

Gay and Lesbian Issues and Psychology Review

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Gay and Lesbian Issues and Psychology Review

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Aims and scope

The Review is a peer-reviewed publication, that is available online through the Australian Psychological Society website. Its remit is to encourage research that challenges the stereotypes and assumptions of pathology that have often inhered to research on lesbians and gay men (amongst others). The aim of the Review is thus to facilitate discussion over the direction of lesbian and gay psychology in Australia, and to provide a forum within which academics, practitioners and lay people may publish.

The Review is open to a broad range of material, and especially welcomes research, commentary and reviews that critically evaluate the status quo in regards to lesbian and gay issues. The Review also seeks papers that redress the imbalance that has thus far focused on the issues facing white lesbians and gay men, to the exclusion of other sexual and racial minority groups.

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Gay and Lesbian Issues and Psychology Review

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EDITORIAL: LESBIAN AND GAY PSYCHOLOGY IN AUSTRALIA IN 2005

DAMIEN W. RIGGS

I begin this first issue of the Gay and Lesbian Issues and Psychology Review by acknowledging the sovereignty of the many Indigenous Nations upon whose land we all live in Australia. In doing so, I draw attention to the fact that Indigenous/non-indigenous relations in Australia demonstrate the 'unfinished business' of Reconciliation that continues to shape the nation (Moreton-Robinson, 2000). Readers and contributors to the Review are thus encouraged to be mindful of the ongoing histories of colonisation of which we are all a part, whether this be through unearned privilege or experiences of oppression. Talking about the issues that sexual minority groups face should thus always take into consideration the intersections of race, sexuality, gender and class to name but a few. To do otherwise runs the risk of perpetuating a particular (white) way of looking at the world (Riggs, in-press).

I would like to offer thanks to the Gay and Lesbian Issues and Psychology Interest Group for supporting this initiative, and to the wide range of academics, researchers, policy makers, activists and other committed individuals who have taken the time to make the Review happen through their contributions, suggestions and support. In particular thanks must go to Graeme Kane, the Editor of our previous publication GLIP News, and to our National Convenor, Gordon Walker, for continuing to support research on lesbian and gay psychology in Australia.

It is important here to spend some time talking about terminology. I have already had several people challenge me as to the title of the Review, and as to its remit of looking at lesbian and gay psychology. Without wanting to explain away these important challenges, the reasoning behind the title is simple: it reflects the title of the Interest Group that supports this publication. As to the phrase 'lesbian and gay psychology', our decision to use this term reflects a broader trend within research worldwide (e.g., Coyle & Kitinger, 2002). Whilst it is acknowledged that there exists a much broader range of sexual identities outside those of lesbian and gay (and

heterosexual) individuals, researchers focusing on other sexual minority groups are still developing their position both within the academy and out. The Review thus hopes to address this by encouraging the publication of research and theory that seeks to speak to this imbalance, and which also challenges the normative status of whiteness within the area of lesbian and gay psychology itself. We are also wary of simply 'adding on' other sexual minorities to our title (e.g., LGBTI psychology). Whilst this has been successfully achieved in other publications (e.g., Clarke & Peel, forthcoming), we have yet to see whether this will be the case in Australia. Our feeling is one of optimism in this regard, but we are hesitant to claim the title 'LGBTI psychology' before we have actually witnessed successful attention being paid to the multiple communities that come under this term in Australia.

In regards to our remit, we welcome papers from a wide range of disciplines, and the word 'psychology' in the title should not be taken as an *a priori* requirement of papers published in the Review. We particularly invite research that is critical of psychology and its relation to LGBTI communities, and which seeks to explore alternate means of understanding such communities.

So what do we think lesbian and gay psychology might look like in Australia in 2005 and in the future? We hope that sufficient attention has now been paid to 'proving the normality' of LGBTI individuals, and in producing research that compares heterosexual and non-heterosexual individuals. Whilst there may still at times be utility in such approaches, we encourage research that explores the experiences of LGBTI communities and individuals *in their own rights*, and which seeks to prioritise the values, morals and experiences of such communities and individuals. We have made a step towards this in our recent publication *Out in the Antipodes* (Riggs & Walker, 2004), and were very glad to have received such a resoundingly positive response to this research agenda.

We of course welcome research that explores LGBTI issues from outside of Australia. We hope that the Review will provide a space for researchers in Australia to share their work, and also for international scholars, activists and policy makers to contribute to exploring the possibilities that lesbian and gay psychology may create. Our focus on Australia is thus not exclusive, but is mindful of the specificities of LGBTI experiences in all countries, and thus we seek to explore these specificities in greater detail.

Inside this issue

The papers in this first issue demonstrate the exciting breadth and variety of research on LGBTI communities in Australia. Ranging from qualitative research on identity to theoretical reviews of practice, from discussions of the intersections of age and sexuality to quantitative research that provides a comparative approach to understanding intersecting identities. In addition to this, we are also fortunate to have field notes on the 13th Anglican Synod and a book review. Together, this first issue of the Review demonstrates the commitment that Australian researchers have made to publishing research on LGBTI issues in this forum.

In the lead article, Jane Edwards provides an insightful elaboration of women's experiences of coming out as lesbians. The narratives analysed in Edwards article demonstrate some of the limitations that arise from using stage models to understand lesbian identities, and instead point towards the importance of understanding the specificities of lesbian experiences, rather than simply presuming them to be 'all the same', or 'just like' those of gay men.

In her article on LGBTI ageing, Jo Harrison demonstrates a useful comparative approach to understanding the experiences of older LGBTI individuals. Drawing on data collected both in Australian and in the United States, Harrison draws attention to the heteronormativity that often inheres to research in the area of gerontology, and suggests that a continued focus is required on practices of inclusion for older LGBTI individuals.

Drawing on the field of social work, Jasmin Miller outlines the possibility for social work practice

with transgender individuals. Miller importantly outlines the limitations (and potential oppressions) that arise from assuming a medical model when working with transgender clients. She instead proposes that social workers need to work as 'helpers' with transgender clients to achieve goals.

In the final article of this issue, Sharon Dane contributes significantly to the literature on same-sex attracted youth by exploring the hypothesis that in addition to support from same-sex attracted peers, same-sex attracted young people may experience high levels of support from their heterosexual friends and associates. Obviously this has implications for assumptions about the presumed to be *a priori* support provided within lesbian and gay communities, and draws attention to the importance of working with 'heterosexual allies' to combat oppression.

As a whole, these four articles demonstrate the importance of exploring the specificities of experience of LGBTI individuals, as well as recognising the interactions between multiple types of privilege and oppression.

Finally, it has been heartening to receive papers from upcoming researchers, as well as those more established within the field. We encourage this mixing of experience and knowledge, and hope that it has resulted in this first issue of the Review being a valuable contribution to research on lesbian and gay psychology in Australia.

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TELLING STORIES: WOMEN'S ACCOUNTS OF IDENTIFYING AS LESBIANS

JANE EDWARDS

Abstract

Cass' (1979) model of identity formation has become an influential one in conceptualizing how gay men and lesbians come to identify as such. While it is useful in illuminating important concepts, some questions remain about its capacity to accommodate the experience of some women who claim a lesbian identity. Cass' account suggests that individuals form a homosexual identity by initially asking questions about their sexuality. They seek answers by sequentially passing through a series of stages; it is an active, forward-moving journey. However, other perspectives suggest that women's sexuality is too fluid and non-exclusive to be easily accommodated in such a schema. Women's pathways to lesbian identity are diverse and, frequently, marked by considerable ambiguity. Women use narratives to make sense of their past and to link it coherently to their present. They reflect on past experience and perception and interpret them to strengthen their identity as lesbians. Claiming an identity as lesbian is frequently a retrospective, interpretive process.

Introduction

Notwithstanding the recent liberalisation of attitudes among some sectors of society toward non-heterosexual people, being a member of a sexual minority remains a de-valued, if not stigmatised, identity. Not only are sexual minorities stigmatised, they have, until relatively recently, been largely invisible. Given the vast socialization apparatus available to the institution of heterosexuality, how do women develop and consolidate an identity as lesbians? In a culture that valorizes heterosexuality and provides few appropriate role models and visible pathways, what processes do women undergo in coming to define themselves as lesbians?

One famous answer to this 'puzzle' of 'identity formation' among lesbians and gay men has been provided by Cass. In the 1970s, she formulated what has become a widely accepted theory of how lesbians and gay men come to identify as such

(Cass, 1979). In Cass' view, there are six stages through which people sequentially pass in identifying themselves as lesbians or gay men. Individuals, in Cass' schema, begin by wondering whether they might be 'homosexual'; they may then move on to tentatively accept this identity. In the third stage, individuals begin to acquire a firmer sense of themselves as 'homosexual'. 'Acceptance' marks the fourth stage, during which there is increased contact with other lesbians or gay men, and individuals feel increasingly normal in claiming a homosexual identity. In stage five there is virtually complete acceptance of one's homosexuality and it may become the focal point of an individual's identity. Finally, individuals reach stage six, that of 'identity synthesis', during which they integrate their homosexuality with other important parts of their identity (Cass, 1979).

Cass' model is a useful heuristic tool and remains the dominant understanding of non- heterosexual identity formation (Degges-White, 2000). Nevertheless questions remain about its capacity to accommodate the experience of all men and women who identify as homosexual. For one thing, there is doubt that all people pass through all stages identified by Cass, much less in sequential fashion (Degges-White, 2000; Rothblum, 2000). Secondly, Cass' model does not take account of the age nor the social and historical context in which individuals begin exploring an identity as gay or lesbian (Degges-White 2000). Later work by Cass, however, points to the need to examine identity formation as a process of interaction between individuals and their environment (2004, p. 300-301).

Cass' model is gender neutral and can, ostensibly, be applied to both gay men and lesbians (Degges-White, 2000). However, a voluminous body of theory and empirical evidence documents the different social and sexual experience of heterosexual men and women (Connell & Dowsett, 1992; Hillier & Harrison, 1999). Far less work has been done on gender differences between lesbians and gay men, but that available suggests that non-heterosexual women and men define and experience their sexuality differently (Diamond &

Savin-Williams, 2000). Moreover, empirical evidence indicates that young men and women come to identity themselves as gay or lesbian via young men, who more neatly align themselves with the (presumed) binary division of heterosexual and homosexual (Dempsey et al., 2000).

Another criticism that may be lobbed at psychological models such as that of Cass (1979) is that they depict individuals as abstracted and atomized beings. Cass' (1979) model assumes that individuals have *a priori* suspicions that they might be lesbians. They undergo a range of intra-psychic processes and may then seek out other lesbians. While Cass' later work (2004) focuses on the interplay between individual and environment, it does not explicitly consider the role social interaction might play in identity formation. Other work, however, suggests that an identity as lesbian might be constituted through various forms of interaction; that is, it is formed in social interaction, not by an isolated individual (Moon, 2001; Ussher & Mooney-Somers, 2000; Rothblum, 2000). Moon (2001), along with Ussher and Mooney-Somers (2000), found that some events are epiphanies for women who now identify as lesbians and women recognize themselves as lesbians through, or because of, them. Epiphanies may be provoked by a kiss, by having sex, by being the object of another woman's desire, or simply by recognizing one's feelings as desire or love (Ussher & Mooney-Somers, 2000). Such events may be sudden, they may have a slow, gradual onset or they may be quite unexpected (Ussher & Mooney-Somers, 2000). Some women had never entertained the possibility that they might be a lesbian prior to an epiphanal event (Rothblum, 2000).

Cass' (1979) linear model of identity formation also tends to overlook the extent to which identifying as a lesbian is a retrospective, rather than a prospective, process for many women. In Cass' schema, individuals start with a question to which they sequentially seek answers; they move forward in time, 'working' toward identifying themselves. Yet, claiming an identity as lesbian is often a retrospective accomplishment, as much as it is a purposeful, prospective activity. Women frequently claim an identity as lesbian through a narrative reconstruction of their pasts. That is, women's accounts of claiming an identity are a form of story. This—most emphatically—does not mean that what women say about coming to identify as a lesbian is not true; it means that these accounts are structured as narratives in

quite distinct pathways (Dempsey et al 2000). Young women are more likely to describe themselves as 'bisexual' or 'uncertain' than are which the past is reinterpreted to give meaning to the present. Events, emotions and perceptions are selected from the cornucopia of past life to chart a consistent and coherent journey to the present. This process is not unique to lesbians. People use narratives to understand their life and their world, imposing some form of order and meaning upon them. Clough goes further and claims that narratives are central to knowledge, "...all factual representations of empirical reality...are narratively constructed" (1992, p. 2).

In defining themselves as lesbians, women may look back at past events, experiences and feelings, retrospectively interpreting them as evidence of a lesbian identity that may have always existed, even if dormant, and is now only recognized and claimed (Moon 2001; Ussher and Mooney-Somers 2000). In Moon's words, "It is through narrative that one tells about her life, that the life, with all of its inconsistencies, contradictions and randomness, takes on meaning" (2001, p. 4). Narratives are articulated in the present, invoking the past to explain how things came to be as they are (Moon, 2001; Plummer, 1995). Narratives, however, not only reflect the self and express identity; they play a central role in constituting the self and its identity (Moon, 2001, p. 4.; Plummer 1995, p. 34; Jansen, 2004, 337-338). To some extent, we 'make' ourselves and construct our identities through the stories we tell about ourselves. In Moon's assessment, "Narrative and self are, for all intents and purposes, inseparable" (2001, p. 4).

Sample and methods

Seven women who identify as lesbians were interviewed. In addition, one woman who provides support and counseling to non-heterosexual women was also interviewed. Because that interview was not concerned with her account of coming to identify as a lesbian, no reference to it is made in this paper. The interviews were guided ones in that they were relatively unstructured and both interviewee and interviewer identified key themes (Grbich, 1999). The interviews explored various aspects of how these women came to identify as lesbians while living in rural settings. The influence of rural settings has been documented elsewhere (e.g., Edwards, in press) and is not discussed here.

A gay and lesbian counseling service distributed information and recruitment sheets containing my contact details and women then made contact with me. The interviews ranged from one to two hours; they were audiotaped and transcribed verbatim. The transcripts were analysed for emergent themes that were identified after a colleague and I independently read a transcript each. Having identified the emergent themes, we each 'blind' coded one of the transcripts to verify the validity of the emergent themes. I then used the themes to code each of the transcripts. Summaries of the interviews, based on the emergent themes, were sent to each of the women interviewed as a further check on the validity of the themes and so that the interviewees could remove any information they felt might identify them. The women's ages ranged from early twenties through to early forties, though most were in their late thirties. With the exception of one woman, all were in paid employment and all came from English speaking backgrounds.

Results

Awareness of not being 'proper' girls

Many of the women I interviewed did not have a sense of knowing themselves to be lesbians from an early age. Much more striking in their narratives was a strong sense of knowing who they were not, rather than of knowing who they were. The interviews began with the question, "Could you tell me about the circumstances in which you started to explore issues related to your sexuality"? Most of the women interviewed immediately invoked childhood memories, telling of incidents, feelings and perceptions that clearly remained salient for them. With the exception of one woman, all the women interviewed spoke of feeling 'different'. Other research has noted the ubiquity of the term 'different' when women recount narratives of coming to identify as lesbian (Jansen, 2004; Moon, 2001; Degges-White et al., 2000).

This theme was expressed most frequently in terms of 'gender discrepancy'; this entailed two, sometimes closely related, themes. The first is that many of the women did not feel like other girls. Specifically, many recalled not wanting to be stereotypical 'little girls'; in particular they disliked 'girls clothes'. Secondly, some women enjoyed the kinds of activities boys did, rather than the one's

they were 'expected' to enjoy as girls. Paula's ¹ account is typical:

Knowing all along from a little kid that I was different. I was certainly different from the other girls. At that time I wanted to be a boy because they had a better time. At that time I wanted to ride a boy's bike, not a girl's bike. I didn't want to wear skirts even from a baby onwards...and I didn't want frills and bows and I wanted gumboots for school shoes.

Karen, the only girl and the youngest child in her family, nominates not only her love of sport, but her competitiveness with her brothers as marking her off from other little girls. Her identification with boys, she now feels, was a sign that she was not 'normal':

...I was not a normal person right along, I don't think, not in my community anyway. Growing up, I was very into sport, wanted to do everything the boys did...So, I grew up very competitive; anything they could do I could do and wanted to do it better than them.

Only one of the women interviewed did not make reference to a childhood significantly coloured by having been a 'tomboy'. However, being a tomboy in childhood does not automatically equate with being a lesbian as an adult, as Garnets and Peplau (2000: 189) demonstrate. Many women who recall being tomboys as girls become heterosexual women (Garnets and Peplau 2000: 189). The significance of these recollections of having been 'tomboys' is the salience they hold for the women I interviewed. They attach significance to having been tomboys because it serves as an indicator of the difference they felt while growing up. This sense of difference, while confusing or painful at the time, now makes sense; identifying as a lesbian now gives meaning to that experience. But, these women did not make the assumption, at the time, that they were lesbians. This is a retrospective gloss, as Paula acknowledges:

It's easy to look back and to say "Looking back I can see many signs right from when I was a little kid". I don't think it hit home until I'd been away, even then I wasn't sure.

¹ All names are pseudonyms.

Not interested in boys

The lack of an erotic interest in boys during adolescence is also retrospectively identified by some women as an incipient sign of being a lesbian. Karen now makes sense of her relative indifference to boys and her feelings toward other girls:

So, I was wrapped up in sport a lot and didn't have time as far as I was concerned for boyfriends. So, as I went through the teen years I just sort of ignored the fact that I wasn't really interested. I look back *now* and realise some of the feelings I had for the girls at school and stuff, it was a bit different to what it should have been (my italics).

Karen now recognizes the significance of her feelings for other girls. The significance of her feelings now makes sense in the light of her identification as a lesbian. Karen did recognize her lack of interest in boys at the time, but not her same-sex attraction. Margaret's story is similar. She recalls not only being uninterested in boys, but also not understanding the nature of their interest in her, "...this boy was giving me a bit of pressure about things and I was thinking, well, 'What's he on about?'" No idea. Not interested in him a bit".

Christie also gives a clear illustration of how unaware she was during her adolescence of attraction to women. Christie had sexual relationships with young men during her later teenage years and has no recollection that she felt attracted to girls at the time. However, recently she found an old diary from her teenage years and now regards it as evidence of always having been attracted to women. Christie now makes sense of the entries in her diary because they indicate to her that she has always been bisexual, but did not recognize it prior to her relationship with Jodie:

I didn't realize but Jodie and I looked at my diary a couple of months ago...and from the age of twelve I had written in my diary about feeling this way [attracted to women].

Avoiding the term 'lesbian'

On reflection, Margaret considers that she found a somewhat convoluted way of avoiding considering and naming same-sex attraction. She had intense emotional attachments to other girls during

secondary school and now considers that her involvement in the church, whatever its other motivations and consequences, allowed her to avoid naming her feelings toward women. Attachment to the Church gave Margaret a way of 'acting' heterosexual, while avoiding sex with either men or women. Margaret tells of how she, almost unwittingly, circumvented one very intense emotional relationship with a woman during her teenage years:

...probably nothing much else came out of it...because I got very involved with the Church. I think it saved me because sex was only for marriage then...if you were going out with boys you could always, you know, the line was always there.

Margaret did not recognize the nature of her relationships with women at the time either. In her words, she:

...was still very much involved with the Church and had friends and attachments to women, who, you know, you used to send all those 'Snoopy' cards to and cut off a bit of your hair and all that sort of close girlfriend stuff, but [I] never thought of it as being lesbian.

Margaret's story is a telling insight into the way events and feelings of the time are not necessarily given a name or identified in a way that crystallizes self-definition as lesbian; this is a retrospective accomplishment. Her account is interesting because, even though she did not identify her experience as 'lesbian', she knew it was 'wrong' because of the way other people might have responded to it:

...when I was sixteen...[I] started sleeping with a friend of mine in the same bed, with nothing else happening, and knowing it was wrong and knowing that we had to scoot out early in the morning before everyone else got up.

It was other people's definition of her friendship, rather than an inherent questioning of herself, that began to move Margaret toward naming her feelings toward women. Indeed, Margaret only came to apply the label 'lesbian' to herself in a vicarious way, when an acquaintance referred to somebody else as a lesbian. As Margaret recounts:

...[I was] involved with the Christian nurses group up there and there was a midwife there who was obviously older than I was and she

was always this butch—actually, in retrospect, she was definitely butch— and so at that stage I thought she was a bit odd. Then I got a phone call from this [other] woman...and she said, "Look, I've got some bad news" and I said "Oh what?" She said, "Oh, we've got a lesbian in the group". And I thought, oh my God, she's talking about me. Of course, she wasn't. ...She was talking about this other woman.

Denial

While for some women their same-sex attraction remained opaque, discovered in diffuse ways, some women did have a well-developed sense of attraction to other women relatively early in their lives. In Kathleen's case, her social environment played an influential part in her choosing to deny her sexual preference. Kathleen, unlike most of the women I interviewed, identified her same-sex attraction while in secondary school. While she popular with boys during her adolescence, she was nevertheless aware that, "...it was the cute girls I had my eye on". By the time she got to university, Kathleen:

...went through just the agonizing, 'cause I knew by then that I was definitely very much leaning that way [being sexually attracted to women] but I had no idea what to do about it...I also knew it wasn't a possibility for me.

In the face of knowing she was attracted to women and living in a context that was not conducive to exploring same-sex attraction, Kathleen married a man she did love and, "...it went fine for probably ten years". However, her attraction to other women was something Kathleen could not deny, despite being in a relatively happy marriage. Eventually she:

...got to the stage where that's what I was thinking about all the time, I wonder what it is like to sleep with a woman? There was always this thing missing in my life and that was what I thought about all the time.

Despite having been in a long-term, heterosexual marriage, Kathleen strengthens her lesbian identity in her narrative by now pointing out that many of her childhood-friends have turned out to be gay men or lesbians: "But all my friends from all those towns have turned out to be gay". This narrative manoeuvre demonstrates Kathleen's conviction that she has always had an identity as a lesbian and that despite being buried under the

cover of heterosexuality it has eventually emerged. Kathleen invokes certain aspects of her past to give greater coherence to her present life.

Falling in love

Gayle reconciled long-term relationships with men and intermittent "one-night stands" with women, without claiming an identity as a lesbian. In recounting her history, Gayle self-consciously reinterprets her past in the light of her present circumstances:

I can remember playing lesbian games with my girlfriend when I was ten and eleven and like sort of pseudo sex games...So, ten to thirty six, what happened in the interim was I had through my teens and twenties a lot of flings with women. One-night stands with women, in between blokes or not, as the case may be. And at the same time [I] had fairly, reasonably long-term monogamous relationships with men; so, a four year relationship, a seven year relationship. When I was thirty I hadn't had a same-sex fling for a while—*this is all in retrospect*— and I started to think that I might be sane so I had a last-ditch effort at getting into the mainstream by getting married at thirty (my italics).

Despite having had casual sexual relationships with women for much of her adolescent and adult life, Gayle did not define herself as a lesbian. The catalyst for her coming to call herself a lesbian was not sex with women *per se*, but falling in love with Karen. It was this relationship that precipitated her exploring an identity as lesbian, by reading books on the subject and by making contact with gay men and lesbians she knew:

I felt like a babe in the woods. Like, here was this knew relationship and I've never had one like this before. And it didn't even remind me of the flings [with women] that I'd had, because they were very different, often drunken episodes. Whereas, this was clearly a very different story. Like, I knew I was in love with her and this was more than a passing thing.

Gayle is extremely insightful in recognizing that she has created a narrative that, to some extent, re-interprets her past life in light of now identifying as a lesbian. She acknowledges that, in response to a question about whether anything would have made the transition to identifying as a lesbian easier, she is actively re-shaping her past

to make her present more congruent with who she now feels she is:

Jane: Would anything have made it easier?
Gayle: You mean over the years?
Jane: Yes
Gayle: Of denial? Yes
Jane: Do you think of it as denial?
Gayle: Yeah, I do. Now

When Gayle referred to her decision to marry a man as a "last ditch attempt to get into the mainstream", I asked her if her relationships with men had been an attempt to be 'straight'. She replied, "I didn't recognize it as such at the time, but I guess that's the story I put on it now. You're re-storying your lives all the time".

Recognition through seeing other lesbians

Some of the women I interviewed did not begin to identify themselves as lesbian and then seek out other lesbians. Rather, they began to identify themselves as lesbians only after having seen or met other lesbians. For Paula, seeing lesbians for the first time in her life generated an inchoate sense of recognizing herself as a lesbian. In her words, she began to see a 'me' in these other women while attending a conference:

Like the first time when I recognized there was a me in these other women, it was at a conference. And there were all these different women there...they just blew me away and I hardly said a word for three days but I just took everything in because there was something there that I recognized.

Karen didn't feel attracted to boys when young, but neither was she conscious of being attracted to girls. Rather than wondering whether she was a lesbian and weighing 'evidence' that might confirm or refute her suspicions, Karen discovered a lesbian identity only in the context of a relationship with another woman. In Karen's words, it was almost an accident:

Eventually I sort of stumbled across it, I suppose. Stumbled across someone who felt the same way and we spent quite a lot of time together. She was actually married at the time. So yeah, just all of a sudden happened and "holy shit, what happens now?"

Conclusion

The narratives of the women I interviewed indicate that for these women the process of coming to identify as a lesbian was a more circuitous and contingent process than suggested by models such as Cass' (1979). These women did not make the journey toward being a lesbian by passing through sequential stages. Many of the women did not have a sense of having always been a lesbian in that they did not necessarily recognize themselves as lesbians at earlier stages in their lives. About half the study sample had been married to men and most had sexual relationships with men in the past. This is consistent with other research that demonstrates that even women who are aware of same-sex attraction show a greater capacity to become involved in heterosexual relationships than gay men (Dempsey et al., 2000). These findings also support the contention that women's sexuality is more non-exclusive and more fluid than that of men (Diamond & Savin-Williams, 2000, p. 299). A gender-neutral model of sexual identity formation such as that of Cass (1979) is unlikely, therefore, to be sensitive to women's distinctive experience. Such observations also point to the importance of not considering sexual identity as a unitary concept; it involves behaviour—that is, the gender of sexual partners; attitudes—the gender(s) to which one is attracted, and a label that may be claimed as an identity—heterosexual, bisexual or lesbian (Rothblum, 2000). These elements of identity may be congruent or contradictory.

Most women in this study pointed to the lack of congruence in the elements of their identity. For example, some recognized their attraction to women, while being sexually involved with men. Moreover, there was great diversity in the events that precipitated women identifying themselves as lesbians. One woman, Gayle, managed to be sexually involved with other women without regarding herself as a lesbian. It was an emotional experience—falling in love—rather than sex that was the catalyst for Gayle's naming of herself as lesbian. Paula, on the other hand, had a nascent sense of her lesbianism by recognizing her self in other lesbians she met; these women acted as a kind of looking glass for her. Her identity was not provoked by either sex or by a relationship; it was a 'simple' fact of recognizing herself in other women. Both Karen and Margaret did not recognize their same-sex attraction earlier in their

lives. Margaret began to apply the term lesbian to herself after others started defining her relationships as lesbian ones. Her identity as a lesbian was achieved vicariously. Karen's pathway to identifying herself as a lesbian was something she 'stumbled' upon.

Notwithstanding the diverse routes taken, with their ambiguity, contradiction and contingency, the women I interviewed have all claimed an identity as lesbian through narrative. Interestingly, given that some of them had not considered the term in relation to themselves when younger, their narratives all rake over their pasts looking for signs that lesbianism has been a consistent theme in their lives. Not having been 'proper' girls while growing up and not having felt strong erotic attachments to boys, for instance, are now interpreted as signs that they probably have always been lesbians. This suggests that narratives are important facets in the construction of any identity. Narratives, whatever else they do, bridge past and present. They imply continuity and coherence between what was and what is, between who we were and who we now are. By 'narratively' identifying a lesbian self that has probably always existed, the self, as Moon says, is constituted as "... the glue holding the life story together and the subject of the life story" (2002, p. 9). The women I interviewed showed great skill and creativity in identifying and constituting an ongoing sense of self that has helped them chart their way through some often turbulent experiences. Some of them also showed great insight in acknowledging how active they were in re-interpreting their pasts to understand their present and to give it continuity and coherence. These women's stories also suggest that identity formation is as much a retrospective, interpretative process as it is a prospective quest for an identity.

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PINK, LAVENDER AND GREY: GAY, LESBIAN, BISEXUAL, TRANSGENDER AND INTERSEX AGEING IN AUSTRALIAN GERONTOLOGY

JO HARRISON

Abstract

Issues concerning sexual and gender identity have been almost completely neglected in Australian research and action around ageing. This is reflected in textual discourse, clinical and service practices, training and education, research approaches and policy development. Recent Australian research investigated whether lessons might be drawn from the experience of activists in the United States of America (USA) and then applied to Australian gerontology with regard to the recognition of GLBTI ageing. The research aimed to provide guideposts for a process of change in Australia, by the investigation of the factors involved in collective action. Qualitative research was conducted in Australia and the State of California in the USA. The research findings revealed: a previously under-recognised personal dimension of action; the importance of self-determinist approaches in the USA; and the status of the Australian situation. The findings raise important implications for those who conduct research and undertake clinical or service related practice in aged care, as well as for the Australian GLBTI community.

Introduction: Heteronormativity in Australian gerontology

The field of Australian gerontology encompasses the study of ageing and the practical application of this knowledge. It incorporates all aspects of research, education, policy development and practitioner intervention in aged care. Such practitioner intervention includes the ageing or aged care related work of professionals from a wide variety of fields including the areas of psychology, occupational therapy, medicine, physiotherapy, psychology, nursing and social work. Gerontology also includes advocacy work and activism which relates to ageing issues or aged care concerns. The present research investigated the virtual invisibility of gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender and intersex (GLBTI) issues and experiences in gerontology research,

education, services, and policy development in Australia. It examined whether lessons might be drawn from the experience of activists in California and applied to Australian gerontology.

The concept of heteronormativity refers to a general perspective which sees heterosexual experience as the only or central view of the world (Johnson, 2002). Such heteronormativity underpins the absence of recognition of diversity around sexual and gender identity in aged care in Australia today (Harrison, 1999). Despite the occurrence of a wave of wide-ranging reforms challenging heteronormativity within the Australian socio-political domain over the past twenty years, this change has had a minimal impact on gerontology. Gerontology literature is heteronormative particularly where the literature discusses notions of family, the nature of caring relationships, household composition, gender, taxation and superannuation arrangements and special needs groups (Harrison, 2001; 2004). Other than in Victoria, Australian State and Territory governments do not include GLBTI issues in aged care policy or discussion documents (Harrison 2002; McNair & Harrison 2002).

Australian and overseas perspectives on LGBTI ageing

Australian gerontology, by virtue of its heteronormativity, does not currently create an environment in which individual older people who are not heterosexual would be prepared to declare readily, to anyone attempting to assist them, their sexual or gender identity, life history, or needs. This assumption of heterosexuality, which underpins the current Australian gerontological perspective, results in the cyclical perpetuation of absence of GLBTI ageing concerns. This cycle of invisibility operates through a process in which consumers' fears of persecution are reinforced by practitioners' lack of understanding of the significance of sexual orientation and gender identity in gerontology.

The cycle of invisibility is evident in the lack of published Australian research addressing GLBTI ageing. Certainly, Australian research which is currently in progress or recently reported will contribute significantly to the growing picture of GLBTI ageing (e.g., Chamberlain & Robinson 2002; Sharpe 1997). However, there is a particular absence of Australian research or other sources which focus on the needs of bisexual, transgender or intersex older people, although Noble (2001) refers to general issues associated with intersex experience in Australia.

In contrast with the lack of Australian literature specifically examining GLBTI ageing issues, the past two decades have seen a proliferation of published research concerning the experience of ageing as gay or lesbian in the USA and, to a lesser extent, Canada and the United Kingdom (Cook-Daniels, 2000; Nystrom & Jones, 2003; Quam, 1997; Raphael & Meyer, 1988). Literature that combines an examination of GLBTI social movement activism, or processes of collective action, with concerns related to ageing could not be located.

The research framework and approach

A deliberative stance shaped the present research as characterised by the promotion of a stated goal around informing the creation of change through overtly political, activist research (Ladwig & Gore 1994). In particular, the research approach was informed by new social movement theory and the role of activism. Seeking to bridge the gap between the structural and cultural social movement paradigms, a number of writers have attempted to synthesise work across these alternate domains (Fisher & Kling 1994; Kling 1995; Tarrow, 1994). Recent writing on the gay and lesbian movement overseas (Adam, 1995) and in Australia (Johnston 1984, 1999, 2001, 2002; Willett, 2000) has attempted to build on a synthesis of theoretical approaches, as this research does.

The phases of data collection and analysis

In this research, the phenomenon of collective action in gerontology was the focus of interest. Triangulation of methods and data sources was employed in order to develop a complex picture of the phenomenon being studied (Rice & Ezzy, 1999). The fieldwork proceeded in three phases. In all phases participants were selected through purposive sampling using a snowballing approach

(Patton, 1990). Phase one involved the administration of an open-ended format questionnaire, mailed to individuals with a history of activism in Australia. Twenty-two participants responded to questions about the concepts: allies; targets; strategies; barriers to change; success and failure; turning points; and frames of meaning. They also applied their experience to a question about action around gay and lesbian ageing.

Phase two involved the analysis of overseas archival documents relating to the process being investigated. Phase two also involved semi-structured, open-ended interviews with nine activists involved in raising the profile of GLBTI ageing in California, in the USA. In phase three, semi-structured open-ended interviews were conducted with six Australian GLBTI activists close to or over 60 years of age. A written Interview Guide was adapted to the circumstances and specific situation of each activist, as was the case in phase two. Each phase of the research was influenced by the outcomes of the preceding phase. The three phases were encompassed by a process which involved the researcher documenting a log of relevant Australian action related to GLBTI ageing as the research was in progress. While not constituting a specific phase of the fieldwork, the log involved continuous documentation of incidents of action with which the researcher was involved, as well as action which occurred independently of the researcher. The results reported here focus predominantly on data collected in phases two and three, drawing on a content analysis conducted on the data collected in phase one.

Overseas findings

The Californian data revealed the establishment of three influential organisations: The National Association of Lesbian and Gay Gerontology (NALGG); Old Lesbians Organising for Change (OLOC); and the Lesbian and Gay Aging Issues Network of the American Society on Aging, (LGAIN). The Californian process of change was a complex one involving struggle, courage, inter-personal connections, conflict and devotion to the cause. In particular, it involved a period of difficult struggle between NALGG and the American Society on Aging (ASA), when ASA decided to set up a new network and wanted to bring NALGG into the new constituency group, effectively absorbing it. NALGG was an organisation with a long history of grassroots advocacy and action

while the ASA is the largest aged care organisation for professionals in the USA. The struggle which took place was fraught with conflict. Due to the personal histories of those involved and despite the personal hurt involved, the younger activists (those under 60 years of age) recognised the importance of older people managing the process of change themselves.

On this issue, Sharon Raphael has written

I also happened to be a gerontologist and never imagined that when I turned my attention to the topic of old lesbians that eventually it would then become my turn to be considered an exploitative outsider. Being a lesbian was not an instant passport into the world of old lesbians, even though, if I live long enough, I will some day be old myself (1995a, p.2).

As an outcome of the struggle, the ASA brought older people onto the Leadership Council of its new constituency group, the Lesbian and Gay Aging Issues Network. The notion of self-determination, involving older GLBTI people leading the process of change, can be linked to the way this concept has been applied to action for change by Indigenous people in Australia (Harrison, 1997). The emergent themes from the phase two interview data were: allies; strategies and tactics; obstacles and enablers; turning points; successes; frames of meaning – visibility, rights, ageism and self-determination; special people; biographies; and devotion to the cause. A very small selection of pertinent direct quotes from the phase two and phase three interview participants are presented here.

Two lesbian activists, Sharon Raphael and Mina Meyer said

You've got to start with the old lesbians. I mean ours just took off and took over and they did everything...It was painful for us but it was wonderful. It was also liberating and correct. You can't always be doing things for other people, even if you know you're going to become one of those older people.

Del Martin and Phyllis Lyon emphasised the importance of adopting a self-determinist approach and conveying its meaning to activists who were not themselves old, so that the process of change could succeed. They referred to Shevy Healey, a founder of OLOC, who was particularly

adamant that older lesbians be in control of the process which aimed to improve their situation

The first old lesbian celebration was here [San Francisco]...that first, Shevy was very much involved. So were Mina and Sharon but they weren't old enough to be in it. They did a lot of the work and then they weren't permitted to attend. This was very important to the women who started it. 60 and up became – you were old at 60 and they meant old. Not older but old. They had a little slogan about 'We are starting it on our own turf and getting it together'.

In relation to the theme Frames of Meaning: Visibility, a gay activist, who chose to remain anonymous, put it

Spectrum, GLOE and Lavender Seniors of the East Bay have a co-operative program to create friendly visiting programs for isolated gay and lesbian seniors. Creating a speakers' bureau of gay and lesbian seniors headed by a professional person is a powerful tool, to be a component of in-service training at every kind of senior organisation from home delivered meals, to nursing care in nursing homes, everything in between, every range of services. It's an excellent way for people to see, be public, about ageing, about gay and lesbian ageing. When they hear it from people, it's no longer a dehumanised topic. It's a very real one.

Lisa Hamburger conveyed the personal attachment and devotion to the struggle as well as the emotional costs involved

There was a collision between the two, OLOC and NALGG and it was painful for everyone. They [OLOC] would express grief over it if we talked now, I think. I definitely would. We didn't know how to bring them in. ASA is a professional organisation as opposed to a grassroots movement. A lot of energy was needed. Part of the dilemma was NALGG lost members to AIDS.

Australian findings

The Australian data revealed that there was knowledge of action in many realms and evidence of interest in GLBTI ageing issues. The analysis of the questionnaire data revealed a personal dimension to action which was unexpected. The Australian interview data revealed that there had been important instances of action and some successes around GLBTI ageing. However, there

was no evidence of a broad, co-ordinated, collective process of change, as had been the case in the USA. The themes from the Australian interview data fell into two broad clusters: Issues of Concern and Taking Action. Matters around visibility, isolation, networks of support, homophobic services, policy and law reform, training of staff, ageism and activism, were all raised by the interview participants.

One gay activist, referring to the AIDS Council of New South Wales project, the Sydney group Mature Age Gays (MAG) said

I know from MAG that practically every member has suffered in one way or another from the invisibility syndrome – you may live in a retirement village and don't admit to being gay because you would either be ostracised or possibly even expelled under some other pretext, and that's the fear of our members – some are in nursing homes too and I don't know of a single one that is out.

The interviews with Australians were held during the height of media publicity about the stock exchange crash of the Satellite Corporation, Australia's first 'pink company', which had a stated interest in developing GLBTI retirement facilities. The crash and the unreleased market research commissioned by the company, were raised by all of the Australians.

On the market research, a lesbian activist said

I was involved in that market research...He was just absolutely blown out by the interview with the four of us, because what he was asking, well there were three who would call ourselves radical lesbians...The question he put to us was would we as political lesbians be willing to share a facility with gay men, just gay men, not political gay men, just gay men...and we really explored that and you know it was very tricky, very difficult, I mean as we know there are some really stunning gay men, really lovely blokes...but I know a couple, and when they're not, god they're awful. I wouldn't want to be living with them. I wouldn't want to be in the same dining room as them... So we finished up talking ghettos...it was really shocking to us to be thinking that way, it brought up visions of all kinds of discriminatory practices...here we were talking about ourselves, in the context of recognising that the older we get the less empowered you feel to make decisions about your life, but it was awful...My guess is that what they came

up with is that people basically don't want to be in accommodation.

In relation to the theme Issues of Concern: Invisibility, Discrimination and Abuse, one lesbian activist said

I think from the church point of view – and it has to be the lever that's used on them – Catholic Church or Baptist or whatever...you are supposed to be providing quality care across the board...one of them has to be the psychological comfort of your residents and no discrimination, if you're talking quality care...In terms of an 80-year-old dyke in a nursing home – what really matters to this woman, what really matters to her? For a lot of older people the health and food thing really matters, the really basic ordinary things matter 'cause that's where you're at. The fact you're incontinent, you can't eat whatever. So you think to yourself on a personal day level, what does this woman need, what's she missing, what's good for her? It's 'do I have a picture of my girlfriend up on the wall, what do I say to "Who is that" – 'Oh that's my sister'...Well that's part of the lie. With dementia therapy it's – 'What did I tell them last time'?

In connection with the theme Taking Action: Education and Training, one lesbian described an attempt to obtain funding to develop a training program for staff in aged residential care settings:

A lot of it [the funding submission] was education of staff, wasn't it? One of the things that struck us about this issue was that, particularly in the short term, the education of staff was absolutely vital, and this was in the days too when they seemed to have – the staffing was ramshackle, untrained.

In combination with the interview data, the log of action demonstrated the wide-ranging concerns of GLBTI older people. The log provided evidence that older activists had confronted ageism and heterosexism in the public domain.

Research implications: The personal dimension, self-determination, and the Australian situation

Aspects of the change process in the State of California, involving personal style, individual biography and devotion to the cause, formed a vital personal dimension of collective action. This dimension has received limited attention in social movement literature (Goodwin, Jasper & Polletta, 2001; Kling, 1995). An awareness of the

significance of this personal dimension may assist Australia to avoid conflict and hasten reform. A dialogue amongst activists, key players in the aged care industry and GLBTI organisations in Australia in relation to the notion of self-determination may also assist the development of a locally appropriate process of change. The life histories of GLBTI older people served to inform the younger USA activists' awareness that, while some older activists might be prepared to be visible, vocal, and in positions of leadership, most would not. Thus, the onus was often placed on service providers, clinicians and gerontologists to provide non-threatening programs that addressed and challenged homophobia, regardless of a lack of evidence of a problem. Younger activists recognised that adopting roles of facilitation and education, rather than decision-making, would enhance progress towards the achievement of change.

To date, action in Australia has been almost completely undertaken by activists and others with access to minimal or no resources. The findings presented here demonstrate that there is potential for a co-ordinated approach to develop, as well as indicating that interest in GLBTI ageing issues is apparent in the local context.

Looking towards the future

This research investigated a process of change in one overseas site and projected potential lessons arising from the outcomes of this inquiry onto the local tableau. The research findings point to the need for further research into many areas including: the experiences of older GLBTI people themselves; the attitudes of clinicians and service providers; models for intervention and education; policy and legal reform; mechanisms for providing advocacy; and the potential development of participatory action research which generates change.

During the period of the research, the prevailing Australian neo-liberal political and economic climate yielded considerable speculation and discussion about how the future of Australia might be coloured by the impact of a rapidly ageing population (Marris, 2003). This research may contribute towards the development of an aged care industry in which diversity would be a cause for celebration and service providers would ensure that all older people are valued, regardless of sexuality or gender identity. In such a setting,

GLBTI older people would be encouraged to be open, honest and proud.

Author note

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LANGUAGE POTENTIALS AND GENDER AMBIGUITY: TRANSGENDERISM AND THE ROLE OF SOCIAL WORK

JASMIN K. MILLER

Abstract

This paper explores the use of medical/psychiatric language in therapy settings with transgender clients. It discusses the complexity of transgender identities and the challenges and responsibilities of social work practice with gender ambiguity and diversity. Particular attention is paid to the pitfalls that may arise from the use of medical/psychiatric discourses, which are designed for psychiatric assessment and treatment of patients, and not designed to assist practitioners in understanding the experiences of transgender individuals. It is then suggested that the professional obligations of social work to social justice and human rights must inevitably translate into practice that is critical of gender and sexuality norms. It is recommended that social work seek to move beyond a 'profession/client' binary, and instead develop ways of 'working with' transgender clients.

Introduction

This paper contributes to contemporary social science discussions on transgenderism, and in particular, recognises the possible role that social work may play in the empowerment and support of transgender people and communities. It is recognised that transgenderism and the role of social work within the transgender community is new territory for the profession, especially in Australia. For the purpose of this paper, a transgender person is recognised as 'anyone who lives a gender they were not perinatally assigned or that is not publicly recognisable within Western cultures' binary gender systems' (Heyes, 2003, 1093). This paper focuses on culturally competent social work practice in relation to transgender clients, and includes an elaboration of social work practices which may have the potential to influence practitioners' understandings around transgender identities, and thus better address transgender clients' clinical/therapy needs.

Negligible social work literature on the therapy needs of transgender clients has meant that Australian practitioners wishing to learn more

about the phenomenon (for example, assessment or language usage) are likely to turn to non-social work articles to determine their suitability for application to social work practice. Some of these articles may come from social science journals or internet resources. These non-social work sources should be critically read by social worker practitioners due to the potential they have to shape or enforce individual beliefs and attitudes about transgenderism, which may or may not fit with social work values and principles of empowerment, self-determination and human rights.

When discussing transgenderism it is important to have an understanding of the difference between gender and sex, as well as the difference between gender and sexuality. The term *sex* will be used when referring to biological/anatomical sex, which can include male, female and intersexed people (those who are born ambiguously sexed). The term, *gender* is used to refer to gender identity and gender performance, or more simply, the degrees of culturally appropriate femininity and masculinity that a person embodies. In this paper I take a poststructuralist view of gender, believing that individual gender identity is a fluid, complex and ongoing process that achieves a semblance of normality or 'truth' through its reiteration, rather than being a *natural* and fixed state based on 'biological sex' (Butler, 1990). It is thus acknowledged that gender identity is significantly influenced by socialisation and social sanctioning through the construction and deployment of dominant discourses. This interpretation of gender along with my own personal experiences of gender identity were thus the main influences that informed the research that preceded this paper (Miller, 2004).

While I have already highlighted some of the current contestations over transgenderism and the terminology surrounding it, I acknowledge that this paper may not capture the full diversity that exists within transgender experiences, identities and debates. Also, it is difficult to discuss the ambiguity and diversity that exists within the

human experience of gender, and deconstruct normative discourses without using language and discourses which themselves may not adequately describe and explain the context or phenomenon itself. Simply by using the term *transgender* throughout this paper, I am aware that I could be accused, by Mackenzie (1994) for example, of adhering to dominant understandings of transgenderism and transsexualism. I have thus attempted to use language which is anti-discriminatory and which demonstrates the diversity of theories and experiences of transgenderism. I also acknowledge the privileged position from which I operate, as opposed to the isolated and often disempowered experiences of many transgender people.

The following review is thus focused on understanding the possible affects of dominant discourses on transgender individuals, particularly dominant medical/psychiatric discourses. Criticism of the medical diagnosis and treatment of transgender people, especially transsexual and intersexed people, has come from professional fields and advocacy groups, and as such represents an important intervention into the pathologising practices that are often used when working with transgender clients. Examining social work practice in the light of such critiques is thus an important starting place for developing more inclusive practices.

Transgender issues, social work and the medicalisation of rights

The potential harm caused by a medical model approach to transgenderism first came to my attention when I read a relatively recent social work paper, written by Langer and Martin (2004) on the psychiatric diagnosis of Gender Identity Disorder in children. In this paper, which comes from a feminist and medical perspective, Langer and Martin explore how transgender people experience forms of oppression under heteropatriarchy. This form of oppression works to dominate women and aims to deter homosexual and gender variant behaviours. Langer and Martin (2004) assert that those who work in mental health fields should take a strong stand against the continuation of Gender Identity Disorder (DSM-IV) 'as a sanctioned diagnostic category'. They discuss the many conceptual and psychometric weaknesses of such a diagnosis and treatment, specifically when applied to children, and believe that there are many ethical problems associated with this diagnosis. In fact, Langer and

Martin (2004) assert that the emergence of Gender Identity Disorder (GID) in the DSM was directly related to the removal of the diagnosis of homosexuality. They claim that GID was simply a new way to pathologise individuals who did not identify as heterosexual, despite the fact that there is no research that supports the claim that cross-gender identification is directly linked with sexual orientation.

Transgenderism may be considered a medical issue in the sense of a diagnosis (e.g., in the DSM-VI, American Psychiatric Association, 2001), yet there may also be a range of consequences such as social, family, financial, employment, educational and emotional implications for the individual, to name just a few. Practitioners such as social workers should be aware of the criticisms of the sole use of GID and of medical/psychiatric diagnosis and treatment of transgender people, especially if they are thinking of referring a client for clinical assessment. Given the dominance of medical/psychiatric practice, and the language used within such practice, social workers may feel that they have no role in assisting transgender clients. Word such as 'medical expert', for example, assert dominance over the therapy needs of clients.

Transgenderism is not just a medical/psychiatric matter, however, as it has a lasting social and cultural impact on people in the community with critical advocacy and support needs. It is my belief that social workers, informed of the many medical, social and cultural issues, can be of great benefit to transgender clients who may or may not also be accessing medical/psychiatric treatment. The medical debates around the assessment and treatment of transgender identities, particularly transsexualism, do not take social work perspectives into account. Sufficient social work research and literature on this phenomenon could, therefore, influence not only social work practice but other professional fields who have contact with transgender people.

Social work research and literature is also needed in order for social worker practice to start acknowledging transgender identities. Perhaps if more social workers promoted themselves as accepting of gender diversity, ambiguity and self-discovery, more clients would feel comfortable with presenting a cross-gendered identity or as having questions relating to their gender identity. Bob Tremble (2001), a Canadian Social Worker, writes about his work with young gay, lesbian,

bisexual and transgender people. Tremble (2001) describes how a number of young people who became members of a peer-support group said that they had never revealed their sexual orientation or gender identity to other counsellors and therapists they had seen, and some had experienced counselling over a number of years. Tremble (2001) believes that service intake and assessment should consider these issues. Newman, Dannenfelser and Benishek (2002) suggest the importance of teaching strategies in social work education that assist social work students to 'accept gay and lesbian clients' and 'provide further education for practice' with these populations. Social work education and literature could certainly be doing much more to raise the consciousness and working skills of future social workers, not only in relation to sexuality, but also in relation to transgender issues.

Social work as a practice of empowerment

Social work has a commitment to empower clients, acknowledge diversity and a responsibility toward upholding the values of social justice and human rights (AASW, 2002). In this sense, social work education needs to recognise both gender and sexuality minority groups in the promotion of practice that aims to empower clients through the acceptance of diversity and support for client self-determination. I believe that it is important for social workers to be comfortable with gender ambiguity and diversity when working with transgender clients. The purposeful education of students is, therefore, preferred over leaving social workers to develop their own understandings of gender identity and transgenderism. Failing to prepare social workers for working with transgender clients increases the likelihood of punitive and pathological approaches to be expressed during assessment and counselling stages, particularly dominant discourses of medical/psychiatric origin. Practitioners need to be aware of their use of dominant discourses, due to the pathologising, shaming or discriminating affect of certain discourses with transgender clients.

People's identities are created and manifested through terminological identification, but transgender identities are especially influenced (not always in positive ways) by medical categorisation. Institutional powers apply labels of *deviance* that are designed to indicate variations from a *norm*, and thus to legitimise treatment. Terminology which has the potential to empower

and liberate transgender people needs to be investigated and harnessed in the social work and counselling settings, as in other helping and caring professions. Medical terminology, such as *dysphoria*, *disorder*, *abnormal* and *deviant* will not assist social work practitioners to build rapport with clients who may be struggling to understand and develop their gender identities.

Self-determination (self-discovery and self-identification) assists empowerment and, therefore, is an essential aspect of social work practice. Transgender clients should, therefore, be able to develop a gender identity consistent with their own individual sense of self. Social work with clients who express feelings of cross-gender identification requires a high degree of understanding diversity and ambiguity. Gender ambiguity can, for many of us, be confusing and confronting, as it puts into question the gender system that we are socialised to believe is *normal*.

Social work has a unique role to play in the transgender community. Affirming and empowering social work with individuals and groups of people who experience cross-gender identification is considered to be relatively new territory for the profession. People who identify with the umbrella term *transgender*, or identify as belonging to one or many of the diverse groups the word refers to can experience varying degrees of discrimination, social exclusion and violence. The experiences of many transgender people include: a lack of access to housing, lack of access to social services and healthcare, high unemployment, sex trade work, police harassment, victims of sexual assaults and violent crimes, high imprisonment rate and an high rate of HIV (Hird, 2001:440; Namaste, 1996:196, Baird & Nataf, 2001).

As a result, transgender people are at high risk of drug use, self-harm and suicide, and must find ways to cope with a society and healthcare system that are based on traditional binary understandings of gender. Suicidal behaviours are commonly seen in gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender people, as suicidal behaviours are believed to be induced by psychological stressors and are a 'response elicited by negative social comparison and the perceived situation of entrapment' (van Heeringen & Vincke, 2000). Although professional development and training on specific client needs is the responsibility of every social work practitioner, it is also the responsibility of the social work profession to

produce competent staff in working with oppressed minority groups. It is my hope that social work education and journals begin to include transgender voices, or at least include voices of social workers who have developed specialised knowledge in working with transgender clients and communities.

Therapy, transgenderism and social work

Dominant discourses which reinforce the normative status of medical models of therapy often rely upon distinctions such as 'the professional', and the act of 'diagnosis', in order to warrant their epistemic authority. Within the DSM-IV and the Standards of Care (2001) the term *professional* implies that the therapist is either a psychologist or psychiatrist and that they are trained in these respective fields. The purpose of professional therapy, as stated in the Standards of Care (2001), is to 'offer relief' from 'distress', formally diagnose the disorder, and 'maximise overall psychological wellbeing and self-fulfilment'. *Diagnosis* involves treating the transgendered person's body as an object and involves the subjective and questionable event of 'clinical significance' (professional opinion), giving the therapist substantial power over the patient/client (Wilson, 2000). This concept of therapy increases the potential for transgender people to lose their sense of agency and for their social/political rights to be violated.

Alternative therapy discourses to this medical model, which could still work alongside and ultimately strengthen medical involvement, include the title *helper/counsellor* and the act of *reform* (Bushong, 2000; Wilson, 2000). The concept of the therapists as a helper engenders a particular responsibility to teach, guide, clarify and advocate. Monro's (2000) research indicates a need identified by transgender people for a more holistic, client-centred and empowering approach to therapy with transgender clients, which offers them an alternative to a pathologising medical model. *Helpers* would be required to possess specific knowledge and experience and to be actively involved in networking and advocating for transgender people and communities. Medical reform would be just one challenge to this advocating role. Wilson (2000) and Monro (2000) believe that the medical/psychiatric establishment needs to be made more aware of transgender specific therapeutic needs of a more affirming and

tolerant practice that espouse self-acceptance rather than conformity.

The role of social work fits within the discourse of helper. This role espouses a holistic, empowering and client-centred approach to working with transgender clients. For example, the concept of helping a client to *transition*, as Bushong (2000) describes it, involves the adherence of the client's human rights to self-determination and informed decision-making. Also, the client-centred aspect advocated by Carroll, Gilroy and Ryan (2002) involves the creation of a safe and positive space (transpositive space) for client affirmation through constructivist and narrative approaches that assist the client to create their own discourse (self-discourse). Monro (2000) also describes this helper role as *transgressive*, which emphasises personal growth and a sense of self, but also advocates a transgender citizenship model based on social justice principles.

Conclusion

The limited existence of social work perspectives and literature on the topic of transgenderism provides an opportunity for the social work profession to take a critical look at historical, medical and cultural constructions of gender and transgenderism in Western society. As a result, I suggest that it is essential to first understand that gender expression is a diverse and complex human experience. Gender is more than just one of the rituals we perform on a daily basis. This paper has sought to question, challenge and deconstruct some of the most influential discourses and social practices that are currently impacting on the transgender community (namely, medicalisation and professionalism).

As instruments of social control, social workers need to be aware of the power they possess, and the potential harm to clients that can be caused, albeit unknowingly, through the participation in and maintenance of dominant and oppressive discourses. Exposing practice to reflection and accountability is a crucial aspect of working with all clients, but especially with minority group members (Fook, 1996). This paper has looked at constructions of transgenderism and the possible impact of the employment of dominant and alternative discourses while working with transgender clients. The significant gap in social work literature covering transgenderism has raised concerns about how practitioners may become informed about the many issues impacting on

transgender people and their communities. The apparent absence of a transgendered voice within social work literature and education leaves practitioners to form their own attitudes around what it means to be transgendered and what a transgendered client's needs might be. It also means that practitioners can be influenced by dominant attitudes and discourses, medical/psychiatric discourses particularly, which have the potential to pathologise, stigmatise and oppress, especially if they are not offered in conjunction with alternatives.

One of the benefits of increased visibility of transgender people is that it can inspire other transgender people to speak out about their own gender identities and may help others in the community to appreciate differences and join the transgender movement. Social workers could be involved in this social change through advocacy, education and activism, as well as the adoption of more inclusive and empowerment-based language when working with transgender clients. Transgender clients should not have to educate the social work profession. The profession should be moving towards taking transgender people into account, to listen to their voices and needs and be a potential sanctuary from judgemental oppressive gender systems. This requires a review of discourses that would be appropriate for social work practice with transgender clients, which confirms the aims of this thesis. The profession should not be afraid to ask questions like, 'How can social work understand such a complex phenomenon and still leave room for individual client's self-discovery of their unique gender identity?'

Author note

Jasmin Miller is a BSW Honours student at the University of South Australia and has just completed her thesis 'Gender Diversity and Social Work: a discourse analysis of transgenderism'. Jasmin's interest in this field stems from her research into the potential for the empowerment of transgender clients in the practice of social work. Address: School of Social Work & Social Policy, University of South Australia, 5000. Email: MILJK001@students.unisa.edu.au

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THE IMPORTANCE OF OUT-GROUP ACCEPTANCE IN ADDITION TO IN-GROUP SUPPORT IN PREDICTING THE WELL-BEING OF SAME-SEX ATTRACTED YOUTH

SHARON DANE

Abstract

Studies investigating the well-being of same-sex attracted youth have generally not distinguished between the role of support from friends sharing their minority status and the role of acceptance from areas outside these friendships. To address this issue, 127 (67 female, 60 male) same-sex attracted youth aged 18 to 25 years were asked to complete a self-report questionnaire examining the role of out-group acceptance in predicting the psychological well-being of these youth, over and above that afforded by support from members of their own minority group. Perceived acceptance of their sexual orientation from heterosexual friends, heterosexual contacts apart from friends (such as neighbours, co-workers, employers, or teachers), and from their mother significantly added to the prediction of these youth's well-being, while controlling for perceived support from their sexual minority friends. These findings are discussed in relation to the unique barriers sexual minorities face to in-group socialisation.

Introduction

Recent research suggests that same-sex attracted youth are disclosing their sexual orientation to others in growing numbers and at earlier ages (Herdt & Boxer, 1993; Owens, 1998; Savin-Williams, 1998). This can be considered encouraging in that this trend may be a reflection of a positive change in attitudes towards people who do not identify as heterosexual (Altemeyer, 2001). However, it also raises some concerns, as earlier disclosure means that youth are revealing their same-sex attractions at more vulnerable life stages. Although several recent studies indicate that many of today's youth experience positive reactions to the disclosure of their same-sex attractions, they also reveal that some of these youth are not so fortunate (D'Augelli, Hersberger, & Pilkington, 1998; Hillier et al., 1998; Savin-Williams, 2001). Even those who

perceive considerable acceptance may well have to cope with some negativity as a result of the disclosure of their sexual orientation. Indeed, it is unlikely that any individual will experience reactions that are uniformly positive. Further, an attempt by others to respond favourably to the knowledge of a youth's same-sex attractions may sometimes be expressed as ambivalence rather than unqualified acceptance. As such, research examining from where and to what extent acceptance and support predicts the psychological well-being of sexual minority youth remains an important area of investigation.

Studies focusing on the negative effects of prejudice and discrimination against minority groups have found that identification with and support from members of one's own minority group can enhance psychological well-being, as well as provide a buffer against the adverse effects of a devalued minority status. For example, Halpern (1993) in reviewing studies on the relation of ethnic minority status to the prevalence of mental health problems, presented evidence from several countries to suggest that minorities who reside in areas that have a higher concentration of individuals sharing the same minority status tend to show lower psychiatric admission rates, when compared to those who disperse. Branscombe, Schmitt, and Harvey (1999) found strong evidence in support of their proposed rejection-identification model which posits that negative evaluations of one's minority group that are perceived as pervasive can harm psychological well-being, but that these damaging effects can be suppressed through increased identification with the minority group. In further support of this model was a study by Postmes and Branscombe (2002) examining the effects of different racial environments on the subjective well-being of African Americans. They found that having lived long-term in a racially segregated area, in contrast to a racially mixed environment, was associated with feelings of in-group acceptance and increased in-group identification. In turn, in-group identification was found to be a strong predictor of

psychological well-being. Further, a study by Romero and Roberts (2003) involving Mexican American youth found that of the youth who perceived high discrimination, those who reported high ethnic affirmation had higher self-esteem than those who reported low ethnic affirmation.

Crocker and Major (1989) have suggested that through affiliation with one's own stigmatised in-group, members are more likely to make social comparisons with others who are similarly disadvantaged and thereby protect themselves from the potentially damaging effects of comparisons with more advantaged out-groups. Several studies support this view, showing that the more minority group members perceive being devalued by dominant groups the more highly they identified with their own group (e.g., Dion & Earn, 1975; Sanders Thompson, 1990; Simon et al., 1998). It is important to note that the benefits of in-group affiliation may not necessarily apply to situations in which members also hold a marginal or minority position within their own in-group (e.g., those whose race, age, gender, religion, or sexual orientation differs from most other group members). The issue of multiple minority status will be discussed in more detail later. However, taken collectively (and at least in the case of prototypical members) findings seem to suggest that feelings of support and commonality provided by one's own in-group can work to buffer the stressful effects of rejection from a more powerful out-group. Researchers have suggested that this may be one reason why the prediction of lower global self-esteem among stigmatised groups has generally not been empirically supported (for a review see Crocker & Major, 1989).

This evidence for minority resilience against stigmatised status, however, is inconsistent with the findings from a growing body of evidence showing a higher prevalence of mental health problems among sexual minority adults and youth when compared to their heterosexual counterparts (for reviews see Bailey, 1999; Cochran, 2001; Meyer, 2003). Meyer (2003), in a meta-analysis, suggests that differences in the socialisation of this minority group compared with racial/ethnic minorities may result in a greater impact of minority stress on sexual minorities. For example, he notes that as lesbian, gay, and bisexual individuals are not born into their minority identity but rather develop it later in life, they do not have the

same opportunity afforded racial/ethnic minorities of growing up with similar others in a self-enhancing social environment. Telljohann and Price (1993) also highlighted this crucial difference when describing a sense of belonging for a marginalised group whose family does not share their same minority status. They point out that even under the worst conditions of social rejection, racial, ethnic and religious minority youth most often have the opportunity to receive positive socialisation from their family about their subculture and group identity. They go on to emphasise how gay youth are instead socialised into values and beliefs that often conflict with their self-definition.

As a consequence, those with same-sex attractions need to actively seek affirmation of their group identity, whether it is from family or friends, or through trying to find others who share their minority status. The relatively concealable nature of sexual orientation can make identifying similar others challenging. Furthermore, revealing a non-heterosexual orientation in order to foster social support from in-group members may expose some sexual minorities to increased prejudice from out-group members. For example, Miller and Major (2000) have suggested that individuals with invisible stigmas may be more reluctant to seek social support or become involved in collective coping strategies, as these responses can make their stigmatised condition apparent to others. While research has provided evidence to suggest that individuals from racial and cultural minority groups are able to benefit psychologically through clustering together, thereby increasing their group density (Halpern, 1993; Postmes & Branscombe, 2002), sexual minorities generally find themselves dispersed amongst the heterosexual population. These barriers to socialisation with in-group members suggest that the protection afforded by a sense of community belonging may be more difficult to attain for those who identify as non-heterosexual than for individuals with hereditary and more visible identities. As such, positive evaluations from out-group members (i.e., the heterosexual community) may play a significant role in the psychological well-being of sexual minorities, beyond that explained by support from their own in-group members.

Several studies have already established that acceptance and support (from family and/or friends) is positively related to the well-being of

both adult and younger sexual minorities (Anderson, 1998; Floyd, Stein, Harter, Allison, & Nye, 1999; Kurdek & Schmitt, 1987; Luhtanen, 2003; Savin-Williams, 1989; Vincke & Van Heeringen, 2002). However, this literature cannot speak to the independent contribution of heterosexual acceptance, while taking into account the level of support gained from members of one's own sexual minority group. That is, does perceived acceptance from others who do not share a young person's minority status in regards to sexuality make a unique contribution to the prediction of the young person's well-being, even when controlling for support from what seems like an extremely important reference group (i.e., their like-minded peers)? Or do perceptions of heterosexual acceptance merely reflect the comfort gained from the support of similar others?

To address these questions, the current study examined whether perceptions of accepting attitudes from various sectors of the heterosexual community would contribute to the well-being of sexual minority youth when taking into account perceived support from members of their own minority group. In light of the barriers to in-group socialisation for sexual minorities, it was predicted that youths' perceptions of acceptance of their sexual orientation from heterosexual friends, heterosexual contacts apart from friends (such as neighbours, teachers, co-workers, and employers), and from their mother and father, would predict their psychological well-being over and above the support they perceived from their sexual minority friends.

Method

Participants

Participants in this study were 127 self-defined same-sex attracted young adults. The 67 females and 60 males ranged from 18 to 25 years of age, with the average age being 21.1. A large majority identified as white, with small numbers identifying as Asian, Aboriginal/ Torres Strait Islander, Maori New Zealander, and being of mixed race. The majority resided in metropolitan areas of southeast Queensland, with participants being recruited from five university campuses, various sexual minority social groups and events, and through friendship networks.

Materials

A self-report questionnaire was specifically developed for this study to assess (a) a youth's self-defined sexual orientation, (b) areas of disclosure and extent of disclosure of sexual orientation, (c) perceived level of acceptance of sexual orientation for each area of disclosure, and (d) perceived level of support from sexual minority friends.

Participants were asked if they had disclosed their sexual orientation, or were confident others were aware of their sexual orientation in four separate domains: heterosexual friends; heterosexual contacts apart from friends (such as neighbours, co-workers, employers, or teachers); mother; and father. Measurements of overall perceived acceptance of sexual orientation from each of these sectors involved single item responses with options ranging from *not at all accepting* to *fully accepting*. Support from sexual minority friends overall was assessed using a single item with the response options in this case ranging from *not at all supportive* to *extremely supportive*. The term 'support' was specified as referring to ways in which friends may be helpful, caring, or encouraging. To assess extent of disclosure (or other's awareness of their same-sex attractions), participants were asked what proportion of their friends they estimated to be heterosexual, and what proportion of their heterosexual friends and heterosexual contacts they were confident were aware of their sexual orientation.

This study included two additional measures that were combined and averaged to form a single measure of well-being as the dependent variable; the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (RSE) (Rosenberg, 1965); and The Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS) (Diener, Emmons, Larsen, & Griffin, 1985). The RSE is a 10-item scale that assesses an individual's global self-esteem. The SWLS is a 5-item scale asking participants to rate their satisfaction with life as a whole. Both of these scales have been shown to have good internal consistency in studies with youth (Diener, et al., 1985; Fleming & Courtney, 1984; Maguen, Floyd, Bakeman, & Armistead, 2002).

Procedure

The scales described here were presented as a single packaged questionnaire, with the well-being measures presented last. With the exception of a small percentage of youth

recruited through friendship networks, prospective participants were approached with a flyer that invited the participation of 18 to 25 year olds who considered themselves to be non-heterosexual. In the majority of cases youth presented with the opportunity to participate in the study were approached in small groups (e.g., universities' 'diverse sexuality' rooms, social groups). In the case of one large outdoor social event, the recruitment of participants was limited to situations conducive to filling in a questionnaire (e.g., sitting at tables or on the grass), and did not involve approaching those who remained transient among the stalls. As all individuals were approached in a sexual minority 'safe place', the issue of disclosure through the request of a questionnaire was not a concern.

Findings and discussion

Consistent with research indicating an increasing rate of disclosure among sexual minority youth, the same-sex attracted youth in this study reported being open with others about their sexual orientation, at least to a moderate degree. The majority reported that most of their heterosexual friends, and more than half of their heterosexual contacts were aware of their sexual orientation. Also consistent with recent studies involving American sexual minority youth (Savin-Williams, 1998), a very large percentage of the young people in this current sample reported their mothers' knowledge of their sexual orientation. Results indicated that fathers were less likely than mothers to know of their child's same-sex attractions, although almost three-quarters of these youth stated that they had disclosed to fathers or were confident their fathers were aware. However, the extent to which individuals' interpersonal networks as a whole knew of their sexual orientation varied between individuals, with only just over half of this sample indicating that others in all four areas were aware of their sexual orientation. As such, despite what seems to be a higher rate of disclosure among the sexual minority youth of today, the data suggest that many may still have reservations about revealing their same-sex attractions in certain sectors.

Acceptance and Support

Due to the fact that the areas in which youth felt confident that others were aware of their same-sex attractions varied between individuals, a separate analysis (reported elsewhere, Dane & MacDonald, 2005) was conducted for each area of acceptance while controlling for sexual

minority support. Results showed that for each analysis the level of support youth perceived from their sexual minority friends was a significant predictor of their well-being, with those reporting higher levels of this support also reporting higher levels of psychological well-being. This outcome is consistent with prior research suggesting that minority in-group support and in-group identification can enhance well-being, as well as act as a buffer against the stressors associated with a devalued minority status (Halpern, 1993; Branscombe et al., 1999).

However, the main purpose of this study was to investigate if out-group (heterosexual) acceptance would play a significant role in predicting same-sex attracted youth's well-being over and above that afforded by support from members of their own minority group. This hypothesis was supported overall, with the level of acceptance youth perceived from their heterosexual friends, from their heterosexual contacts apart from friends, and from their mother, each predicting well-being while controlling for sexual minority support. Importantly, support from sexual minority friends remained a significant predictor when adding heterosexual acceptance to the analyses. Thus, perceptions of positive attitudes from out-group members appears to play a unique role in contributing to the well-being of same-sex attracted youth, as opposed to acting as a substitute for in-group support.

The one area of acceptance that was only partially supported by this study was that of parental acceptance. When taking into account perceived support from sexual minority friends, a mother's acceptance predicted the well-being of female, but not male, youth. Further, a father's acceptance was not a significant predictor of well-being for either gender. These findings appear consistent with those of earlier studies showing positive maternal but not paternal attitudes to predict same-sex attracted youth's well-being (Floyd et al., 1999), with this form of approval appearing to be particularly important for lesbian youth (Savin-Williams, 1989).

With the exception of the questionable importance of a father's acceptance, the results of this study are consistent with the argument that the unique socialisation of sexual minorities renders positive evaluations from out-group members an important contributor to well-being,

in addition to that afforded by minority group support. Prior research involving racial/ethnic minorities has suggested that for in-group support to be most effective in buffering the negative effects of a devalued minority status, it needs to provide a strong sense of community belonging. For example, Halpern (1993) noted that minority mental health appeared to be comparable with that of dominant group members when there was a substantial percentage (perhaps a minimum of a 30-40% concentration) of the minority group within the local population. Similarly, Postmes and Branscombe (2002) found that African Americans who resided in neighbourhoods consisting mainly of fellow African Americans benefited psychologically due to the positive impact of high in-group identification on well-being. Sexual minority youth in the current study were mainly recruited through social groups and events, indicating at least some level of involvement with other same-sex attracted youth. However, this level of support hardly seems comparable to the relatively homogeneous environment experienced by minority group members who elect to congregate, thereby increasing their group density within the local population. Nor does it appear to be comparable to the history of social connection afforded other minority groups, in that the support network of sexual minorities is found later in life, rather than experienced as a social reality throughout childhood. Instead, non-heterosexual youth are almost certain to have been born into and raised by families who identify as part of the heterosexual community, placing them at greater risk for the challenges to well-being that arise from social isolation.

Limitations and future research

Although these data suggest the importance of out-group acceptance in predicting same-sex attracted youths' well-being, the findings may not be generalisable to all sexual minority youth. For example, despite efforts to obtain a diverse sample, there was an overrepresentation of white, older-aged youth (18-25) with higher levels of education.

As the vast majority of these youth identified as members of the dominant white population in Australia, the findings of this study on the importance of both in-group support and out-group acceptance may not extend to youth who identify as non-white within the Australian sexual minority community. Indeed, research

suggest that individuals who are marginal members within their group, compared with those who are non-marginal, perceive lower levels of inclusiveness and more violations of trust as group members (Kramer, 1996). Boldero (2004), in discussing some of the implications of being a racial minority within a predominantly white gay community, describes how some gay Asian Australians may feel torn between two significant but conflicting identities, with identification in one area running the risk of social isolation from the other. This raises important questions with regard to what types of in-group support and out-group acceptance may be functional for sexual minorities whose ethnic origin differs from that of the dominant population.

Another limitation of this study is that it did not take into account whether or not youth were living independent of their parents. This factor may be related to the likelihood of disclosure to parents as well as the perceived importance of parental acceptance. In the current study mother's acceptance but not father's acceptance predicted youth's well-being, with the former applying to only female youth. However, parental acceptance may very well play a larger role for youth still living at home, particularly for those of a younger age who are more likely to be both emotionally and financially dependent on their families.

One constraint faced by research involving sexual minorities, is that the recruitment of participants generally requires their visibility. This often results in a sample largely limited to those who are accessible through sexual minority social networks or events. As a consequence, youth in such research are more likely to be receiving support from other sexual minority youth. This was confirmed in the current study with the large majority of youth reporting high levels of support from their like-minded peers. Thus, the results cannot speak to youth who are less open about their same-sex attractions or who do not access minority support networks. However, the high levels of sexual minority support reported by the youth in this study strengthens the argument that out-group acceptance plays an important role in predicting well-being, beyond that afforded by in-group support. That is, even though these youth generally perceived their like-minded peers as being very supportive, acceptance of their sexual orientation from various sectors of

the heterosexual community still added significantly to the prediction of their well-being.

Although the findings of this study suggest that positive evaluations by out-group members are important to the psychological well-being of same-sex attracted youth, they are not meant to imply that these youth lack resilience or play a submissive role in their interactions with individuals who do not share their sexual minority status. To the contrary, research suggests that sexual minorities employ a variety of active strategies when engaging with out-group members (Conley, Devine, Rabow, & Evett, 2002). What this study does suggest, however, is that the well-being of same-sex attracted youth relies on more than simply having access to similar youth with whom they can share their experiences. This is not surprising given that these youth are likely to spend the bulk of their home-life, school-life, and working-life, engaging with individuals whose values and lifestyles may be vastly different to their own. Research has often focused on the self-protective strategies of members of stigmatized groups (Branscombe et al., 1999; Crocker & Major, 1989; Schmitt, Spears, & Branscombe, 2003). However, the data from this study, along with sexual minority group members' limited access to in-group protection from social oppression, suggests that the welfare of these youth is very much a societal concern, particularly given the evidence that the existing state of affairs puts the health of these young people at risk. In this light, future research that both facilitates acceptance and helps to isolate some of the factors that may impede effective communication between individuals differing in sexual orientation will aid in providing equal access to well-being.

Author note

Sharon Dane is a research student at the School of Psychology, University of Queensland. Her research interests are in minority group status, intergroup anxiety, and social acceptance and well-being. She can be contacted via email at s.dane@psy.uq.edu.au

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LET US LISTEN WELL: 13TH GENERAL SYNOD OF THE ANGLICAN CHURCH

PETER BURKE

Let us listen well.....

The Anglican Church of Australia as a safe and welcoming place for people who are same sex attracted, including those in a same sex relationship.

The place of people who are same sex attracted was one of a number of controversial issues considered at the recent 13th General Synod of the Anglican Church in Fremantle, Western Australia. Several motions on 'Sexuality and Gender Relationships' were considered. The debate which ensued however was largely focused on specific matters such as liturgical blessing and ordination, rather than a more holistic consideration place of same sex attracted people as members of the church.

The first of these motions which eventually passed without amendment, was moved by Chris Jones and suggested that we 'note' the 1998 Lambeth Resolution 1:10; commended two publications, *Faithfulness in Fellowship* (Anglican Church of Australia, 2001) which focuses on homosexuality and the church and *Lost in Translation* (Doctrine Commission, 2003) which focuses more broadly on the meaning and interpretation of scripture. The motion also commended a time of listening and conversation within our church.

Three of four motions moved by Bruce Kaye were passed including two which recognised the continuing process of listening within the church, but then stated that we do not condone the liturgical blessing of same sex relationships or the ordination of people in such a relationship. It was suggested that 'not condone' be changed to 'condemns' but this was unsuccessful. A third motion by Bruce Kaye supported the Federal Government's recognition of marriage as a relationship between a man and a women.

A fourth motion by Bruce Kaye on actions taken to affirm same sex relationships in other parts of the Anglican Communion and a motion by Bruce Ballantine-Jones to "affirm and support" the Lambeth motion were not considered by General Synod due to a lack of time, and a feeling that more than enough had already been said on such

matters. While this is understandable, it was a pity, as Bruce Ballantine-Jones suggested earlier that the ordering of business on this matter did not enable a cognate debate.

Yet, on the broader matter of the place of same sex attracted people in our church, not enough has been said, and perhaps this is because we are not ready either to say or to hear what needs to be said. Once again we have committed ourselves to listening and conversation. We need to listen well, especially to those who make the 'issue' we are considering a reality.

If a cognate debate had occurred at the recent General Synod, it might have created space for a broader consideration on what seems the heart of the matter: what is the place of same sex attracted people, including those in a same sex relationship, in the Anglican Church of Australia? Is it a safe and welcoming place for such people and what needs to be done to make it so, if indeed that is our aim?

A central feature of such a debate, if it had occurred, would probably have focused on the difference between 'noting' the Lambeth Resolution 1:10 on Human Sexuality, and affirming General Synods support for it, as in the motion by Bruce Ballantine-Jones.

The Lambeth Resolution fails to acknowledge the legitimate presence of people in a same sex relationship in our church. It speaks only of 'homosexual orientation', which creates a serious loophole in our respectful conversation and listening. By default, the Lambeth Resolution casts doubt on the full participation of people in a same sex relationship in our church.

The quality of our listening needs to be complete and even-handed – we need to listen and engage with both same sex attracted people who have made a moral choice in Christian conscience to remain celibate or to live in a same sex relationship and we need to be ready to see God's Blessings in both. Both are "in Christ".

The Lambeth Resolution also mistakenly describes the presence of same sex attracted people in the

church as passive recipients of ministry, and fails to recognise the active participation and ministry of such people, including those in a same sex relationship.

Thankfully, there are places in our church where people in a same sex relationship are welcomed, where their ministry is recognised and mobilised. Any action by this church to diminish, deny or condemn this participation must be avoided.

Further, when considering the General Synod's adoption of a National Protocol for Professional Standards among clergy and church workers, and the determination to ensure our church is a safe place for all people in broad terms, it needs to be said that this church is not a safe place for people in a same sex relationship. The definition of 'spiritual abuse' in the Professional Standards book 3b-2b-10 includes the determination of some in our church to condemn people in a same sex relationship constitutes such 'spiritual abuse'. "The use of a position of spiritual authority to dominate or manipulate another person or group".

It is just as well that General Synod did nothing more than 'note' the Lambeth Resolution. To do anything more would be inconsistent with a genuine commitment to respectful listening as together we continue to struggle to move from diatribe to dialogue

A few phrases from a 1989 General Synod article entitled "A Christian Discussion on Sexuality" might be of help in our listening and conversation. This article was written by the late Dr John Gaden and suggests what is at stake and how far we are yet to travel:

But what are our gay sisters and brothers saying to the rest of us? Four things at least:

- 1 Accept us as we are and listen to what we have to say. Trust that we also seek to follow Christ.

- 2 Ask yourself why we homosexuals provoke anger or disgust in you. Is there something that you are afraid of?
- 3 Don't just debate homosexuality in the abstract. When we meet, let us consider the whole question of sexuality and the Gospel together.
- 4 For Jesus' sake don't legislate us out of the church. We have a hard enough time as it is. Shouldn't you consider some affirmative and supportive action instead?

In this context the recent General Synod meeting was a long way from affirmative and supportive action. Our response must be to listen and listen well. Perhaps it is also time for communities of faith in our church to be more visible in being a welcoming and safe place for all, including same sex attracted people and those in a same sex relationship.

Author note

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BOOK REVIEW

REVIEWED BY HEIDI JANSEN

Lesbian Ex-Lovers: The Really Long-Term Relationships Edited by Jacqueline S Weinstock and Ester D Rothblum. New York: Harrington Park Press, 2004, 255 pp., ISBN: 1-56023-283-8.

This paper is a review of *Lesbian Ex-Lovers: The Really Long-Term Relationships* by Jacqueline S Weinstock and Ester D Rothblum, a very fascinating and unique text that explores lesbian ex-relationships and the impact these relationships have on women's lives and subsequent relationships. The purpose of the book is two fold; to develop better understandings of lesbian relationships through further writing, research and theorising in the area, and to promote a commitment to being reflexive in our past relationships and fostering and developing ex-lover friendships. Weinstock and Rothblum acknowledge that they set out seeking an empirical exploration of the topic, but were overwhelmed with the number of personal narratives they received, and accordingly the book reflects this.

Weinstock and Rothblum concede there are limits in the representativeness of the stories presented, and thus caution the reader that there is an absence of stories that might emerge from a greater variety of race, class, culture, age and ability contexts. This is important given the nature of lesbian relationships within mainstream society being situated as "other" to the heteronormative nature of relationships, and furthermore emphasises the fact that lesbians as a 'sub-cultural group' are not homogeneous. The authors make comment on the organisation of the narratives as being one possible framework for understanding, and further to this the authors caution against believing that ex-lover relationships are static, reminding the reader the stories are located in the interpretations of the author(s) based on their current understanding and experiences. This is a significant point, especially if you consider the nature of understanding the world and the construction of knowledge within language. By this I mean the way in which people construct understandings of their identity and lives based on their experiences. Or, the narrative framework within which the stories are situated provides a context for understanding.

Lesbian Ex-Lovers covers several interesting topics including: the roles ex-lovers play in our lives, ex-lovers as contexts for change and development, how we continue to be influenced by ex-lovers, letting go and moving on, ex-lovers as current friends and family, themes of betrayal and loss of faith, reconstructing friendships and community, the mystique of the ex-lover and friend/family connections of lesbian ex-lovers. The content is presented in various formats ranging from poems, cartoons, narratives, and fictional accounts to theoretical discussions and offers advice, anecdotes and interpretations to the reader. The collection of narratives were familiar, the stories resonated a number of 'universal truths' about lesbian relationships and ex-relationships for me. As I read them aloud I found myself identifying with the women and the events within the stories and recollecting my own ex-lover stories. If I did not have the experience, I felt as though I was able to experience the stories, the events, the emotions and the interpretations of the protagonist vicariously.

Weinstock and Rothblum propose there are three main story lines for and contributing factors to lesbian relationships:

stories that (1) reflect lesbians' problematic developmental and relationship issues; (2) consider ex-lover relationships as adaptive responses to the context of lesbian oppression and (3) challenge prevailing ideas and offer alternative constructions of lovers, friendships, relationships, families even adult development (p. 232)

In my reading, the book successfully explores the complexity of lesbian relationships within the context of individual relationships, ex-relationships and within society. The premise of reconstructing the meanings that surround lesbian ex-lover relationships is exciting and fascinating because lesbian relationships, same-sex identity, and the individual and collective narratives of same-sex identified women are still yet to be fully conceptualised (but see article by Jane Edward in this issue for an example of this being done successfully. Also of note is my own work on lesbian identities: Jansen, 2004). In fact, this book epitomises the need for a more critical

understanding and analysis of lesbian relationships, and ex-relationships. Perhaps some would argue that research into lesbian ex-relationships is curious given that there is still so much ground to cover within lesbian relationships and exploring lesbian identity. However, I think that we should be encouraging and supporting any research and critical discussion that encourages exploration of the diversity of lesbian sexuality and lesbian (ex)relationships.

In particular, the book challenges the assumption that lesbian relationships are the same as heterosexual relationships. The author's argue that lesbian relationships are flexible and challenge heteronormative discourses surrounding ex-lover relationships. Difference rather than sameness becomes the focus within the text. In summary, Weinstock and Rothblum provide a space for understanding ex-lover relationships and the book provided lesbians with the opportunity to speak about their lives within the oppressive nature of mainstream society wherein they have previously

been silenced or denied a voice. The book and particularly the authors encourage me to engage critically and reflexively in understanding my personal relationships and ex-lover relationships and inspire me to explore such issues empirically.

Author note

Heidi Jansen holds an honours degree in psychology and is currently undertaking Masters in Psychology.

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Jansen, H. (2004), Narratives of coming out: developing understandings of same-sex identifications. In D. Riggs, & G. Walker, (Eds.), *Out in the antipodes: Australian and New Zealand perspectives on gay and lesbian issues in psychology* (pp. 306-335). Perth: Brightfire Press.

CALL FOR CONTRIBUTIONS

Special Issue of *Lesbian & Gay Psychology Review*

LGBTI parenting and families

Guest Editor: Damien Riggs

- * What shapes do queer families take?
- * What does it mean to be a LGBTI parent?
- * How do we develop new ways of relating to the children we care for?
- * Who can be 'a parent'? How does the term limit or make possible our experiences?
- * What is the relationship between theory and practice in regards to LGBTI parents?
- * Names, terminology and frameworks: How do we talk about and understand our (queer) families?
- * Can psychology contribute to our understanding of LGBTI parents and families?
- * What challenges do LGBTI parents and families present to the discipline (both theory and practice) of psychology?
- * What if we don't choose family: Are there limits to the concept and its location within heterosexual histories?
- * How do concepts such as 'understanding family as a verb' resist traditional narratives of families and parenting?

The guest editor invites research and theoretical articles (maximum 6000 words) and short commentaries and 'opinion pieces' (maximum 1500 words), which address these questions, particularly as they pertain to the multiple familial and parenting arrangements that LGBTI individuals are involved in. This may be as parents, as children, as carers, as families of origin, through supportive networks and extended familial relations, through 'biology', through partnership, through choice, through politics. All article submissions will be peer-reviewed and commentaries will be reviewed by the Guest Editor and the Editor of *Lesbian & Gay Psychology Review*.

The deadline for submissions is 1 August 2005. Informal enquiries and submissions should be sent to (preferably via email):

Damien Riggs
Department of Psychology
The University of Adelaide
South Australia
5005
damien.riggs@adelaide.edu.au

CALL FOR CONTRIBUTIONS

Special Issue of *Gay & Lesbian Issues and Psychology Review*

30 Years On

In 2005 it is 30 years since the American Psychological Association formerly recognised that homosexuality is not a pathology. As a result, this special issue invites articles, commentaries and research that provide:

- * Personal narratives of the event and its implications
- * Commentaries on the effects of the psychological sanction of LGBTI identities
- * Elaborations of what needs to happen in the next 30 years of psychological research and practice
- * Historical accounts of the events surrounding the removal and its political/social implications
- * Overviews of the changes and similarities between psychological practice/research now and then
- * Answers to question such as: how does the APA still sanction discrimination against same-sex attracted individuals - does it?

The Editor invites research and theoretical articles (maximum 3000 words) and short commentaries and 'opinion pieces' (maximum 1500 words) which address these questions. In particular, papers are called for that draw out the strengths and weaknesses of psychology in relation to LGBTI individuals over the past 30 years. Contributors are encouraged to introduce personal, political and professional narratives into their submissions. All article submissions will be peer-reviewed.

The deadline for submissions is 15th June 2005. Please contact the Editor if this deadline needs to be negotiated. Informal enquiries and submissions should be sent to (preferably via email):

Damien Riggs
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Jerusalem WorldPride

David Denborough

Editor of the book 'Queer Counselling & Narrative Practice', Dulwich Centre Publications, 2002
Australian Ambassador for WorldPride

Have you ever wanted to participate in a life-changing event? Here's the opportunity. In August, WorldPride is to take place in Jerusalem!

Visiting Jerusalem at any time is extraordinary. I have had the pleasure of walking through the streets of the old city many times, and each visit changes the way in which I see the world. The stones of old Jerusalem have witnessed events that continue to shape so many lives. Wandering past the church which is built on the site where Christ was crucified, or past the wailing wall where orthodox Jews are praying, or visiting the Dome of the Rock, the third most holy site for Muslims, can be breathtaking.

Now, this holy city is to become the site of a different ritual, WorldPride. It is no coincidence why Jerusalem has been chosen. WorldPride will bring a new focus to an ancient city. In these times of intolerance, in the home of three of the world's great religions, Jerusalem WorldPride will gather Israelis, Palestinians and people from all over the world to bring a message that is needed throughout the Middle East and beyond: that human rights transcend cultural and ethnic boundaries, that our differences can be respected peacefully, and that our love knows no borders.

Like most cities, there is a queer history in Jerusalem that needs acknowledging. For the last eight years a non-profit agency *Jerusalem Open House* has been providing services to the local LGBT community and in the space of a few years has become one of the Middle East's leading queer services and advocacy organizations. The Open House provides services for secular and religious Jews as well as for Arabs. It is one of the few places in Israeli society where such a diversity of people meet together.

Jerusalem has already seen three successful and peaceful pride events, attended by thousands. Now it is time for something more. WorldPride has only ever been held once before. The first WorldPride, Rome 2000, brought to the heart of Europe, and indeed to the Pope's doorstep, the message that queer folk are – and always have been – a vital part of humanity. Now it is time to build upon this message and to bring it to a new and even more challenging frontier. It is time to demonstrate to the world, not only that we belong, but that our love and our pride can cross the harshest borders that divide people.

In August a 10-day festival will take place, the likes of which Jerusalem and the Middle East have never before seen. The calendar of events is designed for participants with a wide variety of backgrounds and interests! It will include parties of every shape and size, concerts, theatre, a film festival, a conference for GLBT clergy, another for academics on religion and homosexuality, GLBT marriage rights celebrations, workshops on lesbian, gay, queer social and cultural issues, opportunities to attend religious services, events for queer clergy, and the WorldPride Parade, Street Fair and Rally where we will make our most public and visible statement of pride and unity. Whether you are atheist (like me), or someone for whom the stories of Jerusalem have even greater meaning, this promises to be a queer event like no other.

When people have been trying for thousands of years to describe the magic of Jerusalem, I can't hope to convey it adequately in these words. Nor can I do justice to the extraordinary work of Jerusalem Open House. All I can say is that I hope to see you in at WorldPride in August.

For more Information:

WorldPride is planned as a 10-day festival spanning 2 weekends, August 18-28, 2005. Information is already available online at www.worldpride.net (in English, Arabic, Hebrew, French, German, Italian, Spanish, Portuguese, and Russian). For more information, including travel information, group rates and special packages, please email info@worldpride.net. If you would like to get involved locally in getting the word out about this event, please email australia@worldpride.net

Gay and Lesbian Issues and Psychology Review

Preparation, submission and publication guidelines

Types of articles that we typically consider:

A)

- Empirical articles (2500 word max)
- Theoretical pieces
- Commentary on LGBTI issues and psychology
- Research in brief: Reviews of a favourite or troublesome article/book chapter that you have read and would like to comment on

B)

- Conference reports/conference abstracts
- Practitioner's reports/field notes
- Political/media style reports of relevant issues
- Book reviews (please contact the Editor for a list of books available & review guidelines)
- Promotional material for LGBT relevant issues

The Review also welcomes proposals for special issues and guest Editors.

Each submission in section A should be prepared for blind peer-review if the author wishes. If not, submissions will still be reviewed, but the identity of the author may be known to the reviewer. Submissions for blind review should contain a title page that has all of the author(s) information, along with the title of the submission, a short author note (50 words or less), a word count and up to 5 key words. The remainder of the submission should not identify the author in any way, and should start on a new page with the submission title followed by an abstract and then the body of the text. Authors who do not require blind review should submit papers as per the above instructions, the difference being that the body text may start directly after the key words.

Each submission in section B should contain the author(s) information, title of submission (if relevant), a short author note (50 words or less) and a word count, but need not be prepared for blind review.

All submissions must adhere to the rules set out in the Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association (fifth edition), and contributors are encouraged to contact the Editor should they have any concerns with this format as it relates to their submission. Spelling should be Australian (e.g., 'ise') rather than American ('ize'), and submissions should be accompanied with a letter stating any conflicts of interest in regards to publication or competing interests. Footnotes should be kept to a minimum. References should be listed alphabetically by author at the end of the paper. For example:

Journal Articles: Riggs, D.W. (2004). The politics of scientific knowledge: Constructions of sexuality and ethics in the conversion therapy literature. *Lesbian & Gay Psychology Review*, 5, 16-24.

Books: Kitzinger, C. (1987). *The social construction of lesbianism*. London: Sage.

Edited Books: Coyle, A. & Kitzinger, C. (Eds.) (2002). *Lesbian & gay psychology: New perspectives*. Oxford: BPS Blackwell.

Book Chapters: MacBride-Stewart, S. (2004). Dental dams: A parody of straight expectations in the promotion of 'safer' lesbian sex. In D.W. Riggs & G.A. Walker (Eds.), *Out in the antipodes: Australian and New Zealand perspectives on gay and lesbian issue in psychology* (pp.393-416). Perth: Brightfire Press.

References within the text should be listed in alphabetical order separated by a semi-colon, page numbers following year. For example:

(Clarke, 2001; Peel, 2001; Riggs & Walker, 2004)

(Clarke, 2002a; b)

(MacBride-Stewart, 2004, p. 398)

Authors should avoid the use of *sexist*, *racist* and *heterosexist language*. Authors should follow the guidelines for the use of non-sexist language provided by the American Psychological Society.

Papers should be submitted in Word format: title bold 12 points, author bold 11 points (with footnote including affiliation/address), abstract italicised 10 points left aligned, article text 10 points left aligned. All other identifying information on title page for section A articles should be 10 points and left aligned.

All submissions should be sent to the Editor, either via email (preferred): damien.riggs@adelaide.edu.au, or via post: Department of Psychology, The University of Adelaide, South Australia, 5005.

Deadlines

January 30 for April edition

May 30 for August edition

September 30 for December edition

