friends, and higher levels of religiosity were significantly less supportive of SSM. Contrary to hypothesis 1, higher education indicated more prejudice against SSM (See Table 2 over page for the correlations). Independent samples t-test showed that men ( $M=2.43$ ,  $SD=1.94$ ) were significantly more prejudice than women ( $M=1.64$ ,  $SD=1.35$ ),  $t(768)=5.31$ ,  $p<.001$ . People who were married ( $M=2.42$ ,  $SD=1.89$ ) were significantly more prejudice toward SSM than those who were not ( $M=1.66$ ,  $SD=1.38$ ),  $t(778)=5.20$ ,  $p<.001$ , and parents ( $M=2.30$ ,  $SD=1.86$ ) were significantly more prejudice than non-parents ( $M=1.66$ ,  $SD=1.37$ ),  $t(778)=4.71$ ,  $p<.001$ .



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Table 1.  
*Demographic variables and Attitude Scores*

Variable	Mean	SD	%	N <sup>a</sup>
Age (range 18-78)	30.01	12.49		785
Sex				
Male			25.6	202
Female			71.9	568
Education				
High School Education or less			11.6	92
Additional Training (TAFE, etc.)			15.4	122
Undergraduate			57.6	455
Postgraduate			14.1	111
Sexual Orientation				
Completely Heterosexual			68.5	541
Sexual Minority			30.3	239
Married (answered yes)			25.2	199
Parent (answered yes)			29.4	232
GLB Friend (answered yes)			94.3	784
Religious Denomination				
Atheist/Agnostic			49	387
Christian			21.8	172
Catholic			11.8	93
Buddhist/Spiritualist			9.9	78
Other			6.3	50
Importance of Religious Beliefs	3.28	3.07		783
SSP	1.93	1.46		790
SSM	1.85	1.56		790
MHS	18.08	8.71		790
MHS-L	18.21	9.03		790
MHS-G	17.95	8.61		790

*Note.* N<sup>a</sup>= 790. GLB= Gay, lesbian and bisexual person. SSP= Same-sex parenting. SSM=Same-sex marriage. MHS= Modern Homonegativity Scale. MHS-L= Modern Homonegativity Scale- Lesbians. MHS-G= Modern Homonegativity Scale- Gay men.

Table 2.  
*Bivariate Correlations, Means and Standard Deviations of Predictor Variables*

<b>Predictor</b>	Age	Education	GLB Friends	Religiosity	MHS	SSM	<b>Mean (SD)</b>
Age	—	.109**	.002	.296***	.209***	.283***	30.01 (12.49)
Education		—	-.022	.151***	-.013	.146***	4.73 (.89)
GLB Friends			—	-.080**	-.206***	-.100**	8.58 (13.49)
Religiosity				—	.363***	.538***	3.28 (3.07)
MHS					—	.698***	18.08 (8.71)

\*\* $p < .05$ . \*\*\*  $p < .001$ . All two-tailed tests

*Note.* GLB = Gay Men, lesbian and bisexual. MHS = Modern Homonegativity Scale. SSM = Attitudes Toward Same-Sex Marriage (dependent variable).

### **Multivariate Analysis**

A hierarchical multiple regression analysis was conducted to determine whether attitudes toward same-sex parenting (SSP) significantly adds to the prediction of attitudes toward same-sex marriage (SSM) after controlling for the influence of other predictors. Preliminary analyses were conducted to ensure no violation of the assumptions of normality, linearity, multicollinearity, and homoscedasticity.

Age, sex, education, lesbian, gay men and bisexual friends, marital status, parental status, sexual orientation, religiosity and MHS were entered in Step 1 and collectively explained 61% of the variance in attitudes toward SSM,  $F(9, 756) = 136.36, p < .001$ . The addition of SSP to the model significantly improved the prediction of SSM by 17%,  $F$  of change  $(1, 755) = 585.91, p < .001$ .

In the final model, only MHS, lesbian, gay men and bisexual friends, religiosity, education, and attitudes toward SSP remained statistically significant. Attitudes toward SSP had the highest beta value ( $\beta = .66, p < .001$ ). Table 3 provides the results of the hierarchical multiple regression.

### **Discussion**

The aim of this study was to explore attitudes toward SSM in Australia and extend past research by examining the influence of attitudes toward SSP on attitudes toward SSM. When the relationship between predictor variables and attitudes toward SSM were considered independently, it was found that sex, religiosity, contact with lesbians, gay men and bisexuals, age, education, marital status, parental status, and attitudes towards lesbians and gay men were all significant predictors of attitudes toward SSM. In the final analysis, people who reported higher levels of religiosity, less lesbian, gay men and bisexual friends and were older or male significantly predicted negative attitudes toward SSM. Contrary to prediction, people with higher levels of education were associated with a less accepting attitude toward SSM. In the final model, attitudes toward lesbians and gay men, religiosity, number of lesbian, gay men and bisexual friends, education, and attitudes toward SSP accounted for 78% of the variance in attitudes towards SSM. Attitudes toward SSP uniquely accounted for 17% of the variance, which indicates that attitudes toward SSP may be influencing attitudes toward SSM, above and beyond that of the other predictors. Given that

Table 3.  
Results of the Hierarchical Regression (N=790)

Variable	Model 1			Model 2		
	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>	$\beta$	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>	$\beta$
Age	.01	.00	.09**	.00	.00	.01
Sex	-.14	.08	-.04	-.02	.06	-.01
Education	.15	.04	.09***	.10	.03	.06**
GLB Friends	.00	.00	.02	.01	.00	.04**
Religiosity	.16	.01	.30***	.08	.01	.16***
Marital Status	.03	.11	.01	.10	.08	.03
Parental Status	.06	.12	.02	.02	.09	.01
Sexual Orientation	-.06	.09	-.02	-.02	.07	-.01
MHS	.10	.01	.58***	.03	.01	.17***
SSP				.71	.03	.66***
$R^2$	.62			.79		
<i>F</i> of change in $R^2$	135.60			593.92		

\*\* $p < .05$ . \*\*\*  $p < .001$ . All two-tailed tests

Note. GLB = Gay Men, lesbian and bisexual. MHS = Modern Homonegativity Scale. SSP = Attitudes Toward Same-Sex Marriage (dependent variable).

only three of the demographic predictors remained significant in the second step highlights the value of examining known predictors of attitudes toward SSM, to control for the influence of such predictors.

The results of this study were consistent with findings from previous research in this field except for education, which was found to be negatively correlated with attitudes toward SSM, contradicting past findings (Ellison, Acevedo & Ramos-Wada, 2011; Olsen, Cadge, & Harrison, 2006; Smith & Gordon, 2005). The association between higher education and more negative attitudes toward SSM could be due to changing socialisation patterns among different age cohorts, in that younger people (regardless of education) are becoming more tolerant of diversity (Becker, 2006; Lewis & Gosset, 2008). Furthermore, additional analysis confirmed that people in the higher education bracket, on average still scored among

the positive end of the scale; therefore, generational effects may be reflected in this study. It should also be noted that a majority of the sample had a higher level of education and this may have affected the influence of education. Additionally, attitudes towards lesbians and gay men and having lesbian and gay men friends also remained significant in the final model, which is congruent with previous research (Hopwood & Conners, 2002). This supports the theory that interaction between people and minority groups can reduce prejudice (Lewis, 2011).

Not surprisingly, people who indicated that religion was an important factor in influencing their personal beliefs were more likely to hold negative attitudes toward SSM, and this is a well-established correlate in the literature (e.g., Edwards, 2007; Olsen, Cadge, & Harrison, 2006). This finding also supports previous findings that religiosity is more important in

shaping attitudes and political stance on SSM, than perhaps affiliation with a particular denomination (Ellison, Acevedo, & Ramos-Wada, 2011). Additionally, religiosity was found to be a better predictor of attitudes toward SSM than other demographic variables, which is also consistent with past research (Ellison, Acevedo, & Ramos-Wada, 2011; Olsen, Cadge, & Harrison, 2006).

Despite the positive progression in acceptance for same-sex sexuality in Australia (Kelly, 2001), results from this study indicate that some reservations regarding SSM still exist. The current study lends support to the hypothesis that negative attitudes toward SSM may be impacted by attitudes toward SSP (Meezan & Rauch, 2005). Research suggests that those opposed to SSM may believe that opposite-sex marriages can produce a balance of gender roles for children, benefits that are believed to be non-existent in same-sex relationships (Meezan & Rauch, 2005). One of the underlying reasons for the current findings regarding SSM may be a concern for the well-being of children raised by same-sex couples, in that they may believe that legalising SSM would increase the legal accessibility for same-sex couples to raise/adopt children. Future research should seek to further explore this issue to determine how and whether SSP values and beliefs are influencing SSM policy debate.

### ***Limitations***

While this study has contributed to the substantive knowledge base, several limitations should be considered in the interpretation of the findings. First, some ambiguity may exist in the term *friend*. When participants were asked to indicate the number of lesbian, gay men and bisexual friends, it is unknown how they conceptualised it. For example, some people may consider all the lesbian, gay men and bisexual people they know on Facebook as "friends," whereas others may only consider people who provide some form of emotional support to be a friend. Therefore, an accurate representation of number of lesbian,

gay men and bisexual friends may not have been achieved; however, allowing for individual interpretation of "friends" was valued over the researcher's definition of friendship.

Second, use of a convenience sampling limits generalisability. Selection bias and disproportionality in some demographics (e.g., sex, age, and education) has occurred. For example, higher education (undergraduate or post-graduate degree) accounted for over 70% of the sample in terms of education, which is not representative of the wider population of Australia, with only 24% of Australians aged 15-64 holding an undergraduate degree or higher (ABS, 2011).

Third, attitudes toward SSM and SSP were measured using single item indicators, which may have excluded important elements of attitudes toward SSP. A scale that measures different aspects of attitudes toward SSP may provide further understanding. Finally, the sample was predominantly from South Australia; thus these results may not reflect cultural and attitudinal differences between states/territories throughout Australia where legislation for same-sex couples differs (De Vaus & Gray, 2004). Future studies should seek to assess attitudes toward SSM across Australia. Nonetheless, the results provide important implications for future research, and this study extends previous research by recruiting members of the community, instead of relying solely on a university sample (Camilleri & Ryan, 2006; Ellis, Kitzinger & Wilkinson, 2003).

### ***Implications***

Although a positive shift in attitudes towards gay men and lesbian rights is evident, current research demonstrates that negative attitudes still exist. This is reflected in the current marriage policy in place in Australia. Future research in this area should seek to explicitly explore attitudes toward SSP, including knowledge about SSP, degree of resistance to change for these attitudes and how they originate, in order to establish better understand-

ing of these attitudes and their influence on SSM. It may also be important to explore whether people believe that legalising SSM would lead to same-sex couples gaining greater access to legal adoption and parental rights, and if people associate being married with raising children. The focus of educational efforts should be on the benefits of legal recognition on children of same-sex couples, and the potential harm that may be caused by laws that prevent their parents from being legally married. This research may inform educational industries in an effort to educate the wider population about the injustice and potential harm being caused by the current marriage policy.

Same-sex parents are a socially stigmatised group in that those raising families are subject to prejudice, not only by the public, but influential social industries, legislators and the judicial system. This stigma negatively impacts same-sex couples and their children in terms of legal protections for SSP, including lack of familial protection, physical loss of custody, and policies prohibiting adoption rights (Australian Adoption Act, 2010; Patterson, 2005, 2009). For example, in the event of the separation between a same-sex couple who have a child together, the non-biological parent may not have access to custody rights and risks losing their child (Avery, et al., 2007). In addition to the effect of family values, love, and support on children within those families, a large part of a child's wellbeing relies on their own rights and that of their parents; however, familial, economic and legal insecurity caused by the current legislation compromises this. Research overwhelmingly indicates that children of SSP are not disadvantaged in terms of psychological and psychosocial wellbeing (Amato, 2012; Biblarz & Savci, 2010; Glodberg, 2010; Short, Riggs, Perlesz, Brown, & Kane, 2007). Patterson (2009) conducted a review of the research on the effect of SSP on the welfare of children raised in those families over the past four decades. It was found that children who are raised by SSP exhibit no difference to children raised by opposite-sex parents in terms of gender identity, gender-role

behaviour, sexual orientation, personal development (e.g., moral judgment, intelligence, self-concept etc.), understanding social relationships and mental health. Additionally, research has found that over 74% of same-sex couples with young children in Australia would prefer to be legally married due to the benefits of social recognition and the reduction of stigma relating to SSP (Dane, Masser, MacDonald, & Duck, 2010; Ramos, Goldberg & Badgett, 2009). Understanding the factors that influence attitudes towards SSM and SSP more thoroughly is valuable in establishing approaches to reduce biases against same-sex couples who are raising children.

Future research may seek to determine how altered attitudes toward SSP impacts attitudes toward SSM. For example, a pre-test/post-test design can be employed, whereby attitudes toward both SSP and SSM are measured before and after an intervention involving a media presentation that provides information about current issues for lesbians and gay men. The presentation could include information about inequalities of SSP and societal discrimination of same-sex couples along with evidence about the relative similarities between SSP and opposite-sex parenting on the wellbeing of children raised in those families. This design would be important in providing insight into whether educating people on issues of human rights, discrimination and the inequalities faced by many lesbian and gay men individuals/couples, would have an impact on their attitude toward SSM. If education alone can impact attitudes, then these kinds of interventions may be used to influence public awareness through various systems, including the media and the broader educational system. These efforts may help reduce prejudice and contribute to the legal recognition of SSM in Australia.

In conclusion, this study has demonstrated the importance of understanding attitudes toward SSM and extends current knowledge about sexual prejudice in Australia. By examining predictors of negative attitudes towards SSM, a better understanding of beliefs sur-

rounding marriage inequality and influences of sexual prejudice in Australia can be achieved. Additionally, this knowledge may help to further identify and address issues of social inequality that many same-sex couples experience. This study addressed a gap in the literature and has illustrated the need to further explore this phenomenon to promote social justice for same-sex couples and parents.

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## BOOK REVIEW

GARETH J. TREHARNE

Connell, R. (2011). *Confronting equality: Gender, knowledge and global change*. Sydney: Allen & Unwin. ISBN 978-1-74237-668-4.

The latest collection of Raewyn Connell's writing addresses inequalities and neoliberalism in a global context, rooted in her native Australia. Using 'equality' in the title is a confronting way of shifting the focus from mere recognition of the negativity of inequalities. Connell lays out a theoretical and methodological basis for investigating the ways in which addressing 'equality' can involve members of the often passive groupings that are the beneficiaries of inequalities (i.e., men/boys, northern hemisphere dwellers, ethnic 'majorities' etc.). This process is not without sites of resistance, where people cling to inequality as 'the way things have always been', but thinking about equality turns the tables on deficit models that imply the struggle against inequality should be generated by the casualties of inequalities (i.e., women/girls, southern hemisphere dwellers, ethnic 'minorities' etc.).

The collection is underpinned by Connell's critical perspective on the neoliberal agenda and concerns arising from the argument that "we now live in a world where neoliberal agendas frame the policies of all major states" (p. 117), particularly Australia and New Zealand. Connell's arguments emphasise ways in which market forces pervade many spheres of existence, often imposing reformations of gendered practices, a crack through which lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) issues can be seen. The methodological focus includes consideration of a social constructionist "ontoformativity of social practices" (p. 4), but Connell also explicitly uses knowledge generated from a realist perspec-

tive, arguing that achieving social justice will require means that appeal to pragmatists of academic and political circles. To support this approach, Connell provides a countering of the critique that realist research involves an artificial detachment of researcher and community: "Objectivity, as the attitude that leads to accurate adequate knowledge of people and things, actually *requires engagement* with people and things" (p. 6, original emphasis).

Minority status has two distinct forms in this collection: the gendered nature of the minority of rulers (i.e., mostly men even under neoliberal agendas, or even more so); and, more subtly, those who come under umbrella terms for minority groupings such as LGBT. Connell's global atunement highlights the way that many minoritisations are location-specific (e.g., people of South Asian origins are not a minority in South Asia). In contrast, the only locations where those of us who identify as LGBT are perhaps in a majority are places such as 'gay resorts', 'gay villages', theatres and department stores. In this review I discuss the broad structure of Connell's framework for equality. This framework might be extrapolated to research investigating LGBT equalities: What might LGBT equalities look like? Who will these equalities involve, and how? Could LGBT equalities be achieved in ways that do not rely on suspending the many other axes of equality from confrontation? In short, how can the focus of equality be extended to questioning heterosexocentrism in addition to questioning patriarchy and Eurocentrism (seeing Europe as the norm, as opposed to the idea that a shared currency is a sterling idea)?

The start point in chapter 1 is the extensive challenge of confronting gender equality. Connell provides a history of the UN's work on women's issues and the place of men and boys in that work. Gay community responses to HIV/AIDS are used as a positive example of "men organizing around issues of gender and sexual politics" (p. 19) with a note about violence against gay men, but I wonder if more could be revealed by reviewing knowledge around (in)equality of labour and caring within gay/queer relationships or discourses of LGBT players of sports in relation to gender, for example. Connell foresees utopianist critiques of men's suspension of resistance to gender equality, and responds with passion about the "potential for action" (p. 23) that she predicts would "produce better lives for the majority of men in the long run" (p. 24).

In chapter 2, Connell overviews and discusses her ethnographic study of gender equality within five Australian public sector agencies. "Gender *denial*" (p. 36, original emphasis) is introduced as a discourse on the idealisation of "gender-neutral workplace[s]" (p. 37) wherein gender inequalities are organisationally externalised and gender-based discrimination is purposefully minimised even though the agencies "remain[ed] gendered institutions" (p. 31), often with gendered departments that were "very like the typing pools of the past" (p. 38). A reconfigured (quasi-)gendered division is highlighted: that of women with dependent children who are not treated equitably to (straight) men and (any) women without children or with full childcare. I am not sure, however, where gay men fit within this division. That quibble aside, this reworking emphasises idealisation of 'the individual' within neoliberalism, which pays less heed to that individual's gender than to their supposed ability to make rational choices.

Chapter 3 turns to parenthood and neoliberal educational choices where "being a good parent means buying the best services for one's own children" (p. 56). A number of empirical examples are discussed, providing a global perspective. Connell proposes another recon-

figured gendered division in the form of mothers as personnel managers of work/home balance and fathers as investment managers of schooling. Likewise, social class divisions are reconfigured as the constraints that exist for those who cannot afford choice in market-driven educational services. Connell demonstrates how these divisions perpetuate uncompetitive services such as poor schooling. Class-related policy is consequently replaced by "shrill 'family values' rhetoric" (p. 56), which overlooks the reality that unconstrained choice is the equality that neoliberalism cannot provide to all. LGBT parents are absent from this chapter, but would arguably be subject to the same demands of the good parent-manager identity concurrent to the challenges faced by having what might be considered diverse family compositions.

The focus on schooling and social class extends into chapter 4, in which Connell overviews and discusses her ethnographic study of families attending four Australian schools within urban and rural areas of lower socio-economic status. The families are historically placed in a time of educational 'reform' around vocational and higher education, but Connell describes how these parents' "projects" (p. 61; i.e., their priorities for and negotiations with their children) centre around attempting to ensure their children complete school. These projects are differentiated from the neoliberal ideal of strategic choices of school, and (more so) within school, as precursors to entrance into higher education and professionalised careers. The students are not devoid of choice, but Connell highlights a lack of guidance and practicalities of timetabling as limitations on effective choice. "White flight" (p. 71) is mooted as a process that might speed ethnic segregation in the face of poor schooling (among other explanations such as violence and disruptive peers at certain schools). LGBT parents are absent again (perhaps linked to class distribution or willingness to participate in research); such parents may again hold further insights into schooling choices intertwined with segregative issues.

Chapter 5 turns to the “good teacher”. Connell outlines how prescribed teaching ‘competencies’ have been formulated without consultancy of the primary stakeholders: teachers, children and parents. These competencies flow back to those in training, with the risk of generating “technicians” (p. 85) competent only in learnt competencies. Lists of competencies vary across authorities but focus on individual teachers (e.g., being “calm and approachable”, p. 78, as opposed to agitated and scary). Institutional functions such as on-the-job training and teaching to “hidden curricular[a]” (p. 83) are thereby overlooked. Social variations of students are mentioned (e.g., gender, “social class background”, p. 83), as is bullying; but sexual orientation of students and teachers is not discussed. Another tenet of the “competent teacher” (p. 78) under neoliberalism is perhaps to divorce them from family circumstance that inform the richest examples they might teach with.

In chapter 6, Connell presents two studies on “intellectual labour” in a broad sense. The combination of life history interviews and survey data provide insights into enactment of neoliberal ideals within academia, caring professions, and (less caring) corporations. Connell’s analysis springboards from an interviewee who posits that intellectuals have fallen behind in recent times, no longer achieving feats such as the building of the great pyramids and the sending of man [sic] to the moon of Earth. Are these examples of moments that “stimulat[ed] intellectual activity” as Connell suggests (p. 90)? Did progress in written (hieroglyphic) representation follow or precede the building of the pyramids? Are intellectual workers ever a “powerful force for change” (p. 102)? Or are we caught in the perpetual rhetoric of knowledge and services that never changes beyond the latest gadgets through which we gather data and disseminate “warranted statements” and “warranted decisions” under Connell’s differentiation (p. 94)? With two strokes of the pen ‘workers’ becomes something different. “Quasi-globalization” is introduced as a term to highlight how a dominant discourse on globaliza-

tion of intellectual labour conceal its continuation of imperial social science wherein the intellectual labour is carried out in (or funded by) those within the (western/northern) “metropole” on those outside who need to be understood and provided with intervention. Connell puts this succinctly as: “It would be nice to have a more *global* globalization!” (p. 101, original emphasis) not forgetting that intellectuals benefit from having “the right to pursue truth[s] wherever the search leads” (p. 102).

In chapter 7, Connell takes an historical angle on equality and the founding of sociology “in a [temporal and spatial] context of global imperialism” (p. 105). Many arguments about the practices of sociology could be applied to LGBT psychological research as a social science, and Connell provides a neat definition of quantitative science as “speculative generalizations supported by a large body of information” (p. 104). Connell differentiates three phases in the history of 19<sup>th</sup>-20<sup>th</sup> century social science: i) the phase when social science theory-making was seen as occurring in the metropole and data-gathering as occurring in the colonies (e.g., census-taking, ethnographies); ii) the phase when social science turned its focus inwards on social groupings and conflicts within the metropole; iii) the phase when international comparisons that were “funded and managed from the metropole” (p. 109) became the favoured methodology with an objective of global ‘implantation’ of (post-)modern theories via grants for students *from* or *in* the colonies. Connell calls for a ‘mosaic epistemology’, in which “distinct systems of concept and data, grounded in local cultural traditions” (p. 115), and a “multi-centred world sociology” (p. 116), to bring more democracy to the current neoliberal world. Connell’s emphasis remains on equality by gender and hemisphere, but there are some inherent parallels in the history of research on sexuality in the metropole and the colonies (e.g., Brickell, 2011). This raises some interesting questions about equality for individuals of diverse sexualities: How have

indigeneity and LGBT issues intersected in recent centuries? And now?

In chapters 8 and 9, Connell interweaves a continuance of her thesis on equality with two biographies: philosopher/politician Paulin Hountondji (who was born in Benin in Africa and studied in Paris) and philosopher/lawyer Antonio Negri (who was born in Italy and taught in Paris in exile). It is evident that, on the whole, Connell has considerable respect for these male thinkers (I was going to preface 'male' with 'straight' but that would be an assumption). Connell uses Hountondji's critique of ethnophilosophy to discuss the practices of knowledge generation (at the three levels of epistemology, institutions and individuals) and the problems of theorising from the metropole that cultures out in the colonies are primitive, static and discoverable. Hountondji makes use of the term "extroversion" (p. 126) to describe the adoption of this colonial worldview by those within, and native to, the colonies. I was surprised to see that Connell refers to Hountondji as "African" (p. 121) as does Hountondji himself. I had previously thought myself post-colonially astute for pointing out that Africa is a continent rather than a single country, but the titles of Hountondji's books refer to an "African philosophy" that perhaps transcends borders. Negri also had to transcend borders when he lived in exile after accusations of murder (subsequently dropped) and conviction for incitement to insurrection related to his Marxist-informed writings (for which he eventually served several years in prison). Connell explains how Negri's theorising predicted neoliberalism as a response to the paradoxical dependency of capitalism on labour and "the failure of previous capitalist strategies" (p. 152). Within Negri's thesis, the "Multitude [s]" (p. 140) can resist capitalism through "creative labour... [which is] based on intellect and emotion" (p. 141). Capitalism is thus seen as driven in a bottom-up fashion that is argued will inevitably lead the ruling "Empire[s]" to self-destruct. Fine by me as long as there are still shops selling nice things. These chapters provide an insightful introduction to

Hountondji and Negri, but links to a LGBT agenda are again evident only by their absence (or via extrapolation). Could Hountondji's conceptualisation of "extroversion" be applied to LGBT theorising and used to further understandings of LGBT equalities? How do LGBT individuals/groups figure as part of Negri's "Multitude" who resist and lead social struggles?

Connell concludes in chapter 10 with a look to the future after a look back over Australia's political past from her lifetime of labour activist academia. Connell takes a damning position on the global assimilation of the neoliberal agenda, which has led to wide uptake of "corporate-funded media politics" (p. 158). There are nods to "the Gay Liberation movement" (pp. 155-156) and "deconstructive queer politics" (p. 158) among other facets of social justice and political change but it left me wanting more history, analysis, pragmatics and prospects. Connell's collection stimulates, in equal measure, both fear of neoliberalism and hope of alternatives. It also stimulates deep thinking about neoliberalism, and is perhaps best viewed as a rich theoretical scaffold that is ripe to be applied to LGBT equalities, which will hopefully germinate many lines of application. What would Kylie say? "We walk together hand in hand" (Stock, Aitken, & Waterman, 1987) is perhaps fitting.

### Author note

Gareth Treharne is a senior lecturer in the Department of Psychology at the University of Otago, Dunedin, Aotearoa/New Zealand. His research includes investigating constructions of sexuality and patients' experience of living with chronic illness including the role of neoliberalist rhetoric in treatment decisions with a focus on both medications and 'healthy lifestyles'. He once tried to explain neoliberalism to Prof. Connell at a conference (Treharne et al., 2011); she listened very politely. He has lived in Aotearoa/New Zealand for 5 years and often points out that he is not really European. Email: gtreharn@psy.otago.ac.nz

### References

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## Preparation, submission and publication guidelines

Types of articles that we typically consider:

A)

Empirical articles (6000 word max)  
Theoretical pieces  
Commentary on LGBTI issues and psychology

Research in brief: Reviews of a favourite or troublesome article/book chapter that you have read and would like to comment on

B)

Conference reports/conference abstracts  
Practitioner's reports/field notes  
Political/media style reports of relevant issues

Book reviews (please contact the Editor for a list of books available & review guidelines)  
Promotional material for LGBT relevant issues

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Each submission in section A should be prepared for blind peer-review if the author wishes. If not, submissions will still be reviewed, but the identity of the author may be known to the reviewer. Submissions for blind review should contain a title page that has all of the author(s) information, along with the title of the submission, a short author note (50 words or less), a word count and up to 5 key words. The remainder of the submission should not identify the author in any way, and should start on a new page with the submission title followed by an abstract and then the body of the text. Authors who do not require blind review should submit papers as per the above instructions, the difference being that the body text may start directly after the key words.

Each submission in section B should contain the author(s) information, title of submission (if relevant), a short author note (50 words or less) and a word count, but need not be prepared for blind review.

All submissions must adhere to the rules set out in the Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association (fifth edition), and contributors are encouraged to contact the Editor should they have any concerns with this format as it relates to their submission. Spelling should be Australian (e.g., 'ise') rather than American ('ize'), and submissions should be accompanied with a letter stating any conflicts of interest in regards to publication or competing interests. Footnotes should be kept to a minimum. References should be listed alphabetically by author at the end of the paper. For example:

Journal Articles: Riggs, D.W. (2004). The politics of scientific knowledge: Constructions of sexuality and ethics in the conversion therapy literature. *Lesbian & Gay Psychology Review*, 5, 16-24.

Books: Kitzinger, C. (1987). *The social construction of lesbianism*. London: Sage.

Edited Books: Coyle, A. & Kitzinger, C. (Eds.) (2002). *Lesbian & gay psychology*. Oxford: BPS Blackwell.

Book Chapters: MacBride-Stewart, S. (2004). Dental dams: A parody of straight expectations in the promotion of 'safer' lesbian sex. In D.W. Riggs & G.A. Walker (Eds.), *Out in the antipodes: Australian and New Zealand perspectives on gay and lesbian issue in psychology* (pp.393-416). Perth: Brightfire Press.

References within the text should be listed in alphabetical order separated by a semi-colon, page numbers following year. For example:

(Clarke, 2001; Peel, 2001; Riggs & Walker, 2004)

(Clarke, 2002a; b) (MacBride-Stewart, 2004, p. 398)

Authors should avoid the use of *sexist*, *racist* and *heterosexist language*. Authors should follow the guidelines for the use of non-sexist language provided by the American Psychological Society.

Papers should be submitted in Word format: title bold 14 points all caps left aligned, author 12 points all caps left aligned, abstract 10 points italics justified, article text 10 points justified, footnotes 9 points justified.

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