‘Live Your Liberation – Don’t Lobby For It’: Australian Queer Student Activists’ Perspectives of Same-Sex Marriage

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Abstract
One topic covered in Australian queer university student print media is the legalization of same-sex marriage. The legalization of same-sex marriage is currently generating much debate in Western queer communities. This paper explores Australian queer university student activists’ media representation of same-sex marriage, and the debates surrounding its legalization. It uses discourse analysis to examine a selection of queer student media from four metropolitan Australian universities, and the 2003 and 2004 editions of national queer student publication, *Querelle*. This paper thus contributes to the history of queer activism, documenting what one group of young people say about the legalization of same-sex marriage, and furthers research on queer perspectives of marriage and same-sex relationships.

Keywords: same-sex marriage, gay marriage, queer activism, student activism, queer media
Introduction
In Australian there is a network of queer university student activists who produce a variety of print media. Marriage is one topic discussed in queer student media, between 2003 and 2006. This media was published at a time when the issue of same-sex marriage was widely discussed in queer communities and beyond, in Australia. Existing research on queer perspectives of same-sex marriage fails to consider the youth perspective. Further, there is little qualitative research on Australian queer communities’ perspectives of marriage. This paper conducts a discourse analysis of queer student activists’ media representations of marriage. This paper examines queer student discussions before and after the amendment of the Marriage Act in Australia. The findings are contextualized with other research into queer community views of marriage and situated in wider queer political and activist debates. This research documents one visible moment in history and contributes to the debates on same-sex marriage within and without the queer community, specifically adding the undocumented voice of Australian queer student activists. This paper thus contributes to the history of queer activism and furthers research on queer perspectives of marriage and same-sex relationships.

Australian Queer Student Activist Print Media
Many Australian tertiary student activists identify as queer. The term queer can be used as an umbrella term to include people who identify as gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, intersex and ‘otherwise queer identifying’, which can include a broad range of non-normative sexes, genders and sexualities (GLBTIQ). Queer students are a visible aspect
of Australian tertiary communities. Individual university student unions serve and
represent Australian GLBTIQ students by funding and supporting queer activism. The
requirement of queer student officers and designated safe spaces are often written into
policy. Queer officers, sometimes paid, advocate for queer students in the university and
lead the organisation of queer activism, information and social events.

The queer student activist media which I study is produced within this institutionally and
financially supported environment. University students are commonly aged between 18-
24, however, contributors may be post-graduate students, mature age students or not
students at all. The fully-subsidized queer student media means that it is free of
advertising and the editorial constraints often associated with advertising (Burns 2002,
24; Atton and Hamilton 2008: 39). This media is subject to the general guidelines of
student union publications that require material to be free of ‘racism, sexism and
homophobia’. Mitzi Waltz states that ‘the creation and presence of [activist] media
provides a means of communication, information and support, and potential for audiences
to get involved in its creation’ (Waltz 2005: 33). Queer student media can include content
that provides communication, information and support including reviews of relevant
events and services, such as nights out, protests or university support services. Pieces of
prose may also serve communication, information, support and avenues for audience
involvement. Articles about depression, coming out , and sexual encounters enable
communication. They may initiate points of discussion and create awareness – for other
queers and mainstream readers. Articles of this type may also provide support, allowing
audiences to discover that they are not alone in their experiences.
**Querelle** is Australia’s only nationally circulated queer student publication; it is launched each year at the Queer Collaborations (QC) student conference. The publication features submissions from queer students across Australia, and is distributed to universities across Australia. Each year a different group of students compile and edit the publication. The form it takes (size, number of pages, colour or black and white, types of submissions) is determined by the editorial team for the year. This editorial team is determined at the previous year’s QC, where groups of students from particular universities or states bid to be in charge of the production of the next *Querelle*. Funding for *Querelle*, and other queer student media, is provided by university student unions. The queer issues of student magazines are usually written into union policy. Production teams utilise the same printer and format as the other editions of the student magazine. A team of queer-identifying students, often lead by the queer officers, call for submissions, design, edits and produce the magazine. These are disseminated within the university including at queer stalls and queer events. Zines, fliers and posters are produced by members of the queer collective, including queer officers. These publications are not subject to any existing design criteria. These are usually photocopied productions, opposed to the professionally published magazines. Queer officers and students also submit articles to general student publications. The selection, editing and publication of these articles are decided on by the editors of the student publications, who may or may not be queer.

The media under examination here is produced in an educated, largely middle-class university environment. In 2006, out of the nearly 984,146 students studying in Australian higher education institutions, 75% were domestic students. Of these domestic
students, 14.5% were from low socio-economic status backgrounds, compared to 25% of the Australian population defined as being from low socio-economic status backgrounds (Griffith University 2008). Regarding ethnicity, 1.2% of domestic students were Indigenous Australians; 2.5% of the adult population are Indigenous Australians (Griffith University 2008). Domestic students born overseas total 3.8%, this portion had arrived in Australia in the last 10 years and spoke a language other than English at home (Griffith University 2008). Out of the Australian population 26% speak a language other than English at home (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2008). These statistics indicate that while there is some diversity in the socio-economic and ethnic backgrounds of enrolled students, there may be a reasonably homogeneous, white, middle-class demographic. The demography of the queer student activist communities under investigation would somewhat mirror these statistics. This context informs the understandings of same-sex marriage that are produced in queer student media and throughout queer student activism.

I investigate print media due to its role within activist organisations, and minority community and identity formation. Media is often a significant source for information on sex and sexuality for youth (Greenberg et al. 1993, Murray 1996, Fejes 1997, Gross 1998 in Cover, 2002). Community media is a medium for marginalised voices to represent themselves and their issues in order to bring attention to these issues and cohere as a community (Atton 2002, 12; Atton and Hamilton 2008, 57; Downing 2001, 185-186; Rennie 2006, 185; Waltz 2005, 33). Ellie Rennie notes that community media is a means of citizenry engagement (2006, 21) and representing oneself is a form of democratic participation (2006, 187). Formal minority media is a source often used in the growth and development of identity (Carey 1969; Cover 2002; Curran and Park 2000; Goddard 1996;
Gross 1998; Hall 1982; Liebes et al. 1998; O’Donnell 2004). Involvement in the production of queer student media may contribute to the identity formation of those producing it (Renn and Bilodeau 2005). Chris Atton and James Hamilton argue that alternative media1 forms part of a network of discursive circulation rather than being the sole driving force behind social movements. They conceptualize ‘culture as not a simple expression of a social movement but as the public, discursive activity by which it comes into being’ (2001, 124). This means that activist media can be conceptualised, and analysed, as a crucial element of activism and not just an extension or representation of it. Queer university student media is an under-studied subject and is a clear example of minority media in which a community works to define itself, making it a rich site for the study of community understandings. The media under examination here is produced by and for queer student activists and aims to reflect the perspectives of queer student activists.

**Same-Sex Marriage**
One topic widely covered in Australian queer university student print media is marriage, and the legalization of same-sex marriage. The legalization of same-sex marriage is currently generating much debate in Western queer communities. These debates are reflected and extended in a large body of academic literature which documents theoretical and legal arguments (See for example, Ettelbrick 1989; Sullivan 1996; Baird and Rosenbaum 1997; Sullivan 1997; Warner 2000; Lahey and Alderson 2004; Jordan 2005; Josephson 2005; Sullivan and Chauncey 2005; Lipton 2006; Ferguson 2007; Smith 2007). Same-sex marriage is legalized in some countries such as Canada, Spain, the

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1 Alternative media can include community and activist media.
Netherlands and Belgium. It has been outlawed in Australia and most states in the US. Campaigns continue to reverse these restrictions. Queer university student media is a significant voice in the same-sex marriage debates in the queer community. For this reason, it is important to examine queer student activists’ understandings of the issue.

Kristen Walker argues that the legal recognition of same-sex marriage in Canada triggered debate within Australia (2007, 109-110). According to Walker, the attempts of two Australian same-sex couples to have their Canadian marriages recognized in Australia triggered the Australian Federal Parliament to amend the Marriage Act 1961 (Cth) in order to disqualify recognition of foreign same-sex marriages (Walker 2007, 110). There was a period of community consultation preceding the amendment of the Act (Victorian Law Society 2004), where various community groups and other stakeholders spoke for or against the amendments. The amendment of the Marriage Act 2004 also solidified the definition of marriage in Australia to ‘the union between a man and a woman to the exclusion of all others’ (ComLaw. 2004). Both the then Federal Government and the Opposition supported this amendment.

Victoria Clarke, Carol Burgoyne and Maree Burns note that there is a lack of qualitative research on queers’ understandings of marriage (2006, 141). Carol Smart argues that many existing contributions to the same-sex marriage debate feature the voices of ‘academic lawyers and/or political activists’ and is concerned that this marginalizes the voices of other community members (Smart 2007, 672). This paper deals with a particular community sub-section, queer student activists. Susan Driver states that ‘Queer youth challenge us to rethink the very status of gender, generation,
sexuality, and culture’ and she describes queer youth as ‘cultural and political catalysts’ (Driver 2008, 1). This signifies the potential impact of queer youths’ perspectives of same-sex marriage.

Previous studies on queer community perspectives of same-sex marriage deal with UK or US couples who have formalized their relationships or couples in long-term relationships that may or may not intend to formalize their relationships (V. Clarke et al. 2006; V. Clarke et al. 2007; Porche and Purvin 2008). Other research examines the opinions of queer individuals (Harding 2006; Lannutti 2005; Yip 2004), some of whom are in long-term coupled relationships. There is little qualitative research on Australian queers’ perspectives on same-sex marriage. Walker considers legal and political perspectives on same-sex marriage in Australia (2007). Pamela Lanutti’s study on the ways that community members perceive same-sex marriage to positively and negatively affect the community provides a contemporary snapshot of shifting perspectives in understanding of same-sex relationships (2005). This paper also contributes to the understanding of same-sex relationships and anatomizes queer understandings of marriage.

**Method**

This paper reports on the results of a discourse analysis of a range of queer student media from the University of Queensland, University of Technology Sydney, Monash University and the University of Melbourne, and three issues of national queer student publication, *Querelle*. These publications include zines, magazines and magazine articles published between 2003-2006. Discourse analysis in this application comes from the
European social philosophy and cultural analysis view that attempts to show how institutions, practices and the individual can be understood as produced through the workings of a set of discourses (Punch 2004, 227) and is used to reveal political dimensions of texts (Van Dijk 1993, 109). Discourse analysis aids in making visible the various understandings of marriage and same-sex marriage that circulate in Australian queer student activists' media representation of marriage and same-sex marriage.

I considered the question ‘What do queer student activists say about marriage?’. I looked for textual examples that assisted in answering this question. I thematically organised the textual examples and explored them with evidence from the surrounding texts and established literature. During this process, discourses emerged and literature assisted in identifying the issues and the underlying discourses behind the material analysed. Literature helps to determine what kinds of ideologies underpinnings and influences may ground this content. Through discourse analysis this article also provides a comparative dimension showing the engagement of queer student activist discourses with other queer activist discourses and their association with broader queer community debates. Before considering how queer student activist media discusses perspectives of the legalization of same-sex marriage, I will examine how they represent marriage itself. This provides foundation for the various discussions of same-sex marriage.

**Oppressive**

Some queer student activists represent marriage in ways similar to socialist feminist and Marxist perspectives. In this manner, marriage is perceived as a tool of state oppression, primarily of women, that aids the capitalist economy (Eisenstein 2001). These
representations of marriage resonate in other areas of the queer community and can be considered in the theoretical framework of ‘the personal is political’.

One student explains how s/he sees that marriage benefits a capitalist system stating, ‘Marriage within the capitalist system is a power relationship; domination and oppression, played out in our most intimate lives; popping out more little workers who in turn will fit into their strictly defined gender roles to reproduce and perpetuate the cycle’ (2004, 24).\(^2\) This perspective is shared by other queer student activists (2004, 22; Bransgrove 2005, 21). One student states ‘marriage continues to oppress, trap and undervalue women (not to mention forcing men into destructive provider roles which only privilege the capitalist system and people who profit from that system)’ (2004, 22). Another student expresses a similar perspective:

> Marriage is an institution necessarily based on inequality between its participants and has traditionally had little to do with love. It is more to do with the exploitation of wom*n and the extraction of their unpaid labour based on the logic of private property and ownership. It commodifies our most intimate sexual relationships, tricking us into trading them for economic stability. (Reed 2006)

Other researchers report concerns about the institution of marriage as unequal in their studies. A participant in Clarke et al.’s study states ‘I’m quite against same-sex marriage because I’m just too feminist about it’ (in V. Clarke et al. 2006, 149). One participant in Lanutti’s study states ‘Marriage itself is a fundamentally flawed institution. It’s patriarchal and makes people think they own other people’ (in Lannutti 2005, 14). One felt that marriage ‘modelled a relationship based on inequality’ (in Clarke et al 2006, 149). Some participants in Andrew Yip’s study also felt that marriage was oppressive towards women: ‘I think marriage is a specifically heterosexual institution where one

\(^2\) ‘Will You Marry Me?: Excerpts from an Online Debate at QUT’ is a four-page article which features multiple statements from multiple, anonymous, students.
partner is being dominant over the other. The wife is still expected to obey and things like that’ (in Yip 2004, 175); ‘I think marriage has a lot of problems related to it which need sorting out. It’s so hierarchical and oppressive to women particularly’ (in Yip 2004, 175). These statements from queer community members demonstrate similar perspectives of marriage to those expressed in Australian queer student activist media.

Gender inequality is a particularly prominent theme in queer student media and queer community perspectives of marriage. Feminist activism and theory also critique the institution of marriage and question its role in the oppression of women (See, for example, Greer 1971; Jeffreys 2004; Millett 1971; Wollstonecraft 2005). Maria Bevacqua summarises the feminist arguments against marriage (2004). This includes the perspective that marriage promotes gender inequality, and that monogamy and requirements for emotional security are patriarchal formulations which oppress women (Bevacqua 2004). Literature stemming from Socialist Feminism speaks about women and capitalism. Dianne Feeley states that,

The family transmits a reactionary ideology through its hierarchical structure, training individuals to be submissive to ‘authority’. Despite the window dressing about the ‘partnership of marriage’, the man is the ‘head of the house’, while women and children are economic dependants. The role of the woman turns her into a domestic slave. (1972, 75)

Respondents in existing research and queer student activist media both deploy arguments similar to what could be described as feminist and socialist feminist perspectives on marriage. It is worth noting that the students’ perspectives resemble socialist feminist perspectives from the 1970s. Contemporary Socialist Feminism does not widely discuss marriage (Gimenez 2005; Gimenez and Vogel 2005; Hennessy 1993; Putnam-Tong 1998; Socialist Party USA n.d).
Peter Morgan delineates the socialist position on gay oppression noting that ‘gay oppression and women’s oppression also exist because of the importance of the nuclear family under capitalism’ (1998, n.p). The family aids the reproduction of labour. Morgan states,

the working class family was a cheap way of ensuring the supply of necessary labour. As the nuclear family became more important to capitalism it became increasingly important to portray it as the only way of living. … Gay sexuality threatens the ideal image of the present day family firstly because it challenges the family’s rationale in the reproduction of labour, but also because it challenges the ideology of the family. The idea of same-sex partners challenges the man-wife relationship essential for the nuclear family. (1998, n.p)

This anti-family language presumes marriage as integral to the family unit, and the family unit is suggested to be integral to capitalism. This representation of marriage and capitalism resembles those articulated in some queer student media. These views about marriage and capitalism suggest an understanding of marriage similar to feminist, Marxist and socialist feminist perspectives. Similar perspectives are expressed by participants in other research on queer community perspectives of marriage. Here I will consider one key historical and contemporary association between feminist, gay liberation and queer politics, theory and activism, which I argue is also the basis for queer student activism.

These perspectives of marriage suggest that some queer student activists understand that part of queer student activism is to consider the systemic influences on seemingly personal issues, and the ways that these formulate as oppression. This is expressed elsewhere in queer student media, such as where students discuss race and sexual preference (Flestado 2006; Sumera 2004a; b; Wilson 2004), queers’ experiences in high schools (Ball 2004) and the influences of heteronormativity of queer oppression
The New Left movements of the late 1960s applied a perspective of ‘the personal is political’. The normative view was that the public and private spheres were separate and therefore concerns such as domestic violence, reproductive freedom, homophobic violence and the illegal status of homosexual sex, were perceived to be matters not appropriate for public political discussion. Second-wave Feminism and Gay Liberation, along with other movements of the time, conceptualised oppression as a product of the wider system of social rule and demonstrated how very public forces (legal systems, politicians) mediated issues that were often deemed to be private. Influenced by the Foucauldian perspective that the construction of sexuality permeates various levels of governance and influences subjectification in numerous ways, queer theory also argues that ‘private’ issues are mediated by very public forces. Michael Warner states that,

stigmatisation is intricately with gender, with the family, with notions of individual freedom, the state, public speech, consumption and desire, nature and culture, maturation, reproductive politics, racial and national fantasy, class identity, truth and trust, censorship, intimate life and social display, terror and violence, health care, and deep cultural norms about the bearing of the body. … Because the logic of the sexual order is so deeply embedded by now in an indescribably wide range of social institutions, and is embedded in the most standard accounts of the world, queer struggles aim not just at toleration or equal status but at challenging those institutions and accounts. (Warner 1991, 6)

He posits that challenging the embedded forces of sexual mediation is a task of queer politics. Gay Liberation, Feminism/s and queer theory conceptualise systems of power in

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3 Heteronormativity can be defined as ‘the impulse of “straight” culture to try and make everybody fit into the same norms of behaviour – not just sexually, but culturally’ (McKee 2005: 148). Heteronormativity is ‘produced in almost every aspect of the forms and arrangements of social life: nationality, the state, and the law; commerce; medicine; and education; as well as in the conventions and affects of narrativity, romance, and other protected spaces of culture … Heteronormative forms of intimacy are supported … not only by overt referential discourse such as love plots and sentimentality but materially, in marriage and family law, in the architecture of the domestic, in the zoning of work and politics’ (Berlant and Warner 1998: 561-562). Heteronormativity can influence formations of coupling, sex, marriage and reproduction.
different ways, however, they all argue that power systems influence whether or not issues are regarded as private. These ideas are crucial to Gay Liberation, Feminism and queer activism. Queer student activism’s concern with issues which were once conceptualised as private suggests that the theorisation of power and the public and private spheres is a key concept grounding queer student activism. This discussion demonstrates one association between the feminist, Gay Liberation and queer theory perspective of marriage. Later I delineate some of these associations in more detail.

Anti-Assimilation
Some of the debate on same-sex marriage rights in queer student media, and its representation of the debate within the wider queer community, includes discussion that can be framed as anti-assimilation. The assimilation approach to queer activism argues that queer people are no different to non-queer people and thus deserve the same rights and treatment by heteronormative society. The opposing liberation approach proudly asserts difference to heteronormativity. It calls for a societal shift in perspectives towards sexuality rather than legal reform and rights-based activism, which sees the expansion of pre-existing rights to queers. Historically there has been a liberation/assimilation divide in approaches to homosexual activism (Sender 2001, 77; Yep et al. 2003, 50). Some debate on the term queer itself encompasses the liberation versus assimilation ideology (See, for example, Alexander 1999; Thomas 1995, Jacobs 1998, Jagose 1996, Watney 1994, Gamson 1995). Media academic Katherine Sender identifies the liberation versus assimilation debate as one of the ‘fundamental struggles between the post-Stonewall gay civil rights movement’ (2001, 77). Sociologist Alan Sears summarises these ideologies stating that
The post-Stonewall Gay Liberation movement emphasised visibility (centering around the importance of coming out), militancy (mobilizing to confront power) and an end to sexual regulation and the monopoly of the compulsory family system (through which the state assumes a monopoly on defining acceptable relationships). In contrast, the more moderate reform-oriented movements, both before Stonewall and since, have emphasised respectability, entrance into the established institutions of power and assimilation into an expanded conception of the family. (2005, 96)

Cultural theorist Alan McKee documents a historical liberation/assimilation divide in queer perspectives towards relationships and marriage (2005, 614), demonstrating that current queer community debates on marriage can be historically contextualised. This divide in approaches to queer activism and politics is not always neatly polarised. Ideologies informing queer activism vary and often shift between variations of these two positions. These ideologies inform the representations of the same-sex marriage campaign in queer student media.

One student regretfully sees the call for liberation as outdated and a movement which demands assimilation as currently dominating queer activism: ‘What is apparent is that the heady enthusiasm and visionary outlook of the queer rights movement has long passed and left in its wake a muted appeal for equality. Instead of the Gay Liberation Front we now have the Gay and Lesbian Right Lobby’ (Dias-Abey 2004, 4). Student Dayvid frames the desire for marriage rights as assimilationist:

Why should queers care about fitting into what are essentially historically constructed, hetero-patriarchal, social, legal and religious norms? Then again, I might as well ask, why does anyone (queer or not) feel that they need the State to sanction or legally recognize their relationship for it to be truly meaningful to them as individuals? (Dayvid 2006, 12).

Another student states that ‘the answer is not equality or the right to participate in the system – we have to fight for the right to a new system. Big changes don’t come from asking nicely, conforming and flaunting our middle class pink $$. I think that being part
of the system (“cooption”) will only compromise our ability to challenge – to think laterally’ (2004, 23). These students perceive campaigning for same-sex marriage as fighting to assimilate with heteronormative society and this conflicts with their understandings of queer liberation.

Similarly, some respondents in two studies did not ‘believe in marriage for gay people’ (in V. Clarke et al. 2006, 149) because they saw marriage as a heterosexual institution (V. Clarke et al. 2006, 149-150; Yip 2004, 176-177). One participant regarded the debates and campaigns for same-sex marriage as ‘very normalizing’ (in V. Clarke et al. 2006, 149). Community members in Lanutti’s study ‘sensed that same-sex marriage may lead to the LGBT community losing its unique culture’ (2005, 13). One states ‘We aren’t as strong a community because we aren’t fighting against the mainstream now, we are wanting to be part of it’ (in Lanutti 2005, 13). This also suggests that these community members perceive marriage as not being appropriate for same-sex couples as it likens the queer community to the heterosexual community.

Queer student activists’ perspectives contribute to the present and historic circulation of existing queer community discourses of marriage. The presence of these perspectives in queer student media and existing research represent themes that ground debates throughout queer activist history. One example of how these arguments feature historically can be seen through examining the Gay Liberation position on marriage. The US 1970s ‘gay revolutionary socialist group’ Red Butterfly saw the aims of Gay Liberation as: ‘To break our chains and become free we are going to have to work for fundamental change in the institutions which oppress us, such as the existing family
system with its web of supports: male chauvinism, sex typing of personality traits and arbitrary labels such as “gay” and “straight” (in Altman 1972, 91). The institution of the family was perceived to be concomitant with heterosexual, monogamous relationships and marriage (Adam 1995, 84) and this argument was used to delineate an anti-marriage position. Barry Adam suggests ‘For Gay Liberation, there was no “normal” or “perverse” sexuality, only a world of sexual possibilities ranged against a repressive order of marriage, oedipal families, and compulsory heterosexuality’ (1995, 84). Gay Liberation perceived marriage as an institution oppositional to its goals of liberation.

Further assimilationist discourses arise in queer student media’s representation of marriage. Manoh Dias-Abey (2004) represents marriage as associated with the individuality of late capitalism (Kirsch 2007), which is associated with consumption – in this case home ownership. Other queer student media also associates home ownership with marriage (2004, 24; Reed 2006). This association between marriage, a move to suburbia and house purchase also represents marriage as assimilatory to heteronormative society. This contributes to discourses throughout queer student media that delineate queer as non-heteronormative and not associated with anything that queer student media deems to be heteronormative. Similar discourses are present in the Gay Liberation ideologies reviewed above.

Some queer student activists’ perspectives on marriage reflect those articulated by Gay Liberationists in the early 1970s. This demonstrates a temporal and geographical circulation of discourses among queer activism and also historically contextualizes some
current queer activist discourses. Marriage is represented as assimilatory in queer student media and this is one reason for queer students’ disdain of marriage.

**Exclusion and Misrepresentation**

Some queer student media argues that the campaign for same-sex marriage excludes particular types of queers – those who are not seen as easily assimilated – and that the right to marry, and therefore to assimilate, is misrepresented as being a desire of all queers. The articles cited in this section are representative of the data sample.

Some students argue that the campaign for same-sex marriage marginalises queers who may not fit into the mould of a same-sex couple (Reed 2006; Tallace 2005). One student demonstrates this, ‘The very language of the campaign is exclusionary. It is not just semantics when the words ‘same-sex’, ‘couples’, ‘gay and lesbian’ and ‘marriage’ are used, it send a clear message to people who may be bisexual, queer, trans*, intersex, single or non-monogamous queers, that they do not belong’ (Reed 2006). Students also perceive the campaign to be monolithic and argue that it claims to represent all queers (Dias-Abey 2004, 4; Dayvid 2006, 13; Reed 2006). They suggest this marginalizes queers who do want to get married, or see same-sex marriage as an important demand (Dias-Abey 2004, 4; Dayvid 2006, 13; Reed 2006). One student states,

> Same-sex marriage as a ‘demand’ of the ‘gay rights’ movement legitimises the idea that people need or should want to get married in the first place – because it is ‘natural’, and even monogamy is natural and desirable, and the idea that we all just secretly want to tie-the-knot is certainly implied in the NDA’s promotional literature, the rally was after all to ‘assert the importance that the LGBTIQ community places on relationship recognition’. (Dayvid 2006, 13)

Students raise concerns about how the limits of equal marriage rights furthers inequality for those involved in other types of relationships (Dias-Abey 2004; Tallace 2005; Reed
Dias-Abey states that ‘In our haste to prove our “normality”, we are marginalizing relationships that do not fit into a socially sanctioned model’ (2004, 4). Here he is also representing the fight for same-sex marriage as an attempt towards assimilation with heteronormative society. In this manner the assimilationist approach is represented as exclusionary as it marginalises those who cannot or who do not want to get married.

Some participants in Lanutti’s study also felt that same-sex marriage would cause the community to view those who choose not to get married as inferior. One participant states ‘the community isn’t going to take a couple seriously unless they get married now’ (in Lanutti 2005, 12). These community members also felt that same-sex marriage would contribute to the rift between gays and lesbians and other members of the queer community. One respondent articulates this concern ‘It seems to me that married gay and lesbian couples are being seen as the “right” kind of relationship, and that just makes the MTFs, FTMs, butches, bois, queers and everyone else who doesn’t fall in a neat little box fit less and less into the so-called LGBT community’ (in Lanutti 2005, 13).

Some respondents in Lanutti’s study and some queer student activists argue that same-sex marriage may cause exclusion within the queer community. Fears regarding exclusion permeate queer communities and tensions about who is and is not part of the queer community are well documented (See for example, Califia 2005; Eadie 1996; Gamson 1995; Rand 2004; Thomas 1995). This demonstrates how arguments about marriage feature elements that circulate in other debates within the queer community. In this manner, queer student debates on marriage contribute towards negotiations of queer community internally and externally to queer student activism.
Liberal rights claims, such as those for marriage rights, can be further posited as exclusionary when considering their grounding in identity politics. Feminist theorist Diana Fuss states, ‘In common usage, the term identity politics refers to the tendency to base one’s politics on a sense of personal identity’ (1989, 97). Claims for equal rights, such as those for women and African Americans use claims of identity as their base. Annamarie Jagose notes that, using this model, lesbians and gays can demand recognitions and equal rights within the existing social system (1996). Queer Theorist Jonathan Alexander notes that the use of identity politics to achieve liberal rights claims erases diversity amongst the queer community (1999, 295-297). He states that an ‘identity politics strategy really only works for people who are willing to identify themselves as “gay” or “lesbian”. Others, such as bisexuals, who perceive their sexuality as more “fluid” or changeable, do not often have a voice within this political structure’ (Alexander 1999, 297). Queer developed as an antidote to identity politics, expanding its scope for politics beyond rights for those with fixed identities. The way that queer student media represents these claims for access to marriage as exclusionary can be formulated as a critique against approaches to activism grounded in identity politics.

Some queer student media represents the campaign for marriage as exclusionary to particular types of queers and particular types of relationships. In this manner, claims for equal rights are challenged for contributing to inequality for others. Identity politics which grounds equal rights claims is also framed this way from a Queer Theoretical perspective. These anti-marriage discussions suggest an understanding of queer student
activism that regards it as important not to exclude any queer identities in political campaigns.

**Pro-Marriage Rights**
In some queer student media students argue for access to same-sex marriage; however, these arguments were marginal compared to discussions against same-sex marriage. One student thinks that queer marriages could transform the institution of marriage, stating, ‘I feel that GLBTI people could play a major role in redeveloping this institution just by showing the rest of society that marriages can exist that do not promote harmful and damaging ideas about sexuality and gender roles’ (2004, 23). Participants in other studies felt that same-sex couple access to marriage could result in social change by impacting on heterosexuals’ perceptions of queer people and their relationships (V. Clarke et al. 2007, 185-186; Harding 2006, 520; Lannutti 2005, 14-15; 2007, 141; Yip 2004, 177). For example, an interviewee in Lanutti’s study states ‘Same-sex marriage makes our relationships really count. Straights can’t ignore us anymore, and I think most of them will come to accept us better if they see that we are married just like they are’ (in Lanutti 2005, 15). Access to marriage is seen in some queer student media and in the studies examined as a means for wider positive social change.

One article does not directly argue for equal rights to marriage but suggests a pro-marriage rights stance by concluding with a quote from an unnamed source: ‘I want to get married. So we can stand on the same starting block and nobody’ll be able to knock us down. So I can choose and be done with the consequences. For all the past crimes committed, I want that right’ (in Evans 2005). The liberal rights argument is used by one student to argue for marriage rights. Lesbionic states, ‘My body parts are in a body that
does not have the same legal/religious/social/“other” rights as the majority of people who happily identify as heterosexual and thus, can take full advantage of such rights. Rights, that I, as a human being, as a citizen of Australia, can’t even lay claim to’ (2006, 19). Chris Absell argues that ‘When seen on the surface, this denial of marriage rights can only be seen as a denial of basic human rights. … This is a level of discrimination that disregards class, creed or colour; a level of discrimination that dictates who we love’ (2006, 37). These students use claims for, or of, equality to argue for access to marriage. These ideas reiterate mainstream GLBT political perspectives. In representing such perspectives the authors are constructing themselves as members of particular queer communities - perhaps mainstream GLBT communities - and excluding themselves from others. These constructions of community happen throughout these discussions of marriage. The students who argue against marriage make clear that certain community members do not fit in with their ideas of queer.

Arguments of citizenship and equality are commonly deployed when speaking for same-sex marriage (See for example, Yip 2004, 177; Lanutti 2005, 9-10; Harding 2006; Clarke, Burgoyne and Burns 2007, 182; Lanutti 2007, 141). This includes the argument that queer people are no different to heterosexual people and deserve the same rights. Similarly this line of argument posits access to marriage and the benefits that follow as affording queers the same citizenship benefits as other citizens. Respondents in other research also listed access to benefits afforded to legally recognised couples as a reason for supporting marriage rights (Yip 2004, 174; Lanutti 2005, 9-10; Clarke, Burgoyne and Burns 2007, 182, 186-187; Lanutti 2007, 141). Rosie Harding states ‘The calls to common humanity, citizenship and liberal sameness which are an intrinsic part of formal
equality arguments allow the normalisation of lesbian and gay sexuality, while simultaneously vocalising the continued oppression of sexual minorities and claiming a “rightful” place in society” (2006, 530). Approaches to queer activism and politics that are regarded as assimilationist may be typified by liberal rights claims (Alexander 1999, 296; Jagose 1996, 25-26; Riggs 2007, 186). Critical theorist Damien Riggs defines this perspective as ‘the liberal assumption of “equality with”’ (Riggs 2007, 185). This means that ‘notions of equality are always implicitly about oppressed or marginalised groups gaining equality with the dominant group’ (Riggs 2007, 186). This ‘equality with’ approach can be framed as assimilatory in that it affords minorities the same rights as the majority thus, essentially, viewing and treating the minority the same. This risks erasing differences and recognising that different people have different needs. This is critiqued in some queer student media (Stokes 2003, 12, 13; Dayvid 2006, 12). Again, this demonstrates how debates regarding same-sex marriage characterize wider debates within queer politics.

Tensions arise when considering the overall findings of queer student media’s representations of same-sex marriage. Some queer student media represents pro-marriage arguments on the grounds that same-sex marriage could transform the institution of marriage, and liberal rights claims, which can be regarded as assimilationist. This incongruence need not be written off as failed activism. By embodying contradictions queer student activism can act towards problematising epistemologies. Incongruencies act towards demonstrating that the solution may not be in solving the incongruence but reconfiguring the way we perceive concepts. Regarding the topic of marriage these oppositions could challenge the efficacy of ordering and legally recognising romantic and
other ‘personal’ relationships. In this manner, queer student activism materialises ideas that are described by queer theory, specifically ideas about the efficacy of deconstructing binary and existing ontologies (Erni 1996, 569; Jagose 1996, 3). These incongruencies also create productive space where the performance of activism and the negotiation of community and identity can occur. Additionally this points to a variety of community perspectives being represented in queer student media and to the heterogeneity (queergeniety, perhaps) of Australian queer student activism.

Perspectives of same-sex marriage in queer student media feature concerns about the assimilation of queer people into heteronormative society and see the competing view being the liberation of queer people on their own terms. Some queer student media also discusses pro-marriage arguments, suggesting that same-sex marriage could transform the institution of marriage, and deploying a liberal rights basis which can be regarded as assimilationist. These themes represent trends in queer student media and other queer communities, which encompass broader assimilationist and liberational ideological debates surrounding queer communities, politics and activism.

**Conclusion**

Clarke states that ‘most lesbians and gay men writing about marriage support the extension of marriage rights’ (2003, 520). Although there was some cross-over in perspectives, the queer student media examined featured held a general anti-marriage position. Clarke et al. notes ‘Another intersecting factor that may have shaped participants’ (personal) decisions was whether or not they were “ready” for legal recognition’ (2006, 157). The opinions of queer youth are unique because they represent
a demographic that may not necessarily be interested in access to legal recognition of relationships and the related benefits. Todd Gitlin notes that student movements have a ‘conflict between the enormous scope of [their] ambition – to transform the whole society, root and branch – and the narrowness of [their] social and cultural base. That narrowness, in turn, is conditioned by the lack of social institutions of leftist continuity’ (Gitlin 1980, 240). The views represented in queer student media are shaped in the context of university activism which equates to a somewhat sheltered activist engagement limiting the knowledges encountered and thus the opinions developed.

This paper establishes the voices of some Australian queer student activists, adding a previously undocumented youth perspective to the established research on views of same-sex marriage. Queer student media perspectives of marriage can be situated among larger queer community debates on how liberation is achieved. This paper also documents varying queer perspectives of marriage and adds to understandings of same-sex relationships.

The discussions about same-sex marriage in queer student media also demonstrate a moment of community and identity negotiation and construction. The students’ understandings of queer circulate through their debates. The students delineate who and what they regard as queer (a range of identities beyond gay and lesbian, non-heteronormative, anti-capitalist) and exclude particular perspectives (assimilation) and ways of living (marriage, home ownership) from their definitions. This combination of perspectives produces an interesting antagonism. Historical and theoretical tensions between Marxism and queer approaches to analysing and combating oppression are well
documented (Hennessy 1994; Smith 1994; Hekma, Oosterhuis, and Steakley 1995; Morgan 1998; Edge 1995; Jagose 1996: 24-26; Morton 1996, 1996; Maynard 1999; Reynolds 2002: 51-52; Cover 2004; Libretti 2004; Kirsch 2007). These political approaches are often represented as contradictory, yet queer politics – including queer student media – deploys them both. Marxist perspectives dismiss queer political approaches as lifestyle and identity politics and argue that these critiques fail to consider material conditions, namely socio-economic positions (Hennessy, 1994; Smith, 1994; Morgan, 1998). Queer theoretical analyses, such as Judith Butler’s (1990, 1991), of the discursive structures of identity are also chided for failing to consider materiality (Hennessy 1994; Namaste 1996). These critiques define what is and what is not valid activism, arguably pushing Marxist values on an area that Marxism has traditionally been hostile towards (Edge 1995; Hekma, Oosterhuis, and Steakley 1995; Reynolds 2002: 150-151). The politics of ACT UP (AIDS Coalition To Unleash Power) and Queer Nation can also be considered as combining an anti-capitalist perspective with notions of the fluidity of sexuality and gender and a politics of anti-assimilation (key ideas of Queer Theory) (Pendleton 2007). The politics of a variety of Australian queer activist groups from 1999-2002 are regarded similarly (Cover 2004; Pendleton 2007). And this combination of perspectives is present in queer student media’s representations of marriage. From a position of academic theorising, one could argue that this combination of ideologies is incredibly flawed and is failed activism and theory. However, if success is measured by the fact that these ideas deployed in queer student media create a coherent explanation of

4 ACTUP formed in the US in the late 1980s and described themselves as ‘a non-partisan group of diverse individuals united in anger and committed to direct action to end the AIDS crisis’ (in Crimp 2005: 144). According to E.J. Rand (2004), a meeting of New York City ACT UP in April 1990, featured discussion of direct action in response to the rise in homophobic crimes. People interested in acting on this held a meeting and the group soon developed as Queer Nation.
students’ beliefs in a context where the media aims to contribute to change and create discussion which can lead to social change, it can be argued that Marxist and queer theoretical perspectives are successfully combined in queer student media.

The findings demonstrate that this youth voice constructs an articulate anti-marriage position based on arguments about inequality related to the perceived capitalist structure, assimilation, and exclusion. This perspective is contradictory to dominant queer community and majority Australian mainstream community positions on same-sex marriage, which argue for access to same-sex marriage rights. These discussions of same-sex marriage within queer student activism form part of their engagement in public debates on the topic, constituting State engagement on their own terms.

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5 A recent survey of same-sex attracted queers across Australia found that 65% of those surveyed under the age of 20 selected marriage as the way they would like Australian law to formally recognise their own relationships, whether or not they were currently in one (School of Psychology 2009). 62% of those under 30 selected marriage as their personal choice (School of Psychology 2009). A 2009 poll found that 60% of Australians supported same-sex marriage (Sharp 2009).
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