



In/visibility on campus? Gender and sexuality diversity in tertiary institutions

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Abstract

This paper draws on the largest and most comprehensive Australian research to date that explores the campus climate for sexuality and gender diverse (SGD) people at one university. Using a mixed-method approach that incorporated an online survey open to all students and staff ($n = 2395$), face-to-face in-depth interviews with key stakeholders ($n = 16$) and an online document analysis, the study explored participants' perceptions and attitudes to sexuality and gender diversity on campus, experiences of in/exclusion, (un)safe places, visibility in public online documents, and the campus-based services available to support SGD individuals. The findings point to the ongoing exclusion experienced by SGD people across the university. We show how exclusion serves to silence individuals across multiple levels and how this, in turn, limits the visibility of, and redress for, exclusion, impacting on health and well-being. This tension, we posit, can only be addressed safely and holistically through proactive and strategic endeavours on the part of the institution; without which, exclusion will continue to prevail.

Keywords Gender · Sexuality · University · Discrimination · LGBT+ · Australia

Introduction

The last decade in Australia has seen an increase in legal rights, social awareness, visibility and voice for sexuality and gender diverse¹ (hereafter SGD) people. Most recently, acceptance and

¹Throughout this research, the term sexuality and gender diverse/diversity (SGD) is employed as it is more inclusive of a range of diversities than are other terms/acronyms frequently employed in this research space (e.g. LGBT [lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender]). It should be noted that the authors are aware of the limitations of much of the terminology used and acknowledge that its use may appear to normalise cisgender and heterosexuality, positioning other gender and sexuality subjectivities as abnormal and constructing a false divide. This is not the intention of the authors or this research. Moreover, use of sexuality and gender diverse aligns with the language of cultural and linguistic diversity (CALD) used in Australian policy and practice. The acronym LGBTIQ[A+] (or its variations) is only used when referencing, or alluding to, other research that has used those terms or a variation of them.

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integration of this community was expressed via a nationwide postal vote supporting the introduction of same-sex marriage, with a national rate of support of over 62%. As a result, marriage equality was legislated in December 2017, and defined as a ‘union of 2 people to the exclusion of all others voluntarily entered into for life’ (Federal Register of Legislation, n.d.), which provides same-sex and transgender individuals with the same rights as those bestowed upon cisgender² heterosexuals. Although a positive outcome, the protracted public debate surrounding this issue, fuelled by conservative media, religious fundamentalists, and regressive hard-right politicians, was deeply divisive and indicative of underlying hetero/cis-sexist³ sentiment in the broader social milieu.

Despite slowly growing recognition and acceptance of SGD subjectivities, discrimination on the grounds of sexuality and gender is still apparent at all levels of education. Schools, for instance, which have a mandate to educate minors, are encumbered by a range of intersecting and dominating discourses that enable the silencing and invisibility of sexuality and gender diversity, and often perpetuate institutional and interpersonal discrimination; this is both an historical and contemporary reality that is well-recorded in the literature (Birkett et al. 2009; Ferfolja and Hopkins 2013; Ferfolja and Stavrou 2015; Hanckel and Morris 2014; Hillier et al. 2010; Robinson et al. 2014; Ullman 2015). Dominant discourses constitute heterosexuality as natural, normal and the only legitimate sexuality, and other sexual subjectivities as abnormal, predatory and socially taboo. Similarly, society reifies the cisgender subject. These discourses of heteronormativity⁴ (Warner 1993) and cishnormativity⁵ (Logie et al. 2012) have been explicitly reinforced through public, political, and media debates about the inclusion and suitability of SGD-related topics in the curriculum, which has fuelled teachers’ fears of parental and media backlash if they broach them in the classroom (Ferfolja and Ullman 2020; Cumming-Potvin and Martino 2014). This is perhaps best and most recently exemplified in 2017 by the public and media hysteria surrounding the federal government’s national roll-out of the Safe Schools Coalition Australia program⁶, which is a program that aimed to provide education about, and support for, SGD students and their families. This program was discredited by far right and extreme religious lobbyists as propaganda on fictional grounds that it forced young people to subscribe to the ‘homosexual agenda’ (Shannon and Smith 2017, p. 248).

It is little wonder then that discrimination is also apparent in the tertiary education sector; many young people, including international and local students, enter these institutions having had limited previous exposure to, or education about, sexuality and gender diversity. They have also been witness to a range of debates and moral panics that perpetuate SGD knowledges and existences as other, and in some quarters, position them as socially taboo. Additionally, despite being discursively constructed as relatively liberal, open organisations, university campuses are largely silent and may even be hostile towards SGD individuals (Bilimoria and Stewart 2009; Coulter and Rankin 2017; Dau and Strauss 2016; Ellis 2009; Jayakumar 2009). As a result, they are ultimately complicit in maintaining the invisibility of

² Cisgender refers to people who identify with their gender assigned at birth.

³ Heterosexism is a system of discrimination and bias based on the assumption that heterosexuality is the only normal sexuality and superior to other forms of sexuality.

⁴ Heteronormativity refers to a system that normalises heterosexuality as the only natural/normal sexual orientation and assumes that sexual relationships involve people of the opposite sex.

⁵ Cisnormative, or cishnormativity, refers to the notion that all people are assumed to be cisgender and that this is normal (Logie et al. 2012).

⁶ For a detailed discussion of this, including the ways in which media fuelled the backlash, see Law (2017).

SGD subjects that is so apparent in many educational institutions. Reports of interpersonal and institutional hostility towards SGD students and staff at universities and colleges have been well-documented historically in the international literature, as evidenced later in this discussion. However, Australian research that explores university campus experiences for SGD individuals is almost non-existent, with the exception of some very recent studies discussed below.

To contribute to addressing this research gap, this paper draws on the largest and most comprehensive Australian research study to date that explores the campus climate for SGD constituents at one university. The study examined staff and students' perceptions and attitudes towards sexuality and gender diversity on campus, experiences of in/exclusion, (un)safe places, bystander capacity, (in)visibility in public online documents, and the campus-based services available to support SGD individuals. The research recruited both SGD as well as cisgender and heterosexual participants; this provided an understanding of cultural norms that shape and govern staff and students' engagement with sexuality and gender diversity in this environment. The findings highlight that cissexist and heterosexist discrimination—termed 'exclusions'⁷ in the study's analysis—is experienced by some individuals (see Ferfolja et al. 2018; Asquith et al. 2018). The main focus of this paper is to examine the ways in which sexuality and gender diversity is excluded through silence and invisibility in a tertiary education context.⁸ Drawing on Foucauldian theoretical concepts, and in particular, Foucault's (1978) work on discourse, we examine how higher education contexts (re)produce working and learning environments where SGD people are largely invisible, underrepresented and underserved.

Before embarking on the literature review, it is important to acknowledge that the university at which this research took place provided considerable support, both financial and in-kind, to undertake this campus climate research. An awareness-raising meeting prior to the study's inception in late 2015 that involved the research team, key stakeholders and executive staff at the university highlighted the exclusions anecdotally being experienced (but seemingly not recorded) by SGD students and staff. This meeting provided the catalyst for the development and implementation of a series of strategies and initiatives being incorporated into institutional operations, and included support for this research. At the time of writing (but not during data collection), staff and students embarked on a strategic initiative to enhance campus life for SGD people and to increase opportunities for education and understanding. The impact of this recent work was not captured in this study as it had only been initiated at the time of data collection but may be measured through future evaluative research.

Literature review

As discussed, limited research has been published about sexuality and gender diversity in the Australian tertiary education sector. The body of literature that does exist, in the main, is international and originates from the USA and the UK. This research illustrates that

⁷ The term 'exclusion' in this discussion refers to the various experiences reported by respondents that demonstrate the violence underlying cissexism and heterosexism; it includes institutional (in)action as well as interpersonal micro-aggressions. The research considers all forms of heterosexism and cissexism as exclusion.

⁸ For a more detailed discussion of the quantitative data collected in this study, please see Ferfolja et al. (2018) and Asquith et al. (2018). In this paper, due to brevity, it is not possible to fully document these results and the quantitative statistical analyses underpinning our arguments in relation to in/visibility.

heterosexism and cissexism are widespread on university campuses and that SGD students are more likely to be negatively targeted than other students (Sanlo and Espinoza 2012; Schmitz and Tyler 2017). Reporting on research undertaken across more than forty universities in the UK, for instance, Ellis (2009) found that although universities have increasingly taken up equity perspectives, many tertiary education environments are considered hostile towards visible SGD students. These kinds of hostilities include being the target of homo/transphobic remarks, being verbally harassed, being subjected to threats of physical violence, being pressured into silence, being threatened with exposure, being denied services and experiencing antigay sentiment in the form of ‘jokes’, written comments and graffiti (Ellis 2009; Evans and Broido 2002; Jayakumar 2009). Additionally, SGD students are at greater risk of sexual assault than their heterosexual peers (Coulter et al. 2017; Coulter and Rankin 2017; Griner et al. 2017; Harris and Linder 2017). The situation is particularly difficult for transgender individuals who experience higher levels of harassment (Dugan et al. 2012), feel like they belong less and feel less able to participate in engagement opportunities associated with their studies (Tetreault et al. 2013).

However, it is not only SGD students who are marginalised. University staff are also subject to discrimination because of their sexuality and/or gender (Bilmoria and Stewart 2009; Brooks and Edwards 2009). This exclusion ranges from the overt and explicit to subtler, microaggressive actions and behaviours. Because of the nebulous, subtle nature of many microaggressions, such practices are difficult to report or address (Ferfolja et al. 2018; Jayakumar 2009). It should also be noted that most harassment or discrimination goes unreported to university or external authorities (Ellis 2009; Ferfolja et al. 2018; Forbes-Mewett and McCulloch 2016).

One does not even have to experience harassment or exclusion directly; vicarious experiences can have a detrimental effect on SGD students and staff (Ellis 2009). Hence, both actual and possible discrimination results in many SGD people remaining silent and consciously invisible as a mechanism of self-protection. Additionally, the stress invoked by actual and potential discrimination can result in mental health issues such as anxiety, depression, lowered self-esteem, vulnerability and suicide among other concerns (Keuroghlian et al. 2014; Sanlo and Espinoza 2012; Tetreault et al. 2013). Such findings are deeply problematic considering that suicide ideation and attempts among SGD youth is higher than for the general youth population and is well-reported in the literature (Baams et al. 2015; Robinson et al. 2014). Woodford et al. (2013) found such discrimination manifested corporeally including headaches and stomach pains. Other research has illustrated how negative experiences can result in attrition and impact academic results, progression and commitment (Hong et al. 2016; Tetreault et al. 2013; Dau and Strauss 2016; Woodford and Kulick 2015). Moreover, heteronormativity prevails, and this is illustrated in the lack of representation of SGD people in university events, curriculum resources and marketing strategies, which render SGD individuals apparently nonexistent within these contexts (Jayakumar 2009).

Research about the experiences of SGD people working and studying in the Australian tertiary education sector is limited although some research has emerged recently. For example, Dau and Strauss (2016) recently published findings from a survey based on the experiences of 264 lesbian, gay, bisexual and trans (LGBT) identified students at the University of Western Australia. The results highlight a hostile campus climate particularly towards transstudents reflecting findings from current national research (Australian Human Rights Commission 2017a), which investigated sexual assault and harassment across Australian Universities. Dau and Strauss also found that 16% of total survey participants reported experiencing

harassment or discrimination on campus with most perpetrators being other students. Over half of the participants did not reveal their sexuality and/or gender to others because they were fearful of discrimination and approximately 20% considered that their diversity had interfered with their academic progression. Moreover, there were ramifications on their ability or desire to socialise with peers with 20% feeling excluded from university clubs and societies because of their sexuality and/or gender.

Furthermore, there is an indication that intragroup politics, as well as diversity in SGD representation across campus resources and services can contribute to difficulties for SGD students. Drawing on interviews with 16 LGBTIQ+ students in Victoria, Waling and Roffee (2017), for instance, found that political differences around identity and representation had the potential to make some students feel unwelcome by the LGBTIQ+ community. This was enacted in a number of ways including microaggressions from other LGBTIQ+ students (Waling and Roffee 2016). It is critical to note, as Waling and Roffee point out, that this is not a ‘pathological dysfunction within LGBTIQ+ communities’ but instead it illustrates ‘Ghaziani’s (2014) notion that in a post-gay era there are new and emerging ways of being an LGBTIQ+ person’, resulting in the re-examination of queerness within ‘broader hetero/homo/transnormative structures, politics and discourses’ (p. 14). They also found that these students felt there were gaps in university service provision, inadequate access to sexual and mental health information and invisibility of a queer campus presence (Waling and Roffee 2018).

Theoretical framing

This paper employs Foucauldian theoretical concepts as a way to frame and understand the experiences of SGD identities in tertiary education environments. Foucault (1978) argued that discourse is constituted in and through language and refers to what can be expressed or thought about a community or identity, through writing, speech or other various forms of representation. However, discourse is also constructed through silence and the unsaid; what is not spoken is equally as important as what is said (Foucault 1978). Critically, discourses which dominate in any society nearly always possess a material basis in social, cultural and political institutions rendering them more powerful. Despite this, no single discourse is all powerful, and various discourses continually vie for power and ascendancy in any society. As such, discourse is contextually, historically and temporally constituted, and its power is changeable (Foucault 1978). However, discourse embodies and creates meaning and as such, is intimately connected to power. Moreover, subjectivity is constituted in the contextually available discourses and as such the power that one has within particular contexts is dependent on that subjective positioning in discourse.

SGD subjects resist and challenge the dominant discourse of heterosexuality that has historically prevailed in western societies including Australia. Constructed as a threat to the moral and social order, such subjects have been actively derided and marginalised interpersonally but also structurally through sociocultural and political institutions, including education. In fact, discrimination and harassment of SGD people was technically legal in Australia until the 1980s; over time protections have been legislated. Yet, the legacy of surveillance and policing of SGD people remains a reality and perhaps no more so than in educational institutions. Recent moral panics over SGD content inclusions in school-based curriculum, for instance, demonstrated by the media-fuelled hysteria surrounding the national roll-out of

the Safe Schools Coalition Australia program, are a case in point. Developed to educate about, and support an environment of safety in schools for SGD students, teachers and families, the program was defunded and disbanded after considerable agitation by conservative Christian groups and right-wing politicians (see Law's 2017 publication for more details). Thus, the regulation and surveillance of subjects assumes many forms ranging from explicit discrimination and harassment through to subtler behaviours and microaggressions; these exclusions may not even be directly experienced by individuals. Witnessing these behaviours also results in similar implications for wellbeing, marginalisation and in/visibility. As demonstrated in our study, these forms of exclusion regulate behaviour and thought and maintain the constructed ascendancy of normalised heterosexuality and cisgender identities.

Methodology

The broader research on which this paper is drawn involved an environmental scan of attitudes and perceptions of sexuality and gender diversity across one university. The university is located in the state of New South Wales, was located across six campuses at the time of the research, and has a population of nearly 42,000 students. This population is culturally and ethnically diverse and includes local and international students, and many are the first in their families to attend university.

The research used a mixed-method design undertaking three approaches to data collection: a university-wide online survey, semi-structured interviews and a document audit of university online material. Survey participants were recruited via emails sent from the University's Office of the Vice-President (People and Advancement), via the School of Social Sciences and Psychology's online research participation platform, SONA (which recruited psychology students' participation in exchange for course credit), as well as a media campaign devised by the university's marketing unit.

The survey was open to all staff and students across the university. It should be noted that university management, who championed the research, permitted staff to undertake the survey during work hours. At the conclusion of data cleansing⁹, 2395 survey responses were analysed. Of these, 82.7% were completed by students and 17.3% by staff. The survey was comprised of three sections. The first two targeted all participants. Part A sought information on demographics and general perceptions of diversity and inclusion at the university. Part B examined all participants' perceptions of safety, diversity and inclusion on campus, and part C investigated the experiences of exclusion for SGD individuals only (Ferfolja et al. 2018). Interestingly, 18% ($n = 412$) of survey participants identified as SGD with younger survey participants identifying as more fluid in terms of gender and sexuality subjectivities; more mature participants tended to identify as lesbian or gay, for instance, which is a trend documented elsewhere (see for instance Robards et al. 2018). Sixty-nine percent of respondents identified as Australian (Australian, Australian Aboriginal, Australian South Sea Islander and Torres Strait Islander), but of these people, only 15 (0.6%) identified as Aboriginal/

⁹ Data cleansing occurred in three stages: First, participants who left the survey before completing the initial demographic and perceived safety on campus questions were removed. This resulted in exclusion of 698 participants. Next, non-serious responses were screened out. Eight respondents were excluded on this basis, as inferred from their responses to text entry questions. For example, when asked to indicate gender, several respondents reported that they identified as 'attack helicopters'. Finally, surveys were screened for poor-comprehension, resulting in the exclusion of data from four participants.

Table 1 Schools in which students were enrolled

School ^a		Frequency	Percent	Valid percent	Cumulative percent
Valid	Business	211	10.7	10.7	10.7
	Computing, engineering, maths	164	8.3	8.3	18.9
	Education	165	8.3	8.3	27.3
	Humanities and arts	226	11.4	11.4	38.7
	Law	43	2.2	2.2	40.9
	Medicine	72	3.6	3.6	44.5
	Nursing and midwifery	235	11.9	11.9	56.4
	Social sciences and psychology	431	21.8	21.8	78.1
	Science and health	375	18.9	18.9	97.1
	Two schools	58	2.9	2.9	100.0
Total	1980	100.0	100.0		

^a What is your primary role at Western Sydney University? = student

Staff were not asked about their school/faculty

Indigenous/Torres Strait Islander and cisgender. Approximately 31% of respondents originated from countries other than Australia. Additionally, 25% of respondents reported having a disability or chronic health issue. It is important to acknowledge the intersectional experiences of the participants. Student responders came from a range of schools across the university (see Table 1).

Sixteen semi-structured interviews were also conducted. Participants were purposively sampled. Recruitment included emailing key stakeholders who worked in relevant units across the university (such as student services), or were part of the divisional or school executive and inviting them to participate in an interview. Additionally, members of relevant university-wide organisations such as the ALLY Network¹⁰ and Queer Collective¹¹ were invited to participate. In total, thirteen staff were interviewed and three students. Of the staff, nine were professional staff involved in managerial or equity positions across the university, and four were academic staff holding various leadership positions; of these, only two were ALLY network members. All students were part of the queer collective or the ALLY network. The interview participants were drawn from five of the university's main campuses. Interviews were conducted either face-to-face ($n = 3$) or online ($n = 13$).

The interviews sought to explore key themes emerging from the survey data and document audit. The interviews covered a number of themes: the perceptions and experiences of gender and/or sexuality diversity at the university; inclusions of related topics in curriculum and campus life; experiences or witnessing of discrimination on the basis of sexuality and gender diversity; and perceived un/safe spaces on campus. Themes emerged on representation and (in)visible diversity, safe(r) spaces and networks, and experiences of harassment. Across all themes, a crucial organising principal was the (in)visibility of SGD experiences and representation across the university, which we discuss in detail in this paper. All interviews were recorded with permission, transcribed and imported into NVivo. We undertook a thematic

¹⁰ The ALLY network is a group of staff and students who are formally recognised as supportive individuals for LGBTIQ+ staff and students across the university. They undergo LGBTIQ+ training and often have visible markers of support (rainbow badges, postcards etc.) in their workspaces.

¹¹ The Queer Collective is a space for LGBTIQ+ people who mostly communicate and organise events online. At this university, the Queer Collective is comprised, in the main, of students.

content analysis (Green and Thorogood 2014), where the data were double coded for emerging themes.

An audit of publicly available online documents on the university's website was undertaken and included keyword searches (see Table 2 below) associated with sexuality and gender diversities on the university internal intranet, and publicly accessible site. We conducted a review of SGD-related inclusions in strategic and policy documents, university-associated website resources and course handbooks from 2008 to 2017. Upon completion of the keyword search, we consulted key stakeholders, including the Equity and Diversity Unit at the university, to ensure all key documents¹² had been included. The audit included 81 documents in total.

Silencing and invisibility on campus

Silencing and invisibility played out in a number of ways across the university, both institutionally and interpersonally, and was perpetuated through official documentation, such as policy, online materials and curricula as well as through a range of interpersonal and institutional exclusions. In some instances, these resulted in a perceived need by some research participants to self-silence and self-regulate to avoid exclusion, which had various impacts on health and wellbeing. We discuss these experiences below, and how silencing and (in)visibility work through existing discourse within and across the university structure.

Silencing through exclusions

Exclusionary practices are examples of the types of punishment, regulation and surveillance tactics meted out to SGD people, and such practices were reported to have occurred in numerous ways and to various degrees in this research. For instance, 19% of the SGD survey respondents claimed that they had experienced exclusion at the university in the 12 months prior to the study. Of these, 28% had experienced repeated exclusion. When extended over a longer period of time, over 40% of SGD survey participants had experienced at least one incident of exclusion since beginning as either a student or staff member at the university, and 13% of these respondents had experienced more than five incidents of exclusion (Ferfolja et al. 2018).

Exclusionary practices ranged in their severity and impact and included, but were not limited to, discrimination, harassment and/or bullying, written or verbal 'hate speech' and to a lesser degree, physical assault and heterosexist or cissexist sexual assault (2% of SGD students and 3% of SGD staff members). A small number of students (6%) and staff (3%) reported experiencing threats of violence. Like research in other educational sectors, students (92%) were the most frequent perpetrators of exclusion; 8% reported the cissexism/heterosexism that they encountered was institutional.

It is important to note the impacts of exclusion on SGD people as their effects have ramifications for silencing, visibility and belonging. The impacts of exclusion on individuals ranged from mild to severe, emotional and physical. SGD survey participants reported that in

¹² It should be pointed out that the university's 'Sexuality and Gender Diversity Strategy 2017–2020' became publicly available post-data collection and analysis; as a result, a number of strategic implementations carried out after this stage are not included herein.

Table 2 Search terms for document analysis

gender, or
 divers*, or
 inclusion, or
 sexuality, or
 sexual orientation, or
 sexual, or
 sexually, or
 LGBT, or
 LGBTI, or
 trans, or
 transgender, or
 same-sex attracted, or
 bisexual

The asterisk is a truncation symbol which enabled searches for longer forms of the root eg diverse, diversity, diversities

response to what they perceive as their ‘most significant incident’ of exclusion, 27% reported suffering depression, 47% anxiety and 18% limited their socialising. Moreover, thirty-eight of these respondents (30%) reported being physically or psychologically harmed, and of these, 13% indicated serious injury was sustained (e.g. broken bones, major psychological stress/anxiety); one respondent reported that they experienced critical harm (e.g. critical psychological event resulting in hospitalisation). Such experiences caused some of these individuals to hide their sexuality/gender (20%), feel sad or bad about their sexuality/gender (27%) and modify their behaviour in unspecified ways (16%). Furthermore, these experiences impacted victim’s attendance at university (9%), progress in the course and assessment outcomes (2%) and a number of students took leave of absence from their degrees (3%). One respondent in this research stated that the exclusion that they experienced led them to attempt suicide (Ferfolja et al. 2018).

Silence in relation to SGD subjects was also incurred through individuals not reporting their exclusionary experience; indeed, only 16% who had experienced exclusion felt able to report it. This is problematic; if exclusionary practices are not reported, they cannot be addressed and remain, in and of themselves, invisible. This silences the behaviour whilst erasing diversity; moreover, in doing so, it reinforces the prevailing dominance of heteronormative and cishnormative discourse. This failure to report is not the fault of those surviving the exclusionary practice, which of itself and for a multitude of reasons can be emotionally fraught, threatening, embarrassing or deemed as not worth reporting because of a perceived potential lack of action on the part of the institution or authority. This is a highly complex situation; when exclusion goes unreported, it cannot be addressed by the institution, and there is a perception that ‘everything is alright’ or that there is ‘no issue’. For actions to be taken, a need requires identification.

Exclusion, whether potentially, vicariously or actually experienced, often results in behaviour modification by the SGD person under attack; indeed, research has acknowledged the ramifications of witnessing discrimination in terms of the health and social consequences in fringe communities (Asquith 2014; Noelle 2002; Iganski 2001; Perry and Alvi 2012). Being hyper vigilant about safety and/or disclosure and feeling the need to be constantly prepared for violence, harassment or other forms of discrimination, can have a marked impact on the physical and emotional health of SGD people. As a result, hiding one’s difference is a strategic action illustrated by the comments below (see Ferfolja et al. 2018).

The LGBT part of my identity has not impacted on my experience as a student because I have not felt comfortable to be out and open about my sexuality, this protects me from prejudice etc. However, it is mentally taxing to keep this part of myself hidden (Lesbian, cis woman, 18–25 years, student).

I have not [been] very open about my sexuality to be honest (Bisexual, cis woman, 18–25 years, student).

I hide my gender and sexuality from everyone. No one at all knows and in doing so I avoid [sic] all the repercussions that goes with that (Bisexual, trans man, 36–45 years, staff member).

Nearly half (46%) of the SGD participants in this study felt compelled to not reveal their gender and/or sexuality whilst at university because it made them feel safer (Ferfolja et al. 2018). Unfortunately, the perceived need to hide or cover is a strategy that has been employed by members of SGD communities (Griffin 1991). Although hiding may be done to avoid potential discrimination, it can be emotionally draining on the individual as the first extract above demonstrates; there are few, if any, equivalents of such experience for those who identify as heterosexual. Hiding one's non-normative gender or sexual subjectivity is perceived by some as safer but by doing so, being able to connect with like-minded people is impacted as one's diversity is rendered invisible.

Foucault (1978) highlights how subjects are constituted through discourse, and produced through a knowledge/power nexus. Understandings of what is normal/abnormal are constructed through discourses that circulate; these also serve as the basis for sexuality and gendered surveillance. Individuals are policed to encourage conformity to normalising (heterosexual and cisgender) discourses; those subjects positioned outside of dominant discourse are often derided and punished as abnormal. Heterosexism and cissexism both contribute to these tactics of surveillance.

Policy, online materials and curricula

It was clear that as a large, public institution, some endeavour was made to include SGD identities in a range of policy documents, online web-pages and variously, in course content. As with the analysis of policy and curriculum inclusions reported in relation to other broad educational systems (Ferfolja 2013; Ball et al. 2011; Ferfolja and Ullman 2014), clearer articulation of requirements, including the provision of diverse examples, could enhance the educational teaching that such documents potentially provide. Because non-normative subjects are non-normative, they are frequently overlooked, ignored or conflated with other subjectivities that are positioned in dominant and normalised discourses of gender and sexuality. Thus, in official documentation, SGD subjectivities can easily be rendered invisible and non-existent. This requires, we might argue, an investment in 'queering' the policy documents that are used to inform decision-making, so they are better able to represent and indeed make visible non-normative experiences and bodies. Moving readers of such documents outside of the taken-for-granted discursive understandings could impact the way that policy, for instance, is interpreted and implemented. As Ball et al. (2011) point out, policy does not necessarily result in enactment or implementation; by extension, when policy is narrowly perceived to relate to a mainstream population, positive outcomes for marginalised groups may well be negligible.

The analysis of course handbooks highlighted that although institutional content increasingly referred to sexuality and gender diversity between 2008 and 2017, this was not across all disciplines represented by the range of university courses. For instance, SGD-related course content in postgraduate courses increased over the period. There was a 25% increase between 2008 and 2017 in SGD-related content in business and law courses, a 133% increase in health and science, and a 184% increase in SGD-related content in postgraduate courses in the humanities and social sciences. Whilst positive, these results point to the uneven distribution of SGD-related content and how SGD identities are more visible in some areas of tertiary education than others. The increase, however, does reflect changing broader social norms in relation to sexuality and gender diversity. This has occurred alongside changes to numerous Australian Federal laws; for instance, in 2009, changes to 85 federal laws were enacted to remove discrimination against same-sex couples in areas like tax, health and social security (Winsor 2017). In 2013, new protections on the grounds of sexual orientation, gender identity and intersex status were included in the Sex Discrimination Act 1984 (Cth) (Australian Human Rights Commission 2017b). These amendments aimed to provide greater equity for SGD people and bring their access and rights in line with those afforded heterosexuals. Thus, although there is, at least on paper, enhanced inclusions of SGD-related content in courses, this is not indicative of a comprehensive approach across the university. As the following participants indicated, this means in some courses, SGD remains invisible and silenced:

Usually if [lecturers are] using a family example it's always mum and dad, two children, picket fence type of thing ... Like once if they said, okay, here's a male couple in this example, and changing it up. Just little things like that I think would just normalise it more. (Interviewee, Student)

[The content in one unit I took] has probably been the one standout unit for actually having... relationships outside of the heteronormative scope. But other than that, it's kind of like 'blah blah blah blah, and then of course there's homosexual relationships' and that's kind of it. Or it's not even mentioned at all... [and] nobody has addressed transgender issues at all in any lecture or tutorial content (Interviewee, Student)

By extension, such silence suggests that many students are potentially graduating from the university with potentially very limited, if any, understanding of this important form of diversity. This may be problematic in terms of preparing young people for the diversity of twenty-first century workplaces.

Support on campus

Accessing institutional supports, particularly if they are not obvious to students and staff, is not always straightforward as illustrated by the survey responses below.

I have not had any association with any queer groups, I've [sic] heard that one exists but I have not received or seen any information about it being distributed (Lesbian, cis woman, 18–25 years, student).

As a staff member, there are no people/clubs/societies/divisions/units available (Bisexual, trans man, 36–45 years, staff member).

Similarly, when asked about the visibility of resources, often staff indicated they were not aware of many of the resources available for SGD students and staff:

It's not visible at all. I think you can walk through the campus and not think there was any queer space on the campus at all. I don't think there are enough signs, I don't think there is enough... with the student newspaper even... I walk through the campuses a lot and you just don't see the signs. I wouldn't even know where to direct someone to, which I know sounds terrible and I'm embarrassed by that (Interviewee, Staff Member).

Although at the time of the research, and indeed previous to it, there were some supports available in terms of clubs such as the Queer Collective and the ALLY Network, and although these groups were spoken of highly in this research, some student and staff participants, expressed difficulty in locating such targeted support on campus. This speaks to the representation of sexuality and gender diversity, and indeed its (in)visibility across the campus. Interestingly, the Queer Spaces on campus—rooms allocated for SGD individuals and their allies—were perceived by some as safe and as sources of potential support, as one student interviewee stated: 'I feel safe in the queer room... I feel safe to express - to act gay, whatever that may be, hold hands with my girlfriend and whatnot. I feel safe doing that in the queer room'. Contradictorily though, for others, because of the visibility (or location) of the Queer Spaces, they were perceived as risky to engage with because of their potential to 'out' individuals who then may be subject to further harassment or discrimination.

In addition, there was some division within the LGBTIQ+ community on campus. Some Queer Spaces, for instance, were not perceived as necessarily welcoming for everyone due to divisions, often linked to identity politics and representations of sexuality and gender identity. In an interview, one member of staff who works closely with community indicated that there has been '...conflict between group members within the collectives themselves', which included microaggressions and 'bullying'. These findings are similar to those in Waling and Roffe's (2016) work, and point to the importance of ensuring that multiple forms of support and representations of queer diversity are visible in higher education institutions.

Conclusion

This paper illustrates how heterosexism and cissexism are present in the higher education institution under examination, and manifest at multiple layers of the university. These forms of discrimination, whether consciously enacted or not, contribute to the predominance of silence and invisibility of SGD students and staff. There is an on-going disjuncture between dominant discourses that generally position universities as socially progressive, open environments (Shiko 2016; Sian 2019) and the seemingly omnipresent discourses in these institutions, as illustrated by the literature review, that legitimate the ascendancy of heterosexual and cisgender identities. Such disjuncture must be comprehensively addressed if universities are to produce graduates across all disciplines who both possess and can demonstrate the cultural capability to engage with increasingly diverse communities—which includes SGD people.

Although silence and invisibility is multi-layered, both imposed by others and agentially assumed by some for tactics of passing, covering and so forth, silence and invisibility also mean that nothing changes as experiences of exclusion and diverse identities remain simultaneously hidden. By highlighting these tensions and discourses that are normalised, our

research points to the important work that universities must consider to address (in)visibility and its impact on the health and wellbeing of individuals. We advocate for increased diversity in the representations of sexuality/gender across universities, and in particular, in policy, course curricula, clubs and societies and university marketing. As the costs of reporting exclusion are perceived to be high for individuals, it is clearly up to broader social and educational institutions to be proactive and show leadership in supporting marginalised individuals and communities; without this, exclusion will continue to be unaddressed and nothing will change.

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