Camping it up and toning it down: gay and lesbian sexual identity in media work

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Abstract

By its make-up, Irish screen production is heteronormative. This can be seen in terms of output, representation and production. Accordingly, this article argues that heteronormativity is a structuring dynamic in the identities of gay and lesbian media workers. Its impacts are two-fold and somewhat contradictory. On the one hand, it results in bias and discrimination towards many media labourers, while on the other hand, heteronormativity offers gay and lesbian workers some opportunities to overcome or challenge overbearing structures wrought by heteronorms within media industries. To demonstrate this argument, we maintain that disclosure and the formation of networks play a role in the maintenance of gay and lesbian identities in media work, whereas bias and discrimination serve to other and discipline gay and lesbian media workers for not meeting heteronormative expectations. The article concludes by exploring how gay and lesbian media workers can manage and co-opt their sexual minority identity in a way that can challenge heteronormative expectations, providing a common ground in media work. Furthermore, this article builds on the growing field of Queer Production Studies by contributing towards the field's expanding set of empirical practices and diversifying the contexts in which Queer Production Studies research takes place.

Keywords

creative labour, culture, media industries, production studies, queer media work, sexuality studies

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Introduction

Stephen Byrne, an openly gay presenter on the Irish public service broadcaster Raidió Teilifís Éireann (RTÉ), stated that when he started working for the broadcaster, he was 'stupidly worried' that he would be labelled as 'the gay presenter'' (O'Reilly, 2015). Adopting a public role, fronting the young adult evening programme *Two Tube*, Byrne expressed his concern that he would be pigeon-holed both professionally and publicly as *just* a gay presenter. Enmeshed in Byrne's comments are the realities of gay and lesbian working lives in film and screen production in Ireland. His comments suggest that the norms and values of Irish media production industries are profoundly heteronormative. Furthermore, the remark suggests that the work culture of film and screen production presents a heteronormative way of doing things, to the detriment of many gay and lesbian media workers who attempt to forge a place in an industry in which they are very much a minority voice and presence. These issues are under-researched in Queer Production Studies, that is, the role of heteronormativity in media work and the ways in which gay and lesbian workers negotiate this heteronormativity in the workplace. In the analysis that follows, the article argues that gay and lesbian media workers are othered within the Irish media work, primarily by the heteronormative logics built into the Irish film and screen industry. This othering manifests through the work cultures of screen production, the networks formed on and off set and interactions with the heteronorms in the media workplace.

As defined by Lauren Berlant and Michael Warner (2002), heteronormativity

> Identifies the way social and political institutions assume the most desirable forms of kinship to be based on a monogamous intimacy between a man and a woman, who in turn reproduce the norms through the regulative institution of the heterosexual family.

Institutional heteronormativity in the workplace has been noted to leave lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) employees feeling 'relationally removed, distant and "different" to those around them' (McFadden and Henry-Crowley, 2018). This can be attributed to the apparent 'normality' of heterosexual orientation, which justifies prejudice or othering against anyone outside of the heterosexist categorization. Heteronormativity has shaped the working lives and identities of many gays and lesbians (Buddel, 2011; Hill, 2009; Reingardé, 2010). Accordingly, workplaces have privileged those within the dominant group because it normalizes heterosexuality and treats homosexuality as an aberration (Waldo, 1999). Furthermore, heteronormativity has been considered to maintain various exclusionary practices and privileges in the workplace through networks formed by White, heterosexual males (Embrick et al., 2007).

In the context of the Irish media industry, this article aims to make a contribution to the growing field of Queer Production Studies, arguing that heteronormativity is a structuring dynamic for gay and lesbian media workers. Its impacts are two-fold and somewhat contradictory. On the one hand, it results in bias and discrimination towards many workers, while on the other hand, heteronormativity offers gay and lesbian workers some opportunities to overcome or challenge overbearing structures wrought by heteronormativity within media industries. To demonstrate this argument, the article maintains that disclosure and the formation of networks play a role in the maintenance of gay and

lesbian identities in media work, whereas bias and discrimination serve to other and discipline gay and lesbian media workers for not meeting heteronormative expectations. Finally, the conclusion observes that gay and lesbian media workers can manage and co-opt their sexual minority identity in a way that can challenge heteronormative expectations, providing a common ground in media work.

Inasmuch as this article highlights the crucial ways in which heteronormativity serves as a structuring dynamic in media work, LGBT workers can also benefit from certain elements of heteronormative culture, particularly if they identify as cis-gendered and perform to stereotypical ideals around gender expectations: not 'too fey' in cases of gay or bisexual men and not 'too butch' in the cases of gay or bisexual women (Mark, Gay; Sally, Lesbian). In a lot of instances, gays and lesbians traditionally drew upon heteronormativity to pass as heterosexual (Rosenfield, 2009). This accordingly provided frameworks for personal survival in a hostile society and 'the collective produce of a respectable homosexual culture' (Rosenfield, 2009: 167). Thus, these competing and contradictory consequences of heteronormativity in media production can be read through a homonormative lens. In this context, homonormative is understood as 'a politics that does not contest dominant heteronormative assumptions and institutions, but upholds and sustains them, while promising the possibility of a demobilized gay constituency and a privatized, depoliticized gay culture' (Berlant and Warner, 2002; Duggan, 2002: 179).

Ireland is a particularly interesting site for a case study of how heteronormativity shapes sexual identities in screen production work. Heteronormativity has historically been a structuring force within contemporary Irish society. Up until 1993, homosexuality, specifically sex between men, was criminalized, until the Campaign for Homosexual Law Reform successfully took a case to the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) to rescind the oppressive laws, forcing the Irish government to remove the remnants of Victorian morality legislation (see McDonagh, 2017; Kerrigan, 2017). Subsequently, the 1990s and early 2000s saw Irish gay civil rights centred around challenging heteronormativity, specifically improving LGBT rights in the workplace (see Rose, 1994) and access to health services for people living with HIV. Much of the recent sexual politics in Ireland in the late 2000s and early 2010s has been defined by the Marriage Equality Movement, which sought recognition and inclusion within the most heteronormative of institutions. This social movement culminated in a same-sex marriage referendum in 2015, where 62% of the Irish electorate voted in favour of Marriage Equality. Since then, Ireland has been internationally recognized as a significant trail-blazer for gay rights and politics. Ireland has in recent years witnessed the ascendance of an openly gay Taoiseach (the elected political-managerial role that is equivalent to that of Prime Minister) Leo Varadkar, and has witnessed drag queen Panti Bliss achieve global recognition for the theatre performance of the Noble Call, a viral speech uploaded to YouTube, lauded for its call for tolerance, equality and justice for LGBT minorities. Despite these significant gains for the gay community, Ireland is problematic because its record on diversity in screen production is so poor and has not reaped the wider benefits seen with the recent successes of the LGBT movement.

By its make-up, Irish screen production is heteronormative. This can be seen in terms of output, representation and production. Ireland shares the typical structures of the

European screen-production industry on a smaller scale. Currently, the Irish broadcasting sector has two dual-funded, public service broadcasters, RTÉ and Irish language station TG4, and one commercial broadcaster, Virgin Media. Over 150 small- to medium-sized independent screen-production companies are active in the film and television industry in Ireland. Heteronormative norms within the Irish screen sector are further embedded by the gender make-up of many employed in programming and broadcasting, with only 30% of the media workforce being women (European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE), 2013: 16). Much attention has been given to the lack of queer visual fare, both within the Irish film industry (MacLeod, 2018) and television (Kerrigan, 2019). Attempts to break the heteronormative mould of film and screen production have been evident internationally. In the United States, the LGBT network Logo TV was launched in 2005. In the United Kingdom, initiatives from broadcasters such as Channel 4 have seen a commitment and rise in the LGBT content and crew make-up (Channel 4, 2019, Diversity 360). Recently, some attempts have been made, at least in terms of commitment, to improving conditions for LGBT workers in Irish media. In 2019, RTÉ's Diversity Policy committed to 'a minimum preliminary goal of 4% of persons who identify themselves as members of the LGBTQI community' (RTÉ, 2019, p. 6). However, it is unclear whether the time frame for achieving this target is 2020 or 2030, as sexuality is not itemized in the action plan beyond the statement of the target for participation. The Irish media landscape then has not forged a queer way of doing things. Primarily, this is down to the fact that due to the small scale of Irish media, narrowcasting to queer audiences risks compromising the larger, presumed imagined heterosexual audience and queer media productions, led by queer production staff, has been very limited to a small number of instances in radio. For those who identify as gay and lesbian who do successfully work in the screen industry, heteronormativity undoubtedly shapes the experiences of media work.

LGBT workers and Queer Production Studies

This research situates itself within the developing field of Queer Production Studies, a relatively new field deriving from the broader discipline of Production Studies. A large body of texts within the main field of Production Studies (see Caldwell, 2008; Deuze, 2007; Mayer et al., 2009) somewhat overlooks questions about sexuality, sexual identity and queerness. Much of the focus around LGBT sexual identity in Media Studies pertains to issues of representation (see Barnhurst, 2007; Gross, 2001; Walters, 2001) along with analyses of LGBT screen audiences (Dhoest, 2016; Kern, 2014). Inasmuch as LGBT representation and audiences have been a central focus to research, scholarship is beginning to turn towards the ways in which media industries produce LGBT sexual identities. The development of this sub-field was marked by the publication of a special issue of the *Journal of Film and Video*, titled 'Queer Production Studies' (Martin 2018a). One of the key aims of this special issue was to 'help illuminate the relationship(s) between the proliferation of LGBTQ media and the ways such media are produced' (Martin, 2018a). Martin (2018a) underscores the significance of Queer Production Studies as a field, as it is involved in various facets of 'queer production and the production of queerness' (p. 5). Significantly, Queer Production Studies has engaged with

various facets of the culture industries and has incorporated various methodological approaches scrutinizing queerness in relation to various aspects of the media industry and the production process.

Ben Aslinger (2009) examined programming strategies within the US cable channel Logo TV, which caters to an LGBT audience. Using an institutional analysis, Aslinger argues that Logo's attempts to market itself to diverse queer audiences are undermined by a struggle to meet programming diversity. Himberg (2014) similarly examined practices surrounding lesbian programming on cable TV networks Bravo and Showtime, examining institutional practices and beliefs surrounding lesbian content. The work of Martin (2015) looks at the production of gay black characters on the black-cast sitcom, using interviews with writers to examine the processes by which they created and produced Black gay characters. Paratextuality, the study of how audiences make sense of media texts through extratextual materials such as trailers and marketing campaigns, has also become a site of research within Queer Production Studies (Cavalcante, 2013; Draper, 2012; Ng, 2018). Several key texts have identified the significance of labour for LGBT people in the media and the need to focus on this and move away solely from research focusing on representational issues (Martin, 2018a; Schiappa et al., 2006). Queer Production Studies similarly serves as a central discipline where the experience of LGBT media workers can be documented and analysed and can offer a way of exposing patterns and trends experienced by LGBT people in media work. This article addresses this relative gap in research, examining the various facets that shape the experiences of gay and lesbian workers in Irish screen production. As Martin (2018a) argues, Queer Production Studies aims to provide a 'set of empirical practices for which analyses of the text alone cannot account' (p. 7), and this article aims to contribute towards this expanding set of empirical practices through examining the media work performed by lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQs), an under-researched aspect of the field. In addition, much of the literature within the field has been US-centric, with a developing localization of research within the European Context, marked by Vanlee's (2019) research pertaining to on-screen LGBT characters and the dynamics of their production on Flemish television. While expanding the empirical practices of Queer Production Studies, this article will also contribute further to the growing contexts in which Queer Production Studies research takes place.

It is important to note that the above examples of research from Queer Production Studies are focused primarily on qualitative research methodologies, examining paratexts and interrogating institutional contexts. Minimal research has been carried out on media work performed by LGBTQs within Production Studies, with some exceptions. Kerrigan and O'Brien (2018) have examined media work in terms of LGBT radio in Ireland. Martin (2018b) examines casting gay characters on US television, examining the ways that casting functions as a practice that works within 'best actor' discourses that 'insulate the television industry from charger of deliberately failing to cast gay actors in projects' (p. 48). However, few studies unpack the tensions between Marxist accounts of labour and Foucauldian ideas of self-disciplining in more recent neoliberal contexts as articulated by workers themselves. As Oakley suggests, flexible specialization from the mid-1980s saw economic activity shift 'away from national governments to regions, and the diffusion of industrial relations negotiations from the national offices of the "big" trade unions, directly to the skilled workforces in the local firm' (in Banks et al., 2013:

Table 1. Employment details of a snowball sample of 10 gay and lesbian media workers.

Pseudonym	Job title	Contract	Employment status
Peter, gay	Director	Freelance	Self-employed
Colin, gay	Producer-Director	Independent company	Owner
Simon, gay	Director	Freelance	Self-employed
Fiona, lesbian	Camera operator	Freelance	Self-employed
Jane, lesbian	Producer-Director	Independent company	Full-time
Chloe, lesbian	Researcher	Employee	Full-time
Sally, lesbian	Producer-Director	Independent company	Owner
Jack, gay	Producer-Sound	Employee	Full-time
Michael, gay	Producer-Researcher	Freelance	Part-time
Mark, gay	Presenter-Researcher	Employee	Full-time

60). Instead of the collective social good of a welfare provision for all workers, individuals were expected to absorb the burden of precarity into their own working lives. Various authors have examined how these tensions arise for creative workers (Banks et al., 2013; Gill, 2011), but few, if any, have examined how LGBT sexual identity may be a complicating factor in understanding creative labour. For instance, Vicki Mayer's (2011) examination of sexuality raises some questions around the extent to which cultural scripts of sexuality imply a gay or lesbian 'advantage' in certain sections of production, but also whether that 'advantage' correlates with practices of undervaluing sexualized labour. Further work is required in this area and this article contributes to that gap in knowledge. As mentioned above, heteronormativity has been documented as a structuring device for gay and lesbian identities within organizational contexts, yet the ways in which this manifests for gays and lesbians working in media industries have not been researched. To that end, the key focus of this article is on the ways in which gay and lesbian media workers react, incorporate or embody heteronormativity in media work.

Methodology

Data were collected in 2018–2019 through semi-structured interviews, with a purposive, snowball sample of 10 people who worked in Irish film and television production (Table 1). In defining media workers, the study included an elite of creative producers, as well as middle-ranking operatives and low-status administrative workers, across multiple genres of chat, daytime, reality, news, entertainment and feature programmes. The sample was gathered through preliminary interviews with informants who were personal contacts and who openly identified as gay or lesbian both inside and outside of the media industry. Following this, other potential respondents were named, and these avenues were subsequently pursued in further interviews. For the most part, sexual identities are referred to throughout the article as gay or lesbian, as that is how the people included in the sample identified. Lesbian, gay, LGBT (commonly used terms for sexual and gender minorities) were the identities most prevalent among respondents in the study. These terms do not presuppose the existence of a clear group or identity, but

refer to widely used social categorizations. All information that could identify any of the individuals described in the study was removed or changed, apart from loose job descriptions. The findings presented below speak of the respondents' current experiences of working within Irish screen production. Accordingly, anything that they refer to as occurring in the past, is very much up until 2 years ago.

Although the findings relate to the specifics of the Irish case, they offer insights into the qualitative nature of the work in film and television production more broadly, as perceived by gay and lesbian individuals employed in the sector. Also, the findings can shed light on the manner in which work is transformed as a result of gay and lesbian sexual identity in other sectors of creative labour, as well on the ways in which the gay and lesbian participants experience all types of work through the prism of processes and practices structured around their sexuality. Moreover, the Irish findings are relevant to other European Union (EU) states, where gay and lesbian media workers are under-represented and non-existent within research.

Findings

Four key themes that recurred throughout the data were disclosure and media work, networks and heteronormative culture, bias and harassment and humour. These four themes explore significant issues for gay and lesbian media workers in response to heteronormative work cultures in an industry governed by heteronorms. As much as this heteronormative culture manages the sexual identities of gay and lesbian media workers, the themes do reveal instances where these heteronorms are met with resistance and challenged by the workers.

Disclosure and media work

Respondents spoke about various levels of disclosure of their sexual identity within the television and film sectors. Expression of sexuality within the work environment is a key concern for sexual minorities, with heteronormativity significantly contributing to this aspect of workplace identity management (Ozturk and Rumens, 2015). Participants spoke about the variety of work cultures that they experienced within the television and film sectors, each of which contributed to the decision, or not, to disclose. Some independent companies and independent broadcasters were seen in a positive light in this regard, while other small organizations and public service broadcasters were viewed negatively. For instance, one respondent noted that she worked 'in an office where my boss is a lesbian, so it is a very open, positive work environment for everybody. There would be more than me, other LGBT people working [there] too' (Jane, Lesbian). Another lesbian respondent mentioned by contrast 'my sexuality, I don't think I ever disclosed it when I was there and I don't think I would have been comfortable disclosing it when I was there' (Chloe, Lesbian). Similarly, a respondent did not disclose their sexual identity and consciously chose to present as heterosexual to colleagues: 'I was representing as a straight person because I still kind of semi-hoped that I was straight and not gay [. . .] the organisation I worked for didn't seem to be gay-friendly from what I could see' (Peter, Gay). An aspect of identity management for participants involved avoidance, as Woods and Lucas (1993)

term it, where sexual minorities in the workplace deliberately avoid disclosure of information that may signal a sexual minority status to colleagues.

In another instance of avoidance, a respondent was working on a show with a colleague and was conscious that they did not want to be perceived to be an activist about their lesbian sexual identity within the workplace. They remarked that while they had disclosed their sexual identity to a number of colleagues on the production team, this was managed very carefully and they were reluctant to have their sexual identity widely known (Jane, Lesbian). With another colleague on the production team, she devised a strategy to avoid being identified only with LGBT issues: 'I was passionate about LGBT issues and [my colleague] was passionate about her community's issues and I remember one day we took each other to the side and agreed to canvass for each other's community' (Jane, Lesbian). The development of this strategy between the two colleagues was constructed to circumvent a perception of being 'too active' around LGBT identity and also provided a strategy to avoid disclosure (Jane, Lesbian). In another instance, not disclosing their sexual identity was crucial for a gay media producer, who feared the bias they might face because of heteronormativity. A researcher who worked on a programme with the producer stated,

> He was adamant that he actually articulate his own personal activism and bring it to bear in making this programme [. . .] He was nailing his colours to the mast and saying this is as much as I can do in these circumstances. It was difficult, even more difficult being openly gay and [. . .] trying to posit and promote programming that specifically attached itself to the needs and aspirations of your own constituency. (Michael, gay)

Although the producer identified as gay, they did not do so openly within the workplace, due to several factors, mainly fears of bias and harassment. Heteronormativity, thus, was a structuring dynamic in the workplace for this worker, forcing this producer to limit how they expressed their sexual identity in the screen industry. On the one hand, the producer did not openly come out within the workplace. On the other hand, they attempted to influence an LGBT slant to programming within the very limited, heteronormative context. So although LGBT media workers often attempted to align with the heteronorms through non-disclosure, at points they did attempt to be minimally active about their sexual identity, but in a carefully managed way.

Some participants acknowledged the fact that disclosure was not a problem in their media work, with the heteronormative structures of the media industry playing a small role, if any, in their disclosure. Regarding coming-out to colleagues, a gay man stated that he never felt the need to disclose his sexual identity: 'I don't think I left much presumption to be honest. My sexuality was just a given' (Mark, gay). Another gay director mentioned that their sexual identity never played a role in their media work, nor were they ever active about it in any overt way. The only time that any kind of disclosure happened was in discussions of partners and relationships on coffee breaks. The director noted that this would obviously become more pronounced at work functions when partners were invited (Simon, gay). The levels of disclosure within media work in response to the heteronormative work culture vary. For some gay and lesbian workers, they choose to remain closeted, doing so out of fear of not getting jobs or blocking their own progress

and development in terms of promotion. Accordingly, these workers deploy strategies that impose a degree of separation between work and personal life.

Those at the more open end of the spectrum more seamlessly integrate the work and personal aspect of their lives. However, factors influencing disclosure decisions within media work are highly contextual. Those who identified as freelancers or worked for independents found coming-out a lot easier in those environments than those who worked in bigger broadcasters that had a more organizational structure. A number of respondents cited the lack of diversity within the bigger broadcasters as a factor in this. These broadcasters, among which included a public service broadcaster, were ironically supposed to cater for a broad range of ideologies, tastes and values under its public service remit. One respondent was clear that disclosure was a challenge for gay and lesbian workers in the context of the public service broadcaster: 'the national broadcaster would have around 3000 people employed . . .. I didn't know one other lesbian and I was there [for four years] [. . .] there were no visible LGBT people there. It's incredible' (Jane, Lesbian).

Networks and heteronormative cultures

Work networks within media production benefitted some of the respondents in establishing connections with gay and lesbian colleagues in response to a heteronormative dominant group of co-workers. Gay identity has been positioned as a form of organizing in work cultures at a broader level (Colgan and McKearner, 2012 ; Kaplan, 2005; Nardi, 1999). A lesbian researcher mentioned how she refused initially to disclose in the work environment, but noted that when they saw other colleagues within the production office who were openly identifying as LGBT, she felt more comfortable in coming-out:

> The sexuality of many of my colleagues was very evident, I mean, there were people who were straight, bi, trans, gay, a massive, completely different workplace, people came from all sorts of backgrounds. So I felt a lot more welcome there. (Chloe, Lesbian)

Overcoming heteronormative work cultures in the industry, or at least contesting them, was evident in this instance through the formation of networks within the organization and alliances in the workplace between LGBT workers. As Rumens (2010) has argued, within contemporary heteronormative work cultures, gay and lesbian sexual identity has served as a node for LGBT people to organize friendships.

A gay director expressed the benefit of networks that shared identity and work in common. As he recounted,

> That's a community that you plug into and it just expands and you have your five friends and they have ten friends and they are all working in the business and they're all actors or writer or comedians, so you have all this shared experience [. . .] and that's really interesting because you then talk to them about what they're doing [. . .] there is that shared experience on two levels. You have your sexuality which is obviously endlessly fascinating to talk about but then you also have the career thing and when they intersect, there's always interesting things that are thrown up by that. (Peter, Gay)

That filmmaker also pointed out how gay people constituted a welcoming audience in addition to other heteronormative audiences:

> You do get to travel the LGBT film festival circuit, which is a great way to get your stories in front of your people, which doesn't preclude you from travelling to the other festivals as well, so we are helping out own community foster our story-telling, show it together and consume it and it's really good, so that's actually a way that has impacted me positively. (Peter, Gay)

Another producer cited how their career actually transformed as a result of a gay network and friendships that formed when he worked in a broadcaster, to such an extent that he left his permanent media work to establish a production company with their gay friend:

> He coaxed me to leave and said come on out, you're going to have so much more fun. So I went and became an independent and with my friend, began producing and selling shows that we wanted to do and sold them to prime-time slots. (Colin, gay)

In these instances, the establishment of networks among gay colleagues within the media enabled gay media workers to reproduce empowering identities, allowing them to overcome or move past overbearing and oppressive heteronormative structures within broadcasters and break the limits placed on their sexualities. A director further remarked that his being out in a broadcaster actually served to prevent him making other gay friends. He mentioned that other gay colleagues feared being outed, even by simply associating with an out gay person in the work environment (Simon, gay). Potential friendship networks then came at a potential cost in terms of being identified as gay.

In a lot of respects, the networks formed between gay and lesbian media workers in Irish screen production can be read through Kath Weston's (1991) framework of 'families we choose'. Weston coins this term as a queer form of kinship fashioned as an alternative to a biological family, suggesting that such families are structured and based on the performance of kinship. These kinships formed between members of the LGBT community are cultural responses to the displacement wrought by the structures of heteronormativity and traditional family structures, where LGBT people are rejected by their 'biological' families as a result of their sexual identities and/or suffer bias and discrimination from broader heteronormative society. Weston's notion of 'families we choose' is similarly reflected in Judith Butler's (2002) theorization of queer kinship structures, which she describes as affective social structures that 'emerge to address fundamental forms of human dependency' (p. 15). As this dataset suggests, such structures of kinship are in operation in Irish screen production, which manifests in terms of support networks and in some instances, friendships. As Colin and Peter suggest above, such forms of kinship served as transformative for their media careers and opened them up for varying opportunities in terms of media work. Accordingly, gay and lesbian media workers have at least one aspect of their identity that possesses the unique social potential to build relationships and networks with each other against a heteronormative backdrop.

Bias and discrimination

Experiences of bias and harassment within the Irish screen industry were cited by many of the respondents. Those who chose to express their sexual identities in the screen industry often found themselves becoming subordinate subjects and disciplined by the heterosexist principles of colleagues, be this through negative remarks, sexual harassment or outright bullying. Often, this harassment took the form of thinly veiled homophobia or outright prejudice. One lesbian respondent described an experience of outright bullying when working for a production company:

> It was the only time in my life where I dealt with severe homophobic bullying in the workplace [. . .] and there was a lot of problems, but that was about the only time I ever really experienced stuff that was beyond the usual ignorant comments. (Fiona, Lesbian)

Other respondents described being subjected to negative remarks by people in more senior positions. As a researcher notes, 'I was subject to certain comments, most particularly by my editor' (Chloe, Lesbian). Another worker described how he felt when he faced prejudice from his direct line manager, which stymied the progress of his career. As he said,

> A former boss, was very anti-gay towards me [. . .] He was [clever] enough not to say anything outright [but it was] in his attitude to me, just being around me or anything like that [. . .] he would see that if I went for an interview, I wouldn't pass the first interview, that sort of thing. (Jack, gay)

A lesbian woman was clear that she

> experienced harassment a lot, sexual harassment, and to be honest most of that occurred around the time I came out as lesbian, I didn't come out as such but I didn't make a secret of it that I had a girlfriend. So that time I noticed a lot of 'friendly sexual harassment' if you can imagine such a thing. People thinking, men thinking they're being funny saying things to you. (Sally, Lesbian)

She detailed the nature of their 'funny' comments: 'Guys telling me I needed a good fuck, or I needed a good man. This was over dinner in the evening and I'd have to sit in the car with this person for the next five days' (Sally, Lesbian). She describes her reaction of feeling like she had to accommodate this behaviour:

> I'd better just make fun of this, I'd better just have a laugh, so I'd say I had a good few men and it hasn't changed my mind, as opposed to 'shut your mouth how dare you speak to me like that' You couldn't school them, and I was in my 20s and that was hard, that was hard in terms of my experience of coming through the ranks. (Sally, Lesbian)

The disclosure of gay and lesbian sexualities often put gay and lesbian media workers at odds with heteronormative expectations.

One producer specifically spoke of the structuring of a homophobic us versus them dynamic: 'The level of snitty, snide, bad-natured slagging, not good-natured slagging, bad-natured slagging, and I just became miserable, to the point where, a friend said, you

shouldn't be in there' (Colin, gay). Another gay respondent noted how he overheard him-self being referred to as a 'bum boy' by senior staff and that at points, he was told to 'tone it down' by senior staff, whenever he was perceived to being overtly gay (Mark, gay). The harassment and bias experienced by the respondents is evidence of heterosexism in Irish film and screen production harbouring heterosexism, which included marginalization, har-assment and in some instances, a denial of resources to gay and lesbian workers:

> [The organisation] wouldn't allow me to do the producer course. They saw me as an assistant producer and a production assistant, which meant that I was the one with the stop watch and the one doing all the organising and all that sort of stuff [. . .] and that was because I was very out and open. (Colin, gay)

Heteronormativity served as an organizational cultural schema in this instance. The sta-tus of gay and lesbian media workers within crews and on jobs was devalued as a result of a perceived femininity within culturally masculine environments, particularly in the cases of gay men: 'it was particularly awkward when I had to go on shoots that involved over nights, because the crew in general didn't want to associate with me if it was an all-male crew' (Simon, gay). Unsurprisingly, the cumulation of harassment and other experi-ences of working in production where gay and lesbian identities were treated as outliers had an impact on how people experienced work and how they came to see themselves as workers in Irish film and television production.

Humour

Respondents spoke of how these heteronormative power relations could be challenged and overcome. Humour and joking played a crucial role in this and, for the most part, served as a positive for the gay and lesbians experience of media work. They referenced a practice of joking about their sexualities, which often challenged gender and sexuality norms. Humour and joking have been marked as particularly relevant within a workplace context. As Fletcher (1999) argues, humour serves as a form of relational practice by 'creating team' and building solidarity or social cohesion between workers. Holmes and Marra (2002) look at the role of joking specifically in relation to minority groups in the workplace, which they argue 'contributes to the ongoing construction of social identity by actively highlighting and reinforcing boundaries between different social groups' (p. 154). One lesbian respond-ent talked about how being included in men's jokes and not being seen as 'sensitive' allowed her to be accepted among straight, male co-workers. As she put it,

> I guess it wasn't seen as being sensitive so, there's a lot more dirty jokes and talking about women [. . .] and the jokes, got easier to deal with and (it got easier) to be able to give them instructions [. . .] I was considered one of the boys [. . .] I could also go for drinks and the jokes and whatever like rumours, gossip, happened. (Fiona, Lesbian)

A lesbian camera operator described being able to handle the jokes, to her advantage, but also being able to contain the potential for an escalation into the territory of homophobia or offensiveness. As she put it,

> Everyone just got on with jokes. I'd say with some of the older crew, you would get the stereotypical jokes of who wears the pants and only on very rare times did I get someone who became offensive, I would be pretty sharp and start shutting that sort of stuff down. (Simon, gay)

These interactions within the workplace emphasized power relationships and how joking within screen production enabled a negotiation and a renegotiation of those power relationships.

This negotiation of power relations also served to challenge perceptions of gay and lesbian sexualities. Respondents actively participated in jokes and humour, using them to their advantage to socialize and develop friendships and relationships with their crew. A producer noted that joking also served as a useful way to challenge these power relations, specifically biases, and could be used as a way to debate terminology and delineate the boundaries between acceptable and offensive language, which again she felt she had autonomy in adjudicating. As she observed,

> We had a discussion in the office about 'dyke' and whether it was an acceptable phrase to use. So, people came to me saying 'Is it okay if we call you a dyke?' And I pretended to get very upset, of course I was joking. And I said yes, that's one of those words that is acceptable for a lesbian to hear if it is used in a positive term, or just in a non-negative way. (Jane, lesbian)

Interestingly, one respondent recounted how he was able to turn the homophobic joking dynamic experienced by gay and lesbian respondents on its head in his film scripts:

> There's a lot of jokes about homophobia [. . .] you know as opposed to homophobic jokes, the joke is on the joker and it was just really important to me that we modulated that in the right way so that it never felt like dumb gay jokes have to be a part of that story. I was really obsessed with the idea that we had to be on the right side of that. (Peter, gay)

As the data suggest, the gay and lesbian respondents often engaged with jokes to express some degree of resentment at their perceived minority status on set or to contest the broader majority norms of the crew. Jokes often served to provide a useful strategy for conveying a negative or critical message in an acceptable form. Sometimes, however, the culture of joking and thinly veiled homophobia could slip into a negotiation among a production crew that created new affective meanings around sexual minorities and also provided an educational platform.

Joking also indicated the competing and contradictory consequences of heteronormativity in media production. Much of the joking culture on set and in production teams established a common ground between gay and lesbian workers and their heteronormative peers. Often, it was deployed by gay and lesbian workers to reposition them from the outside of the norms of screen production and grant them a level playing field alongside their straight colleagues (Holmes 2000). Through this culture of joking and humour, gay and lesbian workers subscribed to heteronormative paradigms, often using stereotypical notions of gay and lesbian sexualities as a means of benefitting from this heteronormative culture within the Irish screen industry and establishing relationships with straight colleagues.

Consciously performing a camp identity was one such conduit for humour and served as another means to both overcome and benefit from the structures of heteronormativity in the Irish film and screen industry. Camp marks or 'describes those elements in a person, situation or activity that express, or are created by, a gay sensibility' (Skelton, 2000). One respondent who worked for a broadcaster spoke to this regular negotiation of sexual identity and being active about their gay sexual identity, when they remarked:

> If a situation arose where I had to camp it up, I would camp it up. It was more so for effect or fun, but I would shut that down if I had to be serious or work with colleagues who didn't know I was out. (Mark, gay)

Another respondent notes, 'I wasn't like a pair of knickers, but I could be camp if the occasion required it. In saying that, I wasn't going around flaunting myself, but I didn't hide it either' (Jack, gay). This camp demeanour served more so as a means of socialization and humour with crew and staff than anything else. Conversely, it brought attention to minority sexualities through accentuating gestures and playing to stereotypes, often with the goal to be seeing to mock oneself. Doing this provided the potential to strip the power away from attempts of othering by marking openly and assertively one's sexual minority status.

Conclusion

The work culture of the Irish screen industry is heteronormative, but it is met with resistance. Gay and lesbian sexual identity becomes managed by this culture of heteronormativity, through various discourses. Disclosure served as an organizing principle for the working lives of gays and lesbians, in that most respondents could not disclose and when they did, they suffered. Despite experiencing exclusion from heteronormative networks and culture, the formation of networks with other gay and lesbian media workers proved vital in plugging into a community and having shared experiences with colleagues in production contexts, often through kinship structures. Whereas bias and discrimination on set and within media industries overtly othered gay and lesbian workers, humour served to challenge bias, stereotypes and commonly held beliefs as many of the gay and lesbian media workers challenged colleagues on viewpoints through humour and jokes. Camp further served to challenge and resist the structures of heteronormativity on sets. As much as the work culture of the Irish media industry is heteronormative, resistance is evident by many of the workers who challenge and overcome the heteronorms of an industry in which they are very much a minority presence. While generalizing on the basis of a very small national sample is always problematic and this research makes no claims on that level, nonetheless, this research set out some key areas in which gay and lesbian media workers see that their working lives are different from those of their straight peers, given that they work within an environment governed by heterosexist norms. This study serves to illuminate the lack of equality among workers based on these distinctions around gay and lesbian sexual identity and requires further research into inclusion and diversity, to understand better the inequalities that permeate the lives of gay, lesbian and queer media workers.

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Supplemental material

Supplemental material for this article is available online.

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