"Here come the bride and groom"?: Heteronormativity in British Wedding Magazines

Nicola Puckey
University of Winchester, United Kingdom

Heteronormativity, and more specifically weddings/marriages as sites for presenting, reinforcing and challenging heteronormativity has become a prominent and important area of study. This is particularly important given that many governments around the world are continuing to debate and legislate on same-sex marriages and partnerships. Specifically, in the UK same-sex weddings will become an option for same-sex couples in 2014, after Civil Partnerships were first introduced in 2004. However, this does not mean that, given this length of time, same-sex and mixed-orientation marriages are being seen in mainstream wedding publications.

Research into heteronormativity and marriage/weddings has shown that ideas of ‘romantic’ love are intimately connected with notions of heterosexuality and differing male and female roles, expectations and behaviours (e.g. Wolkomir, 2009). Raising questions as to how same-sex partners negotiate these societal norms and practices. Likewise, Suter and Daas (2007) explored how lesbian couples display their commitment, often using heteronormative symbols like [wedding] rings, and Kimport (2012) has analysed wedding photographs of same-sex couples to explore how heteronormative standards have been adapted, challenged or adopted. My paper builds on this work to consider the multiple ways in which heteronormativity is present in British wedding magazines available in shops on the highstreet. This research has analysed the multimodal discourses in wedding magazines, including advertisements, columns written by wedding professionals, readers’ letters and emails, editorials and advice sections. It considered how gender and sexuality are not only featured in them, but can also be hidden by these magazines. At the surface level, same-sex ceremonies are absent from these publications, but underlying this is an implicit and assumed representation of heteronormative images, ideas and activities which further reinforces societal expectations of weddings, marriages and partnerships.

Keywords: Discourse analysis, Heteronormativity, Wedding magazines.