

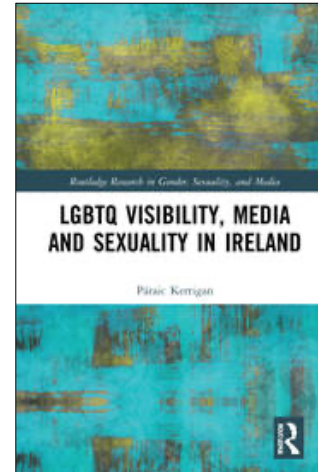
Páraic Kerrigan, **LGBTQ Visibility, Media and Sexuality in Ireland**, New York, NY: Routledge, 2021, 192 pp., \$128.00 (hardcover), \$48.95 (paperback).

Reviewed by

Aiden James Kosciesza

Temple University

Gay and lesbian media visibility in Ireland has developed in a tug-of-war fashion, with both civil rights groups and broadcasting institutions attempting to leverage that visibility for their own ends. This is the central argument of Páraic Kerrigan's **LGBTQ Visibility, Media and Sexuality in Ireland**, which traces developments in queer visibility in Irish media, primarily on television, from 1974–2008. Kerrigan presents a thoroughly researched overview of queer media history in the Irish context, responding both to a lack of existing comprehensive scholarship on queer media visibility in Ireland and to scholars' calls for multimodal methodologies in queer media studies. The author takes a production studies approach, incorporating interviews with Irish gay civil rights activists and media professionals alongside archival research and textual analysis.



The book's central objective, to trace developments in Irish queer media visibility over time and place them within historical context, is the one that Kerrigan accomplishes most effectively. Chapter 1 lays out a brief but comprehensive recent history of gays and lesbians in Ireland, including cultural forces like the dominance of the Catholic Church and legal factors like the criminalization of male homosexuality until 1993, and also introduces the Irish public broadcaster, Raidió Teilifís Éireann (RTÉ), which produced most of the material in Kerrigan's analysis. The remaining chapters present case studies of gay and lesbian representation in Irish media during five historical periods. Chapter 2 covers early representations of gay men on current affairs television from 1974–1980. Chapter 3 considers RTÉ's *The Late Late Show* and its function as a space of public debate over moral issues, including homosexuality, in 1980–1989. Chapter 4 covers the period from 1983–1994 when the AIDS epidemic engendered stigmatizing representations of gay people, who then employed media activism to refute these representations and ultimately became public health authority figures in the face of the Irish government's inadequate response. Chapter 5 traces the tentative incorporation of gay identities into sitcoms and soaps in the postdecriminalization era of 1995–1998. Finally, chapter 6 considers the forces of globalization connected to Ireland's Celtic Tiger period of rapid economic growth from 1999–2007, demonstrating both the more nuanced representations of gay identities in "quality TV" (p. 140) and the use of queer characters to critique the Celtic Tiger economy. The chronological organization of the book is effective, presenting a cohesive overview of Irish media, cultural, and gay history. Kerrigan's analysis of each text is richly contextualized, enabling clear understanding of the forces shaping Irish media production and queer visibility.

In addition to this historical overview, Kerrigan has two more major objectives in this text. One is to argue that visibility is a tool used differently (and often competingly) by activists and by institutions of power. Kerrigan details a number of frameworks and concepts, including respectability politics, the mainstreaming and confessional modes of representation, homodomesticity, and sensationalism, that were variously deployed both

by gay and lesbian organizations pushing for civil rights and by broadcasters seeking ratings and profits. Thus, he argues, the history of media visibility in Ireland cannot be said to develop in a smooth and linear fashion but rather plays out as “a tug-of-war between Ireland’s LGBTQ community and media institutions” (p. 12). This tug-of-war idea is effectively presented, but could be further developed beyond the conclusion that social actors with differing aims attempt to leverage media power for different ends.

The final objective, and the one that Kerrigan emphasizes most often in the text, is to complicate the idea that visibility equates to “progress from oppression to liberation” (p. 4) for queer people. While Kerrigan’s case studies do demonstrate the complexity of visibility, this argument does not seem particularly novel or groundbreaking. Scholars have long argued that “visibility is a trap” (Foucault, 1975/1995, p. 200). In particular, scholars of queer media visibility have said that it can perpetuate stereotypes (Hart, 2013); that it can both help and hinder (McNicholas Smith, 2020); that queer digital media participation is not evidence of power, but a struggle for it (Berliner, 2018); and that queer visibility is a “limited and ultimately limiting” concept (Kohnen, 2016, p. 3). *LGBTQ Visibility, Media and Sexuality in Ireland* does not engage with the extensive body of scholarship on the perils and pitfalls of queer visibility, and as a result, its central argument falls flat.

The major contribution of this text is its careful linkage of developments in onscreen Irish queer representation to their historical and cultural context. Scholars of queer history and queer media studies will find value in Kerrigan’s chronologically organized case studies, and his focus on Ireland is a significant addition to the field. Those who usually work in the U.S. context will appreciate both the comparisons that situate the Irish media within a global environment as well as the careful review of relevant Irish history and culture. What this text does not offer is the title’s promise to cover *LGBTQ* media history. As Kerrigan readily acknowledges, the book’s case studies almost all concern gay men; representations of lesbians are discussed only in chapter 3, and there is no material on bisexual or transgender visibility. One paragraph in the conclusion lists some instances of transgender representation in Irish media, but none of these are analyzed (or even mentioned) in the main text. Readers interested in the tension between media visibility as an avenue to social recognition and as a source of material danger for trans people should consult Mia Fischer’s (2019) *Terrorizing Gender: Transgender Visibility and the Surveillance Practices of the U.S. Security State* or the edited collection *Trap Door: Trans Cultural Production and the Politics of Visibility* (Gossett, Stanley, & Burton, 2017), where the paradox of trans visibility is eloquently discussed.

The strengths of Kerrigan’s work lie in its focus on the Irish context, an understudied area of queer media history; its excellent contextualization of media case studies with respect to the historical, political, and cultural forces in Ireland; and its combination of archival research, textual analysis, and interviews with industry and activists. This book adds to the growing number of works that engage with queer and trans media visibility in contexts outside of the United States, such as Fejes and Balogh’s (2013) *Queer Visibility in Post-Socialist Cultures* and Zabus and Coad’s (2014) *Transgender Experience: Place, Ethnicity, and Visibility*. Despite its many contributions, however, the book’s title continues to rankle. Claiming the acronym “LGBTQ” in the title of a book that does not engage with bisexual or transgender identities is more than misleading; it is an act of erasure that feels baffling in a book focused on visibility. Bisexual and transgender people have been subjected to marginalization and material harm as their identities were invalidated and rendered invisible, not only within mainstream society but also within the LGBTQ(IA2S+) community (Hayfield, 2020; Namaste, 2000). Scholars

and editors of future works should take care that acronyms like LGBTQ are not used as a catchall and only appear when the work actually addresses the listed identities.

References

- Berliner, L. S. (2018). *Producing queer youth: The paradox of digital media empowerment*. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Fejes, N., & Balogh, A. P. (Eds.). (2013). *Queer visibility in post-socialist cultures*. Chicago, IL: Intellect.
- Fischer, M. (2019). *Terrorizing gender: Transgender visibility and the surveillance practices of the U.S. security state*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press.
- Foucault, M. (1995). *Discipline and punish: The birth of the prison* (2nd ed., A. Sheridan, Trans.). New York, NY: Vintage. (Original work published 1975)
- Gossett, R., Stanley, E. A., & Burton, J. (Eds.). (2017). *Trap door: Trans cultural production and the politics of visibility*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- Hart, K.-P. R. (2013). *Queer males in contemporary cinema: Becoming visible*. Lanham, MD: Scarecrow.
- Hayfield, N. (2020). *Bisexual and pansexual identities: Exploring and challenging invisibility and invalidation*. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Kohnen, M. E. S. (2016). *Queer representation, visibility, and race in American film and television: Screening the closet*. New York, NY: Routledge.
- McNicholas Smith, K. (2020). *Lesbians on television: New queer visibility & the lesbian normal*. Bristol, UK: Intellect.
- Namaste, V. K. (2000). *Invisible lives: The erasure of transsexual and transgendered people*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.
- Zabus, C., & Coad, D. (2014). *Transgender experience: Place, ethnicity, and visibility*. New York, NY: Routledge.