Title
Heterosexuality and Race During the Australian Same-Sex Marriage Postal Survey

Abstract
This paper examines the production of sexual citizenship in Australia through a study of some representations of heterosexuality produced and circulated during the recent same-sex marriage postal survey. We highlight three themes observed in these representations: authenticity, authority and the occupation of space. Through a reflection on how sexual citizenship is realised via depictions of heterosexuality we argue that what comes into focus is how sexual citizenship rests on normative understandings of class and race. We study heterosexuality as depicted in the survey material as an example of how Australian sexual citizenship relies on raced and classed fantasies of life (such as the ideologically-charged space of the suburban backyard) to deepen an understanding of gay marriage beyond simple binaries of progressive and conservative.

Keywords
Citizenship
Marriage
Heterosexuality
Race
Class
Australia
The Australian same-sex marriage postal survey led to a proliferation of representations of heterosexuality in both ‘Yes’ and ‘No’ campaigns alike. Held between September and November 2017, the survey unsurprisingly provided a powerful platform for claims from conservative politicians that two biological parents were a “gold standard” (ABC 2017) for childrearing, and declared relationships between men and women as “fundamentally unique” (Knaus and Karp 2017) in the national media. Those in support of same-sex marriage also drew upon representations of heterosexuality. The official ‘Yes’ campaign, Australian Marriage Equality (AME), repeatedly highlighted the importance heterosexual endorsement of gay and lesbian family members. The representations produced during the same-sex marriage postal survey thus sought to establish a consensus concerning claims to sexual citizenship inherited by virtue of a publicly recognised same-sex relationship.

This paper considers both the conditions for and effects of the reliance on representations of white, male, heterosexual authority to establish political legitimacy during the survey, which feminist and queer perspectives have otherwise called into question. As a form of state power that is both a “compulsory system and an intrinsic comedy” (Butler 1999, 85) heterosexuality offers crucial insights into the performative dimensions of citizenship. The fact that it featured so prominently in media produced during the survey means that it offers a crucial window on the implications of same-sex marriage in Australia. Indeed, the strident assertion that heterosexuality is a natural norm — as anthropologists and historians have identified — often arises at moments of profound social, political and economic transformation

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1 While our analysis of heterosexuality during the postal survey joins a significant body of contemporary feminist critique of same-sex marriage (Edwards, 2007; Walker, 2009; Richardson-Self, 2012), less attention has been paid to the co-construction of gender, sexuality and race in Australia. Valuable engagement with same-sex marriage might also emerge out of Australian feminist engagement with the historical relationship between marriage and patriarchal authority in that context (see for example Lake, 1994, 29).
We have found that representations of heterosexuality during the survey highlighted such a political position that rested both on the defensive assertion and anxiety of racial and class-marked forms of authority. While race and class may at first glance not appear to be central to a debate about same-sex marriage, usually considered in terms of sexuality and to a lesser degree in terms of gender, we have found the intersection between these to be a crucial discourse through which political and moral authority was constituted during the survey in Australia.

In order to consider the co-construction of gender, sexuality, race and class we primarily engage with Aileen Moreton-Robinson’s (2015, 36) consideration of Australian citizenship in terms of “patriarchal white sovereignty” established through “violence and transgression, voyeurism, pleasure, and pride.” The illegal act of possession at the founding of the Australian nation-state, as Moreton-Robinson writes, was at its core about establishing “who counts as full moral and political persons” — a discourse which presents “white heterosexual men” as rightful bearers of authority over racialised others (143). An “anxiety of dispossession” arises through increasingly strident claims to authenticity whenever the boundaries of the nation as a “white possession” (152) is threatened — “their” not-belonging is a necessary yet unsettling condition of “our” belonging (see also Ahmed 2000b).

We have identified three themes through our engagement with the work of Australian feminist and critical race scholars: authority, authenticity and space. While these are abiding themes in Australian settler colonialism, as we shall see, they are also central to the performative force of heterosexuality deployed during the survey. While racialised anxieties sometimes surfaced in explicit ways (Brown 2017), such assertions appeared less often in the

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2 For example, Jonathan Katz (1995, 47) shows how heterosexuality shifted from an association with sexual excess, to a way to justify increasingly common middle-class practices of sex for pleasure throughout the West in the context of rapid economic changes.
guise of an Australian version of “homonationalism” (Puar 2007) than as a durable discourse linking assimilationist visions of contemporary Australian citizenship and belonging to sexuality. While not necessarily deliberate, the terms set by this discourse made it difficult to talk about the relationship between race and class, and gender and sexuality, in anything but impeded terms.

In the following section we introduce the context for the postal survey, providing a brief narrative about the conditions under which political support for same-sex marriage arose in Australia. We then situate same-sex marriage as one discourse embedded within longer assimilationist histories linking the performance of heterosexuality through marriage, to race and class as central conditions of Australian citizenship. We provide an overview of how the survey appeared structured by enduring anxieties over authority, authenticity and space, and analyse a number of representations via these themes. In conclusion, we suggest that forms of political authority ceded to heterosexuality during the survey led to an impoverished possibility for engaging with other potential ways to imagine citizenship and belonging.

The Postal Survey

The same-sex marriage postal survey was conducted by the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) between 12 September and 7 November 2017. Although contested as an appropriate method for accomplishing same-sex marriage, in August 2017 the conservative Australian Liberal government fulfilled an election promise by instructing the ABS to undertake a survey that would gauge support for changing the marriage law to include same-sex couples.\(^3\) The ABS prepared and posted a survey which asked one question to every Australian listed on the electoral roll: “Should the law be changed to allow same-sex couples to marry?” along

\(^3\) The reason for holding the postal survey was not legislative: unlike in Ireland, where marriage law is defined in the constitution and thus required a referendum to change, Australian marriage law is able to be changed through parliamentary process. Rather, the main justification given by the Prime Minister for the postal survey was to “give all Australians a say” on the issue (Prime Minister of Australia 2017).
with a requirement to answer either ‘Yes’ or ‘No’. Both AME and the official organisation for the ‘No’ campaign, the Coalition for Marriage, produced a large amount of media during the course of the survey. 4 Both paid for the production of television advertisements, billboards and posters, mailed out campaign materials, undertook doorknocking and telephone campaigns, and maintained active social media profiles.

Although a safeguards bill covered the length of the campaign and included the requirement to disclose the source of publically distributed material, there were no specific requirements for organisations to report details of expenditure or advertising (Australian Government 2017). 5 While difficult to verify the economic aspects of either campaign, both relied on volunteers, fundraising and corporate support as ways to mobilise their message. Furthermore, this exercise in constituency-building rested strongly on the use of social media, which enabled media like the television advertisements introduced in this paper to be shared and distributed online.

On 15 November 2017 the ABS announced the result that, from a total of 79.5% (12,727,920) Australians who voted in the survey, 61.6% voted ‘Yes’, and 38.4% voted No (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2017). 6 Given the majority ‘Yes’ response, the Marriage Amendment (Definition and Religious Freedoms) Act 2017 was tabled and subsequently

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4 The Coalition for Marriage is an organisation funded primarily by Christian churches, including a number of diocese of the Anglican and Catholic Churches, and the Australian Christian Lobby. Australian Marriage Equality is an activist group made up of diverse membership which has more recently focused on recruiting support and fundraising from corporate Australia (Christopher 2018).

5 While limited, the few details available about the production and circulation of material produced help to situate the survey within a wider context of Australian political culture. The most detailed information about advertising spending provided, reported in The Guardian newspaper, was an analysis undertaken by an advertising analytics firm of free-to-air television advertisements in Sydney, Perth, Brisbane, Melbourne and Adelaide between the 8 August and the 12 September (Karp 2017). According to this report, the Coalition for Marriage spent $312,000 and Australian Marriage Equality $64,000 on television advertising as of 12 September 2017. However, given that this was prior to the most active period for the production and circulation of media, between the arrival of survey forms from around 14 September and announcement of the results on 15 November, this offers only a limited understanding of the impact of either campaign.

6 Voting in Federal and State elections is compulsory for all Australians aged over 18 years of age, which helps to explain the high response rate to a voluntary postal survey. In comparison to the 79.5% turnout in Australia, approximately 61% of Irish voters participated in the 2015 referendum on same-sex marriage and 59% of eligible Californian voters participated in Proposition 8 in 2008.
debated in Parliament. To joyous scenes, including a rendition of an unofficial anthem often associated with a commitment to multicultural diversity by spectators in the public gallery, the bill passed the House of Representatives by a large majority on 7 December. The law was changed to allow same-sex couples to marry on 8 December 2017, with existing marriages conducted overseas recognised and new marriages able to be registered from 9 December 2017 (Commonwealth of Australia 2017).

Most popular commentary produced during the survey has focused on the way that forms of gender or sexual difference was either elided or given heightened prominence. Moreover, feminist and queer critiques of same-sex marriage in Australia have tended to focus on the normalising aspects of gender and sexuality that it informs (Edwards, 2007; Walker, 2009; Richardson-Self, 2012). Focusing on representations of heterosexuality that circulated in the mass media, by contrast, enables a better understanding of the way that the survey provided a platform for normative visions of citizenship for progressive and conservative political positions alike. Our analysis of the material produced during the survey reveals race and class as crucial if often submerged parts of normative visions of citizenship. In the following section we address the historical relationship between heterosexuality, class and race in Australia. In doing so a picture emerges of the ways that heterosexuality serves as a durable arrangement through which white, masculine authority sustains its privileged position — an alluring discourse for progressive and conservative visions of citizenship alike.

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7 Race sometimes emerged in explicit ways, for example, in a handful of opinion pieces about the experience of being gay and Aboriginal (see for example Shaw 2017; Clarke 2017), and stories about an Aboriginal activist group (“Blackfullas for Marriage Equality: Meet the Aboriginal Aussies Fighting for a ‘Yes’ Vote” 2017). However, discussion of race in the mainstream media during the postal survey was usually limited to clumsy attempts to analogue same-sex marriage and indigenous struggles for civil rights (Schipp 2017; “Szubanski Challenges Archbishop in Q&A Same-Sex Marriage Episode” 2017).
Marriage, Class and Race in Australia

Race and class are central to histories of sexuality in Australia (see Bongiorno 2012). As Frank Bongiorno writes, for example, middle class concerns in late 19th century Australian cities crystallised around anxieties about the limited availability of domestic space—particularly the notion that a lack of privacy in lower class homes was leading to “sexual depravity” (42) among children who lived in these crowded quarters. In this and other accounts, heterosexuality emerges as something which cannot be disentangled from economic and social transformations, which produces a variety of contradictory expectations of what counts as the competent performance of gender and sexuality (see also Connell 2005, 103, 148). Furthermore, feminist theorists have established race and class as crucial coordinates of discourses of heterosexuality in a wide variety of colonial and postcolonial locations (see especially Stoler 1995).8 In the Australian context, while scholars have grappled with the recognition of indigenous land rights in the law (Povinelli 2007) and multicultural policies in the mass media (Ang and Stratton 2001), there has been little consideration of how other kinds of progressive politics are shaped by race, as Scott Moregensen (2011) and others have undertaken in the USA.

While histories of race in the USA cannot be extrapolated to the Australian context, this research does offer a useful starting point for considering the role that marriage plays in bestowing citizenship rights (Cott 2002; FRANKE 2015). Engaging directly in an historical comparison of marriage equality as a vehicle for obtaining citizenship among lesbian and gay groups on the one hand and African Americans on the other, Franke suggests that the “reinvention and redemption” (19) of marriage has enabled gays and lesbians to acquire

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8 See Ann Stoler’s (1995, 2009) influential reading of Foucault’s History of Sexuality to consider the way that colonial projects of defining gender and sexuality—both in the colony and the metropole—rested on attempts to establish the “facts” of racial difference. Perhaps with more relevance to the present article, Judith Butler (Butler 2008) has described the “civilizational” imperative that establishes the conditions for gender and sexual freedom in terms of the coercive and imperialist form of the nation-state (see also Povinelli 2006).
particular rights, but that access to that institution has offered no such normalising benefits to racial minorities, who may indeed support such legal reforms (Whitehead 2012). Indeed, as a “technology of neoliberal governance,” same-sex marriage reflects the overall texture of citizenship in the contemporary USA accruing through “unacknowledged economic and racial privilege” (126). Yet the specific contours of Australian settler colonial history — including the way that citizenship rights are bestowed by the state — mean that theoretical perspectives developed in the USA are not an entirely suitable way to contextualise historical rearrangements of race and sexual citizenship in the Australian setting.

The Australian colonies, with their particular mix of xenophobia directed towards non-British settlers and pathologisation of Aboriginal people, established various legal and social sanctions at the intersecton of marriage and race. With regards to Aboriginal people, the state adopted an “evolutionary logic” which manifested in conditions ranging from paternalistic “protection” (Ellinghaus 2001, 23) to outright violence, which persist in disparate state policies until the present day. For example, in the late 19th and throughout the 20th century, Aboriginal people’s capacity to marry was limited by punitive restrictions to the provision of state welfare in Victoria (Ellinghaus 2001) and to limitations on cohabitation between Asian men and Aboriginal women in Queensland (McGrath 2015). Although Aboriginal people have negotiated marriage on their own terms both within and outside of state rule since this time, the twin imperatives of economic advancement and active dispossession — sometimes framed in terms of a paternalistic logic of care — continues to structure the conditions on which Australian citizenship is granted (MORETON-ROBINSON 2015, 151).

In Australia, debates about legal impediments to marriage based on race during the 20th century did not proceed on the basis of extending choice or agency to indigenous people, but rather an overarching political commitment to protect white men’s “sovereignty” in their choice of marriage partner (McGrath 2015, 259). It is notable that these histories were
highlighted by same-sex marriage activists according to a narrative of progress, recasting one particular legal case — the state’s effort to prevent a white man from marrying an indigenous woman in the Northern Territory in 1959 — in order to make a claim that Aboriginal people had won an expanded set of citizenship rights via marriage at that time (Croome 2011). As Helen Brook (1997) argues, however, the logic on which political support for this case rested did not subvert but rather advanced “the coherence of marriage as a metaphor and strategy of assimilation.” In particular, a narrative of progress shrouded a case which rested on asserting the dominance of white men in their choice of marriage partner, eliding other forms of agency or negotiations in the realms of intimacy at the time and downplaying the centrality of race and class to exclusion from citizenship.

The relationship between heterosexuality and citizenship in Australia is based on the historical arrangements of race and class introduced in this section. As such, normative visions of marriage — as a publicly recognisable performance and recognition of state-sanctioned sexuality — are shaped in fundamental ways by exclusionary and assimilationist logics. In the case of same-sex marriage, representations of heterosexuality served as a way to provide a limited vision of the form that sexual citizenship might take, as well as establish the terms on which it might be adjusted or calibrated in the name of inclusion.

**Representations of Heterosexuality**

During the survey, the performative force of heterosexuality appeared through representations of lavish white weddings, self-sacrificing mothers and authoritative fathers. These are forms of heterosexuality that rely on the class and race-based distinctions introduced thus far. In the Canadian setting, Lenon (2011, 353) has argued that the implicit racial normativity of same-sex marriage indicates how “whiteness” functions to establish an “enactment of racialized respectability that re-marks a proper relationship to sex and hence
national belonging.” The Australian experience of same-sex marriage shares similarities with this description — apparent both in claims by AME and other progressive groups about the respectability of gay and lesbians, and the readiness with which conservative politicians and commentators clamoured to speak on behalf of ethnic minorities that they claimed were naturally disposed to be ‘No’ voters.

Authenticity, authority and space offer a window on the representational work that heterosexuality was employed to do in service of same-sex marriage. As mentioned, the ‘Yes’ campaign bolstered claims to authenticity by the validation of (presumably) heterosexual kin. Mothers and fathers, grandmothers and grandfathers, brothers and sisters provided recognition of gay and lesbian family members’ right to belong. Authenticity emerged as central to the ‘No’ campaign as well: its media campaign centred on concerned and well-meaning mothers who asserted that their opinions had nothing to do with politics and everything to do with the genuineness of their beliefs. While certainly those who spoke on behalf of Australian citizens were mostly white male politicians, heterosexual authority appeared in diffuse guises, limiting the possibility to connect same-sex marriage to other ways of practicing and recognising citizenship.

In the television advertisements and online media introduced in the following sections, masculine figures frequently served in roles of authority. This is perhaps not surprising, considering that the very demands for “reasonable” and “polite” debate that politicians set as conditions binding public discourse during the survey served to silence dissenting voices, privileging heterosexual white men as the “universal liberal individual” (MORETON-ROBINSON 2015, 139). Moreover, references to space served to identify those individuals who might belong within norms of property-ownership as a key attribute of citizenship. In the representations in the following sections, the symbolics of space — framed
as the suburban backyard and the inner city neighbourhood — operated as a shorthand through which the primacy of heterosexual authority was condensed and deployed.

Authenticity, authority and space are by no means the only themes that emerged during the course of the survey, and we are not suggesting that the actors that produced the representations introduced in the following sections share political perspectives or positions. Rather, a perspective that attempts to map the shared vocabulary that emerged in representations produced during the survey allows us to locate it within its historical and cultural context. These three themes offer a starting point to consider the way that race and class were at times neutralised, and at times overdetermined, through reliance on symbolic forms of heterosexuality. This enables us to consider the forms of citizenship and belonging that were displaced or foreclosed in the process.

**Authenticity**

Like many representations of heterosexuality introduced in this article, the “Bachelor advertisement” rested on particular, confected claims to authenticity. Set to a Sarah Blasko cover of the Crowded House classic *Don’t Dream It’s Over*, the advertisement depicts a number of attractive gay and lesbian couples walking down the aisle, cheered on by family and friends (Australian Marriage Equality 2017a). This advertisement screened during the season finale of the television program *The Bachelor* on the commercial television network Channel Ten. It first aired on 14 September and was released on Facebook simultaneously (Campaign Brief Australia 2017a). The production costs for the advertisement were paid by Australian Marriage Equality and the advertising time for the first set of thirty second television commercials was provided for free by a commercial sponsor.

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9 The Bachelor is a reality television show which ironises the heterosexual ideal by pursuing the premise of true love while actually featuring serial dating and multiple partners in a reality competition TV format — a single man amidst a group of women vying to be his choice, who are gradually eliminated in groups and in pairs, as the show continues.
A crowdsourcing campaign raised over $100,000 to screen the advertisement again (Australian Marriage Equality 2017c). While initially a television advertisement, the success of the Bachelor advertisement rested on its wide circulation on social media. It was shared online with positive reviews, particularly for its effort to match television production values and the stylised authenticity of a reality program in the context of which it was screened. As some commentators noted, the widespread circulation of this material on Twitter and Facebook in particular was important to its success (Bennett 2017). This stems from the fact that the footage was presented as authentic, insomuch that it originated from actual weddings which had themselves been shared online in the first place. Sourced through a Facebook campaign from actual same sex weddings undertaken overseas (Little Black Book 2017), a ninety second version depicting “weddings from members of the worldwide LGBTI community who shared their special days” was released to celebrate the ‘Yes’ victory after the 15 November (Campaign Brief Australia 2017b).

The scenes of stereotypical weddings depicted in the advertisement are both ordinary and extraordinary; it depicts gay and lesbian couples participating in the kinds of white weddings previously only reserved for heterosexual couples. For example, in one scene, two fathers walk their daughters down the aisle to be married. While this certainly serves as a reminder of marriage as an exchange of women between families to secure the reproduction of economic wealth, it also shares the logic of other survey material that stresses the importance of recognition or validation by heterosexual parents and family members.

The Bachelor advertisement also stressed familial ties as not only based on blood but on the emotional ties of love. Billed as “an emotional appeal to all Australians” (Bennett 2017) it sought to shift attention away from the political and towards more emotional concerns. In doing so, AME sought to harness emergent forms of “public intimacy” (Berlant
2011) linking gay and lesbian relationships to the expression of love in the national media. As the advertising agency responsible for the video explained in one interview:

We felt like there was an opportunity to tell a more emotive, human story that would simply prove that all love is equal and getting married is a right that should be extended to all of us. It felt like someone needed to turn the issue from a political one into a human one. (Little Black Book 2017)

In this regard, the Bachelor advertisement sought to cultivate a public who could recognise homosexual desire in terms of love, and thus as affectively experienced in terms that are no different to heterosexual relationships. Relying on real footage enabled the advertising agency to represent “a beautiful authenticity that centred around love” (Little Black Book 2017) in a short advertisement.

The Bachelor advertisement was not the only material produced by AME that established its credentials through claims to authenticity. The other representation of heterosexuality produced by AME that we analyse, the “orange juice advertisement,” starred “Australia’s straightest family” (Hildebrand 2017). The success of the advertisement, this newspaper reporter suggests, was because it depicted a real family and presented them as representative of a normative Australian experience and thus palatable to a mainstream audience. The staged authenticity in both of these AME advertisements reveals how the performative authenticity of heterosexuality served as a vehicle for certain modes of authority which define the limits of national citizenship.

**Authority**

We have introduced the way in which representations of heterosexuality during the survey rested on claims to authenticity. We have described how authenticity was central to the way that the Bachelor advertisement deployed heterosexuality, both in terms of recognition by kin and the affective experience of bonds of love. In what follows, we argue that the conditions of the survey as a stage for circulating certain representations of heterosexuality provided the
conditions for an emphasis on authenticity-come-authority. When taken alongside the way that politicians framed their support for and against same-sex marriage in relation to heterosexuality, the representations produced by AME consolidated a narrow vision of citizenship, through which race and class are elided as central arbiters of political legitimacy.

Screened widely on television and online from 24 September 2017 (Australian Marriage Equality 2017b), the orange juice advertisement depicts an ordinary Australian backyard, in which a white husband and wife sit surveying their children, while they play with a bottle of orange juice. The wife speaks first: “We’ve always taught them how important it is to be fair, to treat everyone the same. That’s what our parents taught us, and that’s what this marriage equality thing is all about. Fairness. Treating everyone the same.” The husband interjects, adding: “And that’s all it’s about, fairness.” Looking at the children, inverting patriarchal authority momentarily, he continues: “We’ll be in trouble with them if we don’t.”

That the campaign for gay marriage drew on the capital of heterosexuality to advance its claims is in itself a fairly unremarkable insight, given the political expediency of aligning homosexual relationships with legally recognised national kinship structures. The mother in the orange juice advertisement herself pointed out that they were selected for these obvious reasons: “I guess it’s because we are so average. We’re a white, English-speaking, heterosexual family from the Eastern suburbs of Sydney” (Hildebrand 2017). The orange juice advertisement was released at a point during the survey where the ‘Yes’ campaign was seen to be struggling. According to conservative commentators, harnessing the power of the white picket fence to present gay and lesbian people as respectable citizens was the only strategic move to make.

AME, and indeed the ‘Yes’ campaign more generally, was not the only organisation which deployed representations of heterosexuality during the survey. A very different example
which drew on heterosexual authority was a “Straight Lives Matter” rally held by a nationalist, right-wing group based in Sydney called The Party for Freedom on 23 September 2017 (Folkes 2017). Given that it was a rally in support of the ‘No’ campaign, the political orientation and attitude towards sexuality obviously differs from the AME and other ‘Yes’ material. A key feature of the white nationalist critique of gay marriage was a focus on questions of authority and space. As one speaker at the rally made clear, opposition to gay marriage was grounded in the defense of national borders, real and imagined: “Together we will beat this [same-sex marriage] and any other threat to Australia” (Folkes 2017). Although homophobia is explicitly an aspect of the claims expressed by “Straight Lives Matter,” what is notable is that popular critiques of their homophobia focused on concerns about space as well, reflected in critique focused on the gender and class position of those claiming membership of the group. This was most evident in the way that opponents sought to discredit “Straight Lives Matter” by characterising them as embodying a type of working class masculinity which was out of place in inner-city Sydney. Indeed, this response validated one of the tactics of “Straight Lives Matter” — to characterise themselves as authentic citizens from the suburbs reasserting authority over a space where heterosexual authority had been displaced.

What is intriguing here is how progressive advocates for gay marriage and opponents of it alike braided together questions of authority and space in the expression of legitimate models of citizenship, albeit with different foci. In sum, on both sides of the debate gay marriage emerged as a proxy for a cultural politics of national belonging based on thoroughgoing adjudications of race and class. That supporters of gay marriage shifted the focus away from the groups’s racism demonstrates how, even when race was explicitly at the

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10 The choice of the phrase “Straight Lives Matter” is an offensive and racist parody of the “Black Lives Matter” movement in the USA. This is nested within a general appropriation and use of words and imagery usually associated with progressive politics, such as “straight pride.”

11 This information has been taken from observations of some of the reactions to this event that were expressed on various public Facebook groups on and around 23 September 2017.
centre of political debate, the progressive politics of sexuality characterising the ‘Yes’ campaign was unable to hold questions of sexuality and race together in a produce way during the survey. This was symptomatic of a broader elision of race in the politics of the survey, a demonstration of the complex ways in which race and class are mobilised in disputes over the meaning of Australian citizenship.

While differing in political position, recourse to the capacity for certain types of people to belong in certain spaces was central to both ‘Yes’ and ‘No’ material alike. This suggests how acceptance of homosexuality, as far as the survey presented the limits of such a discourse, rested in large measure on succumbing to the performative authority of heterosexuality. The authority of the “Straight Lives Matter” event was established by virtue of its allusions to a fetishised “authentic” version of working class masculinity articulated through heterosexuality (Connell 2005, 93). In this and other examples of representations of heterosexuality, space surfaced as a crucial theme through which political authority was deployed. This reliance on space, in turn, surfaced as a central motif through which authority based on authenticity materialised.

Space

In this section, we consider the centrality of space to representations of heterosexuality during the survey. As mentioned in the previous section, an emphasis on space emerged in a number of ways; for example, the way that political positions were galvanised around stark geographical divisions of support for or opposition to same-sex marriage based on ‘Yes’ or ‘No’ electorates, or the kinds of discussion that centred on defining who did and did not belong within certain social imaginaries or neighbourhoods. As Sara Ahmed (cf. 2000a, 27) writes, the “neighbourhood” can be understood as a condensation of property and kinship centrally organised by heterosexuality and the white, middle class family protected by paternalistic
forms of care. Drawing on Ahmed, we suggest the ways that representations of heterosexuality served to highlight that the conditions of citizenship were frequently fortified through the identification of strangers within it.

We touched on the spatialisation of heterosexuality in the orange juice advertisement, in which a family was portrayed as seated in a large quarter acre yard, surrounded by the accoutrements of Australian suburban normality. It is notable to reflect on the fact that according to news stories published a number of years earlier, the family in fact lives in a small unit in the inner-city neighbourhood of Potts Point (Warne 2013). The disjuncture between the family’s lived experience and representations of them “at home” in the suburbs — while perhaps a minor detail — hints at the intersection between staged authenticity and the importance of space to secure the boundaries of proper heterosexuality (e.g. in this case, Australian suburban family home ownership). The white, middle class heterosexuality of the orange juice family was important to the accrual of recognition that they bestowed upon the ‘Yes’ campaign. Put another way, they were able to offer recognition that gay and lesbian couples too belong within this particular vision of normative citizenship. However, we suggest that the combination and deployment of symbols of heterosexuality also serve to reiterate how certain kinds of bodies do not.

The “Straight Lives Matter” rally, introduced in the previous section, serves to highlight the symbolics of space present throughout the survey. The organiser, Nicholas Folkes, is known for his participation in the assertion of white supremacy in what was referred to in the Australian media as the “Cronulla riots” (for a discussion of the place of Cronulla in the Australian political imagination see Noble and Tabar 2017). Indeed, Cronulla represents a moment that condenses an idea of the beach as a place “where transgression, violence, and white possession were on display” (MORETON-ROBINSON 2015, 43). Central to “Straight Lives Matter” too was the occupation or displacement of space, albeit on terms that explicitly
referenced heterosexuality. We have described how heterosexuality was put forward during the survey as the measure of an authentic citizenship, one which belongs to the quintessential Australian spaces of the suburb and the beach. “Straight Lives Matter” and the orange juice advertisement portray the suburbs as a place where heterosexuality belongs. This is ideologically significant because the suburbs, and not the city, are the primary place where Australian citizenship belongs.

A shared logic of space, in which race and class are pushed out of political discussion in the service of the accrual of authority, thus links representations of heterosexuality produced by ‘Yes’ and ‘No’ supporters alike. It also emerged in interaction between the two positions. The centrality of space can be considered in terms of the responses of ‘Yes’ supporters to “Straight Lives Matter.” Given that the rally was to be held in the heart of Sydney’s gay area, a move designed to provoke maximum outrage, online responses asserted that “rednecks and racists” did not belong there. This highlights how the survey offered an intensified context in which spaces “belonging” to supporters and opponents of gay marriage were racialized and classed, but did not accommodate an examination of the kinds of race and class privilege that allowed such positions to emerge.

The circulation of material about “Straight Lives Matter” and the kinds of information and commentary that accompanied it served to amplify the impact of the event. Moreover, such deployment served as a way to establish clear spatial boundaries that congealed fully when the survey results were announced — an insidious effect of using the boundaries of existing electorates in order to establish public opinion about same-sex marriage, which became metonymic for LGBT-identification. The recirculation of images of “Straight Lives Matter,” undertaken equally by those opposed to it as those to those who supported it, occurred due to a perceived need for the representation of a shared commitment to reject homophobia.
Whatever the intentions of those circulating these images, however, the circulation of images of “Straight Lives Matter” tended to reinforce a view of hegemonic masculinity characterised as heterosexual, homophobic, racist and violent. More importantly, such speech acts are premised on the basis of identifying those who, by virtue of the way that they speak, act, or appear, do not belong in certain spaces. This emphasis served to distinguish how citizenship can be claimed on the basis of sexuality and its relationship to certain kinds of space, even as it failed to account for the ways that race and class were folded into claims of authority and authenticity.

**Challenging heterosexual authority**

This paper has considered the significance of the large volume of representations of heterosexuality during the Australian same-sex marriage postal survey. We have argued that by presenting heterosexuality as a “gold standard” (ABC 2017) — a claim made in various ways by progressive and conservative groups alike — same-sex marriage served in part as a vehicle for a variety of actors to assert the centrality of white, masculine and heterosexual forms of citizenship. However, while the performativity of heterosexuality certainly leads to its widespread circulation, it also enables us to observe the vulnerability of its sustained political and moral authority — the defensiveness of the assertions we have presented marks it out as culturally and historically formed, and thus open to reinscription. Contextualising the survey material, both within broader Australian history and in other settler colonial contexts, helps to resist allowing same-sex marriage to inevitably pass by as another milestone in progressive politics. Rather, we have illustrated where same-sex marriage may be positioned in relation to broader ongoing projects to refashion citizenship in Australia.

Drawing on Australian critical race and feminist perspectives, we addressed three central concerns in the survey material: authenticity, authority and space. We have found that
these themes are especially important given their durability throughout Australian history, particularly in debates over the relationship between sexuality and nation. In placing survey material into conversation with these themes, normative understandings of class and race emerge as shaping crucial factors in normative projects of sexual citizenship. These problematic fantasies, crystallised here through heterosexuality — whether appearing in the form of representations of the suburban backyard or contestations over the expression of pride in particular neighbourhoods — must be understood not as peripheral but rather as central to the political claims that same-sex marriage mobilises in contemporary Australia.

By observing that representations produced during the survey at least in part served to buttress established forms of heterosexual authority, we hope to resist delineating same-sex marriage as the sine qua non of progressive and liberatory projects linking sexuality to collective visions of social life. While only a small portion of the number of representations disseminated in the mass media, those few that we highlight here serves as a provocation: What, if anything, is necessarily progressive or conservative about same-sex marriage in Australia?

This question gains urgency given the more explicit tenor that political discourse linking race and class to sexual citizenship took after same-sex marriage. For example, only one week after the vote was announced, the Prime Minister announced a review of whether “Australian law adequately protects the human right to freedom of religion” (Prime Minister and Cabinet 2017). Given responses to the survey vote by supporters of same-sex marriage in parliament that religious freedom “isn’t an excuse” for groups to “create enclaves” (Brown 2017), it is important to question on what basis and with recourse to what authority, such claims are being made. In this case, even as a consensus was reached as to who might be assimilated into the nation, the “betrayal of the multicultural nation itself” (Ahmed 2000a, 106) by racially marked others through their participation according to the very terms set by the survey serves
to highlight the limitation of normative frameworks for sexual citizenship. We have suggested that even as small an act as the capacity to question heterosexuality as a historically durable arrangement linking authority, authenticity and occupation of space in Australia may provide the opportunity for new visions of sexual citizenship to flourish.

References


