RESEARCH

Invisible while visible: an Australian perspective on queer women leaders in international affairs

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In among the silencing and invisibility of their stories, queer women operate as critical leaders in international affairs. They face multiple marginalisations: (1) challenging the archetypical diplomat or security leader as a heteronormative (white) male; and (2) operating in different cultural contexts with varying negative attitudes towards women in power and homosexuality in general. Providing both empirical and theoretical contributions to the fields of diplomacy, feminist and queer theory, this article gains unique access to Australian lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans and gender diverse, and intersex diplomats and attachés to understand: what are the experiences of queer woman leaders in international affairs?

Key words diplomacy • gender • sexuality • security • lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans and gender diverse, and intersex • queer

Key messages
- Queer women experience deep exclusion in diplomacy, often 'invisible' despite their highly visible roles.
- Even if not queer, women diplomats are often typified to be queer, which is emblematic of othering.
- Diplomatic privilege protects queer women, providing opportunities to work in contentious spaces.
- Women with wives may be best able to perform the 'dual roles' of diplomacy but challenges remain.

Introduction

'I don't think it's necessarily because of my gender or my sexuality or my ethnicity, but … I spent a lot of time worrying that I wasn't ambassadorial enough, I wasn't like some of the people I'd seen in [my agency] – particularly the men, I have to say, because there's more of them to look at.' (Participant 2, 4 February 2019)

Queer women in Australian international affairs highlight the silencing and invisibility that those at the intersection of gender and diverse sexuality endure, despite the high-status and visible nature of their work. They face multiple marginalisations: (1) challenging the archetypical diplomat or security leader as a heteronormative (white) male (Neumann, 2008; Enloe, 2014); while (2) operating in different cultural contexts with varying negative attitudes towards women in power and homosexuality in general (UNDP, ILO, 2018). Their experiences reinforce what Marinucci (2010) finds as a deeply entwined oppression and suppression of gender and sexuality. Yet, lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans and gender-diverse, and intersex (LGBTI or 'queer') women's experiences also reinforce the privilege and protection offered by international affairs, which, perhaps more so than any other field, offers opportunities for queer women to live and work in vastly varying international contexts. After interviewing Australian LGBTI women diplomats and attachés deployed internationally, this article attempts to understand: what does sexuality add to our understandings of the gendered nature of international affairs?

On this topic, Australia is at a critical juncture, with women nearing parity in leadership across our premiere agency for international affairs. In recent years, Senator Penny Wong has represented Australia as not only the first Asian-born Australian, but also first queer woman, in a foreign affairs ministerial portfolio. Moreover, Australia sits on the cusp of the very first civil society submission to create a 'queer' foreign policy. This contemporary history across Australian international affairs makes the Australian case not only a timely but significant case from which to understand the gendered and queer nature of international affairs.

As a subject, 'queer' is both plural and contested in the literature, defined by: (1) the desire to capture anti-normative and non-normative theories and perspectives; and (2) sexes, genders and sexualities (Weber, 2016). Both perspectives provide valuable insights to international relations (IR). Further, while most of the literature on diplomacy, gender and sexuality comes predominantly from European or US perspectives, contemporary studies from the field and from different perspectives are sought (Aggestam and Towns, 2018). This article therefore presents original and unique in-depth qualitative data from the Australian context, adding both empirical and theoretical contributions to the fields of diplomacy, IR, feminism and queer theory. The article addresses critical gaps, applying queer feminist theory to understand women's experiences, as well as ways of being and knowing, in this space of diplomacy (Peterson, 1992; Aggestam and Towns, 2018). Using Weber's (2016: 12) definition of queer as 'sexes, genders, and sexualities rather than … a broader understanding of queer as encompassing all things', this research focuses on how queer or LGBTI identity affects the distinct experiences of women who operate within Australian international affairs.

This article will first canvas the literature and context, exploring gender and sexuality in international affairs. It will then discuss the research approach and cases, before exploring queer women's identities and experiences internationally. By applying a queer feminist approach and Altman and Symons's (2016) concept of conditional acceptance, this article finds that as long as diplomacy bases its assumptions on the perspectives and actions of men, acceptance of queer *and heterosexual* women in international affairs remains deeply conditional. Further, the article argues that analysis of *gender* in international affairs is incomplete without also analysing *sexuality*.

Literature review

Cynthia Enloe (2014) argues that international diplomacy is a male world, guided by norms of masculinity and occupied by men. Further, the archetypical diplomat remains heterosexual and the field remains heteronormative, with (paid) *male envoys* and (unpaid) *female trailing spouses* remaining central to diplomatic structure, responsibilities and allowances (Aggestam and Towns, 2018). Women occupy only 15 per cent of ambassador positions globally, with Towns and Niklasson (2017) finding female ambassadors less likely to occupy high-status ambassadorships than their male colleagues. Queer women represent a minority within an already marginalised group in international affairs, with employment opportunities generally unevenly distributed across classes, genders, sexualities, (dis)abilities and ethnicities (Acker, 2012). As Spike Peterson (1992: 45) argues, the state exercises power not only through its claim to legitimate violence, but also through state activities, routines and rituals that constitute and regulate 'acceptable forms and images of social activity and individual and collective identity'.

If the history of diplomacy is in any way able to account for these 'acceptable forms' of identity, then in the Australian context, they take on a distinctly heterosexual, masculine and Anglo-Saxon appearance, suggesting that queer women diplomats and envoys would experience challenges in gaining and maintaining their representational roles. They are likely to experience further difficulties as Altman and Symons (2016) argue that there is an inherent precariousness of LGBTI identities, whereby the acceptance of identity remains conditional and identities remain marked by being 'not normal', if not as outright 'abnormality', suggesting significant barriers for queer women in any form of employment, let alone highly fluctuating international representation. The concept of conditional acceptance forms a core part of this article and delineates strict rules for queer women's inclusion or exclusion, which adds to our understanding of gender and sexuality in international affairs.

The constitution of gender and sexuality categories may vary according to shifting dynamics and varying contexts, which makes the subject of diplomacy particularly complex. However, the subordination of certain genders and sexualities is well documented – with femininities subordinate to masculinities (Cassidy and Althari, 2017) and hegemonic masculinity (Connell, 2009) both legitimising men's dominant position in the field and justifying the subordination of women and men along lines gender, as well as ethnicity, sexuality, ability and class. 'Queerness' adds complexity to this understanding. Queer women are often perceived as 'butch' or 'masculine' women, not quite fitting into the same gender category as heterosexual women and often facing distinct and often 'additive' effects of their intersectionality.

Historically, LGBTI individuals have been viewed with caution and suspicion, in particular, as security risks typically excluded from sensitive diplomatic positions (Chua, 2016). Queer identity placed individuals especially at risk of being blackmailed, and their loyalties in diplomacy and security were questioned as they were perceived as being part of a transnational cosmopolitan community (Chauncey, 2005; Crawford, 2010). For Australia's first openly gay diplomat, Stephen Brady, and noted gay senior diplomat John Dauth, queer identity had marked impacts, affecting individuals' abilities to take up the posts that they wanted and, in some cases, requiring them to take 'lesser' posts – acts of 'career suicide'. Yet, most LGBTI histories focus almost exclusively on gay men, with the issue of queer women only raised in the context

of equality: in the UK, if gay men were barred from international appointments, should queer women also be barred?

Increasingly, international and transnational actors have argued that LGBTI rights are human rights (Britt, 2015). Globally, the past two decades have witnessed greater acceptance of human rights as a normative moral international framework. Yet, global studies indicate that workplaces are one of the most significant contexts where discrimination, homophobia and harassment are felt, suggesting that queer working women may face specific challenges (UNDP, ILO, 2018). Across the world, 70 countries still criminalise homosexuality, 44 of which apply this equally to women, and, in many instances, homophobia is not just accepted, but sanctioned by the state (ILGA, 2019).

In the past, the duties of maintaining state security, sovereignty and national interest were largely considered from gender-blind perspectives (Thomson, 2017). They were largely blind of intersectionality too (Crenshaw, 1989) – the influence of not just gender, but ethnicity, class, sexuality, (dis)ability and so on, in an intersecting way, on individuals' experiences. Despite this, the duties of 'articulat[ing] the meaning within which others from around the world work and live' fall to individual leaders – those who are inherently gendered, racialised and reflective of myriad sexual orientations (Adler, 1997: 176). Identity is not therefore something neutral or separate to how we conduct interstate relations; rather, it is inextricably entwined with states' presence within the region and the world – the personal is political, and not only gender, but also sexuality, matters to IR (Smith and Lee, 2014).

This article therefore addresses significant gaps. As Cynthia Weber (2016) and Laura Sjoberg (2016: 82, emphasis in original) argue, '*sexuality* as much as gender shapes state identities and foreign policy'. Yet, there is 'exceptionally little scholarship' on the histories of sexuality in diplomacy, particularly of lesbian, gay or bisexual diplomats (Aggestam and Towns, 2018: 16). The field of political science and IR has also marginalised 'queerness', despite the fact that both remain centrally focused on power and the (re)production of power relations (Smith and Lee, 2014). As Marinucci (2010: 106) states: 'the oppression of women and the suppression of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender existence are deeply entwined'. Queer feminism, then, 'brings both a queer orientation to feminist theory, and a feminist orientation to queer theory' (Marinucci, 2010: 105). The point at which queer, feminist and diplomatic theory meet therefore presents a rich site for analysis to understand what sexuality adds to our understanding of the gendered nature of international affairs, particularly given that diverse diplomacy is critical to the functioning and representation of states (Conley Tyler, 2016). Crucially, queerness relates not only to bodies, but also to the practices and analysis of IR, bringing additional lenses of understanding to IR scholarship (Sjoberg, 2016).

In addition to issues of invisibility and silencing, the paucity of research makes the narratives of queer women in international affairs hard to study. This article therefore explores the experiences of a small number of LGBTI representatives who have self-identified as queer in order to understand not just the gendered, but also the sexualised, nature of IR from an Australian perspective. This fits well within a queer and feminist theoretical approach, which aims to put traditionally marginalised voices front and centre (McNae and Vali, 2015).

Research design

This research forms part of a larger research project on the experiences of Australian women in international affairs. Initially, the research project had no unique focus on sexuality. Yet, through conducting that research, narratives on sexuality were found to be gravely missing in Australian international affairs and in much of the literature globally. This article is therefore a direct response to gaps in the literature and the unique findings discovered on LGBTI experiences in international affairs.

Gaining LGBTI participants was not initially a specific methodological choice in the wider research. Rather, an intersectional feminist approach was used to gain experiences of *diverse* women in diplomacy, which is an important methodological contribution and a common methodological choice for this field of research (see Spark et al, 2018). The primary data analysed are taken from qualitative life-history interviews with four women participants who self-identified as queer or LGBTI (referred to as the 'primary participants'), who formed a natural population of the wider selection of research participants. Given that the intersection of sexuality *and gender* forms the basis of this article, it also draws from the wider data set of a further 53 participants (referred to as 'secondary participants'), who formed the basis of the original research and helped to triangulate the data – some of whom spoke of challenges across gender and sexuality in appointments, even if not identifying as queer themselves. Conley Tyler et al (2014) and Spark et al (2018) provide precedence for this kind of deep-dive analysis. The sample of four primary participants provides important, insightful accounts from which to begin to understand this topic, unearthing rich and varied answers on the gendered and sexualised nature of international affairs.

Participant criteria required women who: (1) were employed in one of the four case agencies; (2) had deployed internationally; (3) were at executive level (EL) or senior executive service (SES) level; and (4) identified as a woman. The primary participants for this article represented all (100 per cent) of those that disclosed being LGBTI or queer in the wider data set. All participants were sought through published databases of staff in the agencies (where found), online publicly accessible accounts of senior women, assistance from the agencies and snowballing. If agencies volunteered to collate names of potential participants, additional senior women leaders were also sought to ensure participant anonymity. This also ensured that a broader range of participants were sought than those identified by the agency, who could be handpicked by the agency as good examples or cases.

Due to the small number of women identifying as queer and in Australian international affairs, and their various statuses of being publicly 'out', participants' names, agencies, post locations and ranks are withheld (unless they were part of the wider cohort of researched participants, where their agency may be identified). The queer women interviewed are numbered 'Participant 1', 'Participant 2' and so on in the article, with all participants numbered 'Five' and above being part of the broader data set, that is, secondary participants.

Qualitative semi-structured interviews were undertaken after gaining ethical approval from the Griffith University Human Research Ethics Committee (Number: 2018/059) and Defence People Low Risk Ethics Panel (Number: 098/18). The four LGBTI participants were employed as envoys in the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) and the Australian Federal Police (AFP); however, as part of the wider data set that helped to triangulate some of the findings, participants also included individuals from Defence and the Department of Home Affairs (DHA). The research

chose these four most salient agencies to Australian international affairs based on their strategic importance within diplomatic or security spheres. The DFAT and Defence are 'natural' inclusions on this basis. However, the DHA and AFP (which is a portfolio agency of the DHA) are an important extra inclusion as they are contemporarily recognised as the 'third force of security' in foreign affairs and are able to provide a deeper understanding of international engagement across agencies often left out of analysis (Pezzullo, cited in Easton, 2017: para 34).

All agencies are at a federal level of government and have high public profiles. Yet, the agencies also have clear differences in terms of levels of women in leadership, agency structure and culture, and policy development for supporting gender equality and LGBTI diversity. Agency structure also has specific implications for queer women leaders, with more militaristic agencies particularly steeped in gendered norms around heteronormative male physicality and enforcement (McGlen and Sarkees, 1993). While unable to be expanded upon here, women in more 'masculine' roles tended to adopt various discursive and bodily identity practices compliant with dominant masculinities, signifying both resistance to and compliance with existing gender orders. This has ramifications to be explored further in another article given that military hierarchy is often associated with higher instances of sexual harassment resulting from power differentials.

All participants gave their full permission for their experiences to be recorded and transcribed, yet it is significant to note that in cases where the primary participants' queer identity was not known prior to the interview, sexuality was often only brought up at the end of the interview. At this point, the interview usually continued for another 30 to 60 minutes. All participants were between the ages of 30 and 60, and out of the queer participants, all had partners, with three out of four being married, and one had children. This differed from the wider participants, of whom only half were married or in a relationship, a considerable number remained single, and most had children. Individuals represented a range of ethnic, socio-economic and educational backgrounds – in both the queer and wider data sets.

In designing the research methodology and questions, intersectionality actively informed the research, shaping the way and manner in which I asked questions – the way in which I introduced the research topic and myself mattered. I used this as an opportunity to share my own personal credibility, as well as the research context and the 'safety' of the interview space. Creating a 'safe' space was important, particularly as not just sexism, but racism, homophobia and other forms of discrimination and harassment, may have factored into women's stories. To establish the space as safe, I would often mention my own work in the fields of LGBTI, cultural and linguistic diversity (CALD) or other inclusion, and would always use the language of 'diverse' women and the diversity of their experiences. Sometimes, in addition to my gender, I would further disclose elements of my background to establish a safe environment. This contributed to a kind of 'embodied intersectionality' approach to research. My personal identity as a young queer woman researcher who had been involved in international public diplomacy efforts with the associated agencies, and whose life had been affected by various aspects of disability, gender and sexuality, brought a very specific understanding and ability to connect and explore the research.

Across the four agencies studied, women's roles internationally varied across portfolios, ranks, duties and types of work. Not all would be comfortable or feel represented by the word 'diplomat', yet by virtue of their international representation

of Australian interests, values and governments overseas, their roles are inherently 'diplomatic' and involve highly developed skills of diplomacy.

Individuals had been deployed in every region of the world, across a wide range of postings. Requirements within Defence and some DHA deployments meant that not all participants could choose their country of deployment, though, in some circumstances, such as in the civilian side of Defence, women could register expressions of interest only for the countries they wanted. For those who could choose their country of deployment, gendered and sexuality-based considerations were key considerations in determining whether they took up opportunities or not. For those with children, the choice was explicit. For others, factors like the type of lifestyle, level of domestic support (for instance, the ability to have domestic help) and spousal opportunities or safety weighed considerably into their choices. A small number of countries were recurrently brought up as 'no-go' countries, including Saudi Arabia and Pakistan, with others low on the list of desired postings including Papua New Guinea, Afghanistan and a number of other Middle Eastern countries in particular. As one participant notes:

> 'We wouldn't deploy to somewhere where [homosexuality is] illegal because … I think it's critical to have your spouse at post … if you're going to be in a foreign country for three years, if you have a spouse, it's really important to have them offshore to have that support network because that's your home, that's your coming back to something – that's your peace point where no matter what sort of stuff happens to you during the course of the day, they're your normal, you know?' (Participant 1, 26 June 2018)

Yet, even countries such as the US were warily regarded, particularly with the decision by the US State Department to stop issuing visas to the same-sex partners of foreign diplomats sent to the US or the United Nations in New York unless they are legally married. Overall, no particular locations were entirely 'safe' for queer women. Rather, safety was marked more by safety within participants' own agencies, reinforcing findings that agencies (not host countries) matter most to women's treatment overseas (Stephenson, 2019).

Queer, woman or diplomat?

How individuals identify matters. Neumann's (2008: 687) work, 'The body of the diplomat', found that women represented two different femininities and hierarchies for understanding their roles: 'as a diplomat that happens to be a woman' and 'as a woman who happens to be a diplomat'. Neumann asserts that these characterisations are due to inherent tensions between the status of being a 'woman' and the status of being a 'diplomat', and that women felt that they had to make a strategic choice to identify and privilege one status over another. For participants, although 'queerness' was inherent in their experiences, similar to Christo's (2015) findings, their status as women generally preceded their sexuality. Gender and sexuality produced related, but also distinct, experiences. While gender is often based on socially constructed differences – many of which are physically 'obvious' – sexuality is often invisible; therefore, the need and ability to identify as queer differed between participants and contexts.

Sexual identity was therefore an integral part of participants' identity but not always one that they could promote or announce. For those who were openly out and were sought for specifically LGBTI-related initiatives or events within their agencies or in-country posts, the hierarchy for understanding their role followed more of a 'queer-and-woman-first-diplomat-next' identity format. In almost every other circumstance, their gender and sexuality were downplayed, following a role-first-woman-next pattern, with their sexuality often left out entirely. Often, the decision to remain in the 'closet' was based out of fear that coming out would limit their career options, damage their reputation or put them physically at risk on their postings or even in their agencies.

Deciding on the context in which to disclose sexuality and to which audience was therefore a significant consideration, particularly as diplomacy relies on interpersonal networking and events, and considerable public functions. In many circumstances, whether individuals were married and had children was the first question asked, and many had carefully scripted responses ready or used non-gendered pronouns to disguise the gender of their partners. Over a period of years at a single post, the ability to do so was extremely taxing and personally damaging, both to individuals and their relationships. As one participant states: "It was difficult for me, I did get away the entire three years I think without actually having it articulated that my partner was female. They didn't come to any events – whilst they had a [spousal] visa [which would allow them to do so]" (Participant 1, 26 June 2018). The effect of this prejudice and invisibility suggests added challenges to the well-documented lack of recognition and self-censoring experienced by women leaders. Further, negotiating invisibility also presented unique challenges in the context of the high-profile nature of participants' roles and the historical expectations of diplomacy as a two-person job, with spouses being an integral part of the diplomatic package. Therefore, the inability to identify participants' queerness, or the ability to only identify it in certain contexts, highlighted the field as more hostile than not to queer women's identities. It only appeared welcoming of diverse women conditional on a large variety of external factors, highlighting the conditional acceptance of queer identity (Altman and Symons, 2016).

What are the experiences of queer women in international affairs?

This section seeks to uncover what sexuality adds to our understanding of the gendered nature of international affairs by exploring core parts of women's narratives, particularly around the challenges as they have raised them. This section covers: the 'queering' of women leaders in the field; the challenges of queer visibility and invisibility; the protective elements that international affairs offered queer women; and the heteronormative structuring of posts and the effect that this had on reinforcing women with 'wives' as those best equipped to manage diplomatic roles, as opposed to their heterosexual female counterparts.

'Queering' women in international affairs

As noted earlier, key scholars such as Enloe (2014) find international affairs to be masculine and male-dominated. However, by applying queer feminism, it is clear that the field is also heteronormative and heterosexist. Therefore, because the ideal diplomat

remains the heterosexual, (white) man in Australian international affairs, it is worth noting that heteronormativity and homophobia effect even *heterosexual* women who represent a deviation from the masculine norm. In the wider data set, Participant 5 notes that "when you look at close girlfriends and I who are still single, there is a view that we must all be lesbians … actually we're not [lesbians] … but, I mean, I've been accused of being a lesbian for a long time, particularly within the army" (Participant 5, Defence, 20 March 2019). For some participants, the correlations between being a woman in a significant position of leadership and having short hair, no children or no partner (or a combination of the three) led to them being recurrently perceived as queer. Mostly, this was received good-naturedly and did not affect their work. However, the way in which participants were perceived by the outside world and their counterparts is significant for understanding the nature of gender in international affairs. Even if not queer, women were frequently typified to be queer. This is emblematic of the 'othering' experienced by women leaders and diplomats, for whom international affairs continues to reinforce specific gendered and sexual power dynamics that support gender inequality and heterosexism (Cassidy and Althari, 2017). It reinforces the fact that even if the majority of women represented internationally are heterosexual, gender *and sexuality* still affect them. There is no 'opting out' of the gendered and sexualised nature of international affairs, which suggests not only that queer women's acceptance in the field is conditional, but also that this conditional acceptance is extended, to a degree, to women more generally in the field – symbolic of instances of conflating 'women' with 'queer'. This reinforces the 'deeply entwined' nature of the oppression and suppression of women and of 'queer' (Marinucci, 2010: 107).

Challenges for queer women: visibility and invisibility

For those who did identify as queer, their experiences revealed the layered effect of their intersectionality. Being demanding and exclusive, international affairs is characterised by high mobility, extraordinary commitment and complex decision-making on topics both inside and outside an envoy's particular area of expertise (Stephenson, 2019). The international affairs workplace remains a bastion of prestige and social class, with deeply embedded norms of masculinity and heteronormativity that, on the surface, would appear to be the antithesis of a space welcoming to queer women (Neumann, 2008; Enloe, 2014). Queer women leaders operate at the nexus where the gendered (and racialised, classed and so on) and heteronormative practices of international affairs meet specific national and overarching international politics, as well as their specific hierarchies and gender practices. As such, this space is complex, with individual circumstances, agency context, host and home country norms, and diplomatic norms all affecting queer women's conditional acceptance in the field. On top of the general challenges that envoys experience, queer women experience further challenges in international representation.

As envoys of the Australian federal government, anti-discrimination and equal opportunity law, policies and strategies bind participants and their agencies, which, in theory, gives queer women as many opportunities and protections as any other employment group. Particularly now that Australia has legalised same-sex marriage, queer women are generally afforded the same benefits and allowances as any other staff member, as outlined by each agency's overseas conditions of service.

However, depending on the legal and social acceptance of homosexuality in the host country, differential treatment, harassment and discrimination were common, with queer women often experiencing a deep form of exclusion and only conditional acceptance. Their experiences were summed up thus: "[being LGBTI] is harder offshore where the environment does not sustain [you] – where it's illegal or where you're very much frowned upon" (Participant 1, 26 June 2018). The experiences of queer women envoys were affected by their ability to be 'out' but did not depend on it. Individuals may have been 'out' within their agency or to a select group of colleagues but not 'out' more broadly, or they could have been entirely 'out' to the world. If they were 'out' entirely, they were often subject to greater overt instances of homophobia or heterosexism – name-calling, bullying, isolation, physical threats or violence – both from within their agency and from the field or host country. If they were not 'out', or only partially 'out', they still experienced instances of homophobia and heterosexism; however, this was often coupled with the burden of invisibility and a lack of recognition, both of themselves and/or of their partner and relationship.

For instance, depending on host location, difficulties exist in getting spousal visas for same-sex partners. As one participant states: "before [Australia] had [legalised] gay marriage, I think we had something where if the other country kind of recognised same-sex relationships, the same-sex partner could go in on that visa, but otherwise you go in on a member of the household domestic visa" (Participant 3, 18 June 2018). Participants reported instances of colleagues' spouses deploying as 'maids' or 'chauffeurs', which had ramifications on whether they could claim spousal financial benefits. Further, in emergencies, only those on spousal or family visas were generally evacuated – not those on household/staffing visas. Navigating visas and benefits had significant financial and social ramifications for individuals, which also had ramifications on the wider attraction and retention of staff. Substantial improvements have been made in recent years, with departments committing to extend allowances to spouses regardless of their visa status. However, as long as LGBTI individuals in the field remain closeted or only partially out, visas remain an issue.

Further, for individuals posted from more security- and enforcement-style agencies, the challenges at post were viewed as even more difficult. Whereas homosexuality has been comparatively more accepted in traditional diplomatic spheres, military and paramilitaristic organisations throughout both Australia and internationally exhibit many examples of highly institutionalised homophobia and heterosexism. In the military, this has historically been experienced through 'don't ask, don't tell' policies in the US; however, the lines of homophobia went even further in Australia, where a total ban on gay men and women in the military existed until 1992. In fact, gay men and women served at a time when their identities were illegal, and 'lesbians were punished as deviants who might somehow contaminate the services' (Robinson, 2017: para 17). Australian policing agencies have a similarly institutionalised approach to homophobia, with policing noted as on the forefront of the historical persecution of LGBTI individuals.

For instance, one public account of the experiences of Queensland's first female superintendent recounts her being a lesbian police officer working in a time of the 'lesbian witch hunts' in Australia, which sought to publicly name and shame LGBTI officials. The former chief superintendent notes how she was subject to internal

reviews and hearings, was sent to posts that were the furthest distance from her partner in an attempt to break them up, and was forcefully harassed and discriminated against. Years of relentless harassment and discrimination led to her resigning from the force, only to join the Papua New Guinean Royal Constabulary as part of an Australian government exchange programme. Despite the fact that Papua New Guinea criminalises homosexuality and has extreme rates of violence against women, she deployed with her female partner and felt that she had equal, or more, standing than many of her male counterparts overseas. Her story demonstrates the nuances of representation within a more paramilitaristic agency. For some, international postings represented a reprieve from more entrenched, institutionalised heterosexism and homophobia within Australia.

Yet, it was clear that participant experiences were not always so positive, and the risk of fully embracing their identity within the field and workforce was not always practical, or safe. As one participant states:

> 'I get that it's a good thing for us to be moral leaders as much as possible but I also think there is a duty of care and security issue, and you can push it too far and then you're sending people into the lion's den … the embassies do have quite a high profile, particularly where they are going to small countries or hostile countries, or countries where there's huge diplomatic profiles or communities. You are highly exposed and it is hard to hide.' (Participant 3, 18 June 2018)

This also had implications on the level of seniority that participants were willing to take, particularly in more paramilitaristic agencies. Within these agencies particularly, "the best position is number 2IC [second-in-command]", especially given that some top positions are contractual, with no guarantee of ongoing employment, and that in some countries, it was felt to be simply not safe enough to be a woman, let alone a queer women, in the most senior position (Participant 6, AFP, 21 June 2018).

In many cases, the need to suppress their identity, and the personal challenges that came with navigating a particularly male-dominated and heteronormative field, resulted in self-censoring and opting out of many diplomatic appointments – the emotional and psychological toll falling heavily on women and queer individuals (Aggestam and Towns, 2018). As Participant 2 states: "there's no kind of putting me back in a closet and I wouldn't want to, but, equally, I have colleagues who have very deliberately chosen not to be very openly part of the [LGBTI] network and things like that because they don't want to restrict their posting options" (Participant 2, 4 February 2019). The choice to be 'out' or not was therefore an individual choice made in the context of widespread structural perceived and real homophobia and heterosexism. However, children also affected individuals' options and considerations. Participant 2 expands on how she and her partner chose their host location because they could be recognised as married with a child: "We have a child and we just couldn't be in a country where we had to be in any way closeted because that's not how she'd spent the first years of her life, so she couldn't spend the next three" (Participant 2, 4 February 2019). Another participant says:

> 'When we do our processes, we get to exclude countries, so we can say we don't want to go here or there for cultural reasons. I excluded a number for cultural reasons and decided I couldn't do my best job, I couldn't be me and do what I could do in Dubai, for example. I couldn't make the best outcomes for [my agency], I think, in any other highly Islamic or highly orthodox country. That's a practical decision for me about what I want and taking away that whole – but it should be equal – that made the difference for me because it gave me peace.' (Participant 1, 26 June 2018)

She further notes that "It isn't play-fighting or anything, there's really deadly consequences…. You can wave the flag of equality as much as you want but if it affects you personally, and it does, then being pragmatic is crucial" (Participant 1, 26 June 2018). This ability to self-select in and out of certain deployments was therefore very important for individuals. However, as mentioned earlier, self-selection is not possible across all areas of international deployment, particularly with security and enforcement agencies offering no choice of location – you go where you are sent – perhaps highlighting forms of 'masculinised and feminised sacrifice' that are necessary 'to sustain a readiness for war' (Sylvester, quoted in Peterson, 1992: 160). Further, opting out of certain postings may have ramifications on individuals' future careers, as a participant from the wider data set notes: "Have you deployed offshore? Have you done the hardship postings? Have you actually gainfully progressed [the agency's] wants and needs offshore? Yes, it is a tick in the box [for career progression]" (Participant 6, AFP, 21 June 2018).

Diplomacy and the promise of protection

The potential loss of highly talented and diverse representatives from the pipeline also has ramifications on Australian objectives. The under-representation of diverse women in diplomacy and security is problematised on two fronts: (1) for the loss of women's equal contribution to international relations decision-making (strategic grounds) (Gilligan, 1982); and (2) that women's under-representation undermines the representative nature of Australian democracy and its national interests overseas (moral grounds) (Cass and Rubenstein, 1995). Further, diverse representation, of which queer women are included, adds authenticity and legitimacy to Australia's foreign policy objectives in the region. The idea of 'legitimacy' is particularly salient in international affairs, where the key roles of actors are to represent 'Australia' and its interests; furthermore, as Conley Tyler (2016) argues, citizens expect that such agencies should reflect the constituent elements of the community they represent. A participant highlights a key point:

> 'We always talk about how proud we are of our multiculturalism, about our broadmindedness … if we say that and then our overseas presence is the white male, heterosexual man, then how is that reflective of who Australia is? Not that I've got anything against white, heterosexual men, but it's only one part of the Australian identity.' (Participant 4, 2 August 2018)

The ability to 'walk the talk' and the experiences of these diverse queer women in diplomacy demonstrate the protective and privileging aspects of international affairs

work, which, perhaps more than any other field, provides diplomatic immunity and protection for queer women in what might otherwise be hostile or even dangerous situations. The protective aspects of international affairs work coalesced around four key themes.

First, there was a privilege attached to rank and role, whereby international representatives, whether queer and women or not, were likely to be better treated than the average individual in either the host or home country. Being part of the 'elite', in public office and selected as the representative of a nation evidently offered considerable status and prestige upon which the participants were able to draw.

Second, diplomats generally evidence high levels of education and cultural competency, and operate within specific codes of conduct aimed at mitigating diplomatic incidences (Stephenson, 2019). This 'worldliness', combined with clearly established protocols and an understanding that an individual is merely a representative of the state, seemed to allow a broader scope of human diversity to be accepted and respected.

Third, and relatedly, the women felt themselves to be, first and foremost, representing their country: a job viewed as genderless, even while still reinforcing distinct gendered experiences. The following interaction between the interviewee and one participant highlights this:

> Participant: 'I do find, though, as a diplomat or representative of your country, you don't have gender because you're representing Australia. So, even in places where they don't normally deal with, or they don't have women in their own service, it's okay, you're a foreigner and you're representing your country. So, it's never been a complete impediment or anything. In fact, in many ways, often, it can open doors because there's more of an interest, because they're less used to having women in those roles.'
> Interviewer: 'That's really interesting. You come in as genderless, you are that representative.'
> Participant: 'Yeah, I'm Australia.'
> Interviewer: 'Do you think the men feel that too in the department?'
> Participant: 'The men in my department … they probably don't have to think about it because they're the dominant gender.' (Participant 7, DFAT, 15 October 2018)

To 'be Australia' appeared to depersonalise participants, adding another layer of protection.

Finally, in some circumstances, participants' identities as queer women was felt to be so far a norm deviation from the standard international representative that they felt they were not constrained by the same expectations of either gender. For many Australian women in international affairs, their worst experiences of sexism, discrimination and harassment were found to be agency-based, rather than dependent on the host location (Stephenson, 2019). Despite different cultures and norms around gender and sexuality internationally, as long as queer women had the support of their deploying agencies, their ability to contribute and be respected as representatives was often highly successful. Support included recognition of their relationship, equally applied spousal benefits for their partner (the same as that of any heterosexual colleague) and

measures to help them adjust to international deployment, such as gained through informal LGBTI networks or formal strategies.

Without this crucial element of agency recognition and support, Participants 1 to 3, in particular, noted that they or their colleagues were more likely to experience challenges. Interactions that were reported included homophobic and sexist comments, a lack of understanding or recourse after homophobic incidences (particularly if there was a feeling of being 'tolerated' rather than actively supported by the agencies), and bullying. Further, all participants spoke about issues surrounding visibility and acceptance: navigating to whom they could be open and out (which had effects on access to allowances and visas), and the impact of entrenched, crushing and long-term invisibility on mental (and physical) health. Common words used to describe the work across all interviewees included that it was 'very public', 'isolating', 'lonely', 'exposed', a '24/7 job', 'destabilising' and 'strains relationships', factors that appeared to have had a compounding effect on queer participants.

Heteronormativity underpins international affairs

Overall, it was clear that queer women challenged the whole structuring of posts around heteronormativity. Women were both in roles of the diplomat and the spouse at the same time, in the same household – doubly different to traditional diplomatic norms of the male envoy and female trailing spouse, and, more recently, the female envoy and male trailing spouse (Neumann, 2008). The result was that the queer women interviewed (women with female partners) appeared to fare better than their heterosexual female colleagues in terms of meeting the demands of international deployment and the extraordinary requirements of diplomacy. It was not that participants who had same-sex relationships were inherently more equal, sharing paid and unpaid labour; rather, female spouses tended to be more engaged in managing diplomatic households and the informal functions that are a mainstay of international negotiation than male spouses tended to be. Female spouses of the participants who were interviewed were also more likely to undertake the burden of unpaid domestic labour or primary childcare and eldercare responsibilities in order to allow their spouses to dedicate more time to their paid deployed role. Further, a considerable number of heterosexual women from the wider data set noted that the most successful deploying partnerships that they witnessed were 'women with wives', a joke that highlighted a theme that if you could choose it, you would have a 'wife' to help you carry out the tasks required of international deployment. Perhaps if nothing else, this suggests an informal form of acceptance of 'women with wives' based on their utility in diplomatic roles.

Conclusion

> 'I asked the ambassador at the time [how the host country might treat having an LGBTI representative]…. He said … "By the time they get over the fact that you're a senior female, the gay thing will be the last thing they'll worry about."' (Participant 4, 2 August 2018)

Analysis of queer women's narratives and experiences reveals the deeply gendered *and heteronormative* nature of international affairs – a field more hostile than not to queer women's identities. Visa issues and spousal benefits, as well as silencing and invisibility, deeply affected participants' experiences. Their experiences highlighted difficulties fitting in, navigating the circumstances in which to be 'out' and balancing their experiences of harassment and discrimination at home versus abroad in a variety of new social and normative settings.

Yet, the protected status of a diplomat or representative, whose social circles are typically elite, educated and worldly, obviously offers some protection for queer women to live and work in a range of international contexts, perhaps more so than other fields of work. The role both protects the diplomat from much of the homophobia and sexism latent in host (and home) societies, while also highlighting systemic heteronormative policies and social norms that marginalise and discriminate against their identity. These norms and institutions both constrained and enabled women in their roles, with a sense of norm deviation also used as a source of power for some who felt that they were not constrained in the same way as heterosexual men or women may be.

It was significant that even heterosexual women could be perceived as 'queer' and subject to the similar conditional acceptance that queer women face, which is emblematic of women's general othering within the field. Further, it was significant that the queer women interviewed appeared better equipped than their heterosexual female counterparts to handle the 'dual role' that international diplomacy requires of both paid envoys and their unpaid 'trailing spouses'. This was deeply ironic as the inability to be visible, or the requirement to be visible only in certain circumstances, placed a heavy burden on those queer women who were perhaps most able to perform the duties required of a diplomatic couple.

This article reinforces the fact that the analysis of gender in international affairs is incomplete without also including an analysis of sexuality. Queer feminism therefore offers rich opportunities for further research, with significant gaps remaining in understanding baseline statistics about LGBTI representatives globally, including their prevalence, experiences and impact. Further research on the topic is strongly encouraged.

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