

GLIP News

Gay and Lesbian Issues and Psychology
An Interest Group of the Australian Psychological Society

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Editor's Note

Welcome to the first edition of GLIP News for 2004. It has taken a little longer than usual to get this one out. The usual work demands and lack of content. Which brings me to the issue of whether this might be the last edition of GLIP News.

Should GLIP News be continued given the email updates that now come out every fortnight or so. Gordon and I are keen to hear from members as we are thinking of replacing GLIP News with the email updates. Members that do not have an email address would receive postal printouts of these. Read Gordon's report on page 2 for further details.



Graeme Kane
National Secretary &
Editor

BMJ 2004;328:1211-1212 - Editorial

Disclosure of sexual preferences and lesbian, gay, and bisexual practitioners "Informed consent" needs to be balanced against "freedom from discrimination"

In the public mind doctoring and homosexuality do not sit easily together. More than most occupations, medical practice is affected by powerful cultural stereotypes concerning the social identity of practitioners. As part of their work doctors have privileged access to their patients' bodies, and in return patients expect to know something of the social and moral character of the practitioner. In popular culture doctors have been represented as asexual or heterosexual, but rarely as a group that includes people who may have same sex relationships. We do not know how many health professionals self identify as lesbian, gay, and bisexual. Extrapolating from estimates for the general

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The Elusive Orgasm: A woman's guide to why she can't and how she can orgasm by Dr Vivienne Cass

A practical resource that will help you with your clients/patients who experience orgasm difficulties or wish to learn more about female sexuality.

An easy-to-read training manual for the busy health professional, education specialist and sexology student.

It's also a self-help book that your clients/patients will enjoy reading, regardless of their age, background, sexual orientation and physical ability.

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- how the clitoris is more than "a little button"
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<http://www.brightfire.com.au/publications.php>

population, many commentators have quoted the figure from the American Kinsey studies of about 10%, although a recent national survey in the United Kingdom showed that only about 5% of both men and women had ever had a same sex partnership. The existence of the Gay and Lesbian Association of Doctors and Dentists in the United Kingdom and the Gay and Lesbian Medical Association in the United States implies that considerable numbers of professionals are involved.

Read on: <http://bmj.bmjournals.com/cgi/content/full/328/7450/1211?ecoll>

National Convener's Report - The year in review!



So far this year the big issue overseas seems to be the question of “gay marriage”, and whilst it threatens to become an election issue in the US, it has received little attention here in Australia. Perhaps this is because the rights of gay and lesbian couples are somewhat greater here than in many part of the world. Nevertheless, we should perhaps consider if the Australian Psychological Society should play a role in the campaign for equal rights on the question of marriage here in Australia. With this in mind, Damien Riggs and I plan to produce a draft statement later in the year. Following feedback from you we hope the Society will adopt it as its official position on gay and lesbian marriage. We would love to hear from you if you feel you can advance the ‘psychological’ case for marriage. Please send us your contributions.

The GLIP Award 2004

Entries for the annual GLIP Award for the best fourth year psychology research report or thesis in the area of same-sex attracted issues close on 31 May. The purpose of the award is to promote and encourage excellence in same-sex attraction issues in psychology, and to acknowledge and reward psychology graduates for their contribution to research into such issues. The criteria for the award of the prize was expanded last year to include research reports or theses from accredited masters by coursework psychology programs and the value of the monetary prize has been increased to \$250. Please get your entries in or if you know people who are eligible to enter please encourage them to do so! The winner will be announced at the annual conference in Sydney

Book launch: “Out in the Antipodes: Australian and New Zealand perspectives on gay and lesbian psychology”

The book contains a collection of writings on theory, research and practice in gay and lesbian psychology from authors in Australia and New Zealand. This is the first such collection of its kind in this part of the world and GLIP is justifiably proud to be associated with its publication. The book will be launched at the APS Conference in Sydney later this year.

GLIP News and Email updates

For some time now GLIP News has been supplemented with regular email updates bringing you news from around the world on gay, lesbian and bisexual issues. These email bulletins now come to you via the

APS National Office thanks to Alexandra Bignell with Graeme and me continuing to provide the content. It is now the case that these email bulletins provide you with much more ‘news’ than does GLIP News!! We are now wondering if GLIP News has been superseded by the email updates. Our thinking goes as follows:

- GLIP News is not developing as we had hoped it would in that it is getting smaller rather than bigger;
- It remains largely a means for Graeme and I to communicate with you;
- Contributions from members other than the executive are rare;
- Book reviews seem to be declining rather than increasing in number, despite members being able to get a free copy of the book for their trouble;
- Reports on the APS Conference and from State and Territory Representatives as well our own reports could also be sent by email.

However we are aware that there are still some members who do not have email and we would not wish to disadvantage them further. Also we need to hear from you the members on this. **Please email us on what you think should happen to GLIP News**

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Book Review: On Whose Terms? Psychology and the Legitimation of Lesbian and Gay Parents. Damien W. Riggs

http://www.psychsociety.com.au/units/interest_groups/gay_lesbian/bookreview.pdf

Book Review: Fiona L. Tasker & Susan Golombok. (1997). *Growing Up in a Lesbian Family: Effects on Child Development*. New York: Guilford Press.

This is an excerpt of Damien's review that can be accessed from the link above.

This paper is partly a review of *Growing up in a lesbian family* by Fiona Tasker and Susan Golombok, and partly a commentary on research in the area of lesbian and gay parenting more generally. As someone who has been involved in the ongoing critique of heteronormative constructions of the family, and now as a foster parent in a same-sex relationship, I feel it important to speak out about the ways in which these issues are shaped through the discourses of psychology that are often used within research on lesbian and gay families. In addition to this is a desire to do justice to the book itself, as it is widely considered to be a seminal text in the subject area. As a result, within this review I will outline the key points that the book makes which are used to support a 'positive view' of lesbian and gay parenting, and I then offer a commentary on these points in order to demonstrate some of the limitations of assuming that psychological science is the appropriate arbiter of what counts as 'good parenting'. Indeed, I suggest that it is often the case that research on lesbian and gay parenting assumes an unnecessarily defensive posture as a result of its location within the realm of science (cf., Stacey & Biblarz, 2000). My intention, then, is that this review and commentary will present a range of views on the topic, and thus hopefully stimulate further consideration of how we may go about understanding the potentially radical differences that arise from lesbian and gay families.

Refuting stereotypes: Who is setting the agenda?

Within their book, Tasker and Golombok outline some of the key stereotypes that have been used to 'prove' that lesbians and gay men are not fit parents. These include: the assumption that same-sex attracted parents will produce children that are same-sex attracted, and more specifically, that these attractions result from the children's 'inability' to develop 'gender appropriate' behaviours, which is suggested to result from a lack of opposite-sex role models. The suggestion, then, is that the long term effects of this 'lack' of 'gender appropriate behaviours' will be emotional disturbance and potential mental health problems for those children raised in lesbian and gay headed households. Finally, those against lesbian and gay parenting suggest that the children of these parents will suffer unnecessarily from harassment

from their peers as a result of their parents' sexual orientation.

Tasker and Golombok use longitudinal data gathered initially in the late 1970's from both a group of lesbian mothers and a 'comparative group' of heterosexual mothers, and a subsequent follow up with the majority of these mothers and their children fourteen years later, to demonstrate the 'flaws' of the stereotypes outlined above. Their data suggest that contrary to stereotypical assumptions about children within lesbian headed families, the children when interviewed as young adults showed no more problems in regards to mental health or emotional disturbance than did their counterparts from heterosexual headed families. Whilst their data suggest that there was a greater likelihood of children from lesbian families exploring or considering same-sex relationships for themselves, Tasker and Golombok propose that this represents the outcome of an increased awareness of 'choice' surrounding compulsory heterosexuality, rather than being the result of the expectations of their mothers. Finally, their data would appear to contradict the assumption that children from lesbian headed families would automatically experience higher levels of harassment than those children from heterosexual headed families. Whilst they do report a trend towards the children (as young adults) reporting more experiences of peer harassment in regards to their own sexuality, they suggest that this could be a result of the 'salience of sexuality' for them, rather than being an indicator of any real difference in experiences of harassment. Together, these results present a very clear challenge to the stereotypes that often surround lesbian and gay headed households, and have thus been employed to demonstrate the importance of allowing children to remain with their (lesbian) mothers following heterosexual divorce.

Whilst this is indeed a very important outcome of the book's findings, and one that demonstrates the inadequacies of the legal system more generally (i.e., its underlying heterosexism), it is dependent on the acceptance of an 'agenda of sexuality' set within the heterosexist assumptions that structure notions of 'family'. In other words, by accepting as legitimate the concerns raised about children of lesbian and gay parents, we reify these concerns as being the normative way of thinking about gay men and lesbians. Thus the idea that children may 'turn out gay' is only of concern if 'being gay' is rendered inherently problematic. Likewise, the assumption that a 'lack' of opposite sex role models is a cause for concern only makes sense if we

are to prioritise 'sex differences', and more specifically, the requirement to accept as central an understanding of the category 'family' as centering on a 'mother' and 'father' (categories which are thus implicitly heterosexual). And finally, whilst it may well be the case that children of lesbian mothers experience harassment, surely the concern should be with the context of heterosexism through which our society is structured, rather than the family of origin.

What I am suggesting, then, is that whilst Tasker and Golombok clearly demonstrate the flaws underpinning stereotypes about lesbian and gay families, they do not go on to question (in any great detail) how these assumptions are rendered intelligible, and whose best interests they serve. Thus in accepting such stereotypes as the starting point of research into lesbian and gay families, they run the risk of recentring the heteronorm. I would suggest that such an outcome is largely the result of the acceptance of science as the appropriate site for determining the value of lesbian and gay families. As I will now go on to outline, there may be a number of unwanted consequences that arise from taking this approach to research.

Science and the construction of gay and lesbian subjectivities

One of the most important facets of the research presented by Tasker and Golombok is that it employed a longitudinal approach. As a result, their data represent

a more wide reaching picture of their participants' lives, which enables a considerably more complex understanding of 'growing up in a lesbian family'. In addition to this, Tasker and Golombok were able to interview the children as young adults, the inclusion of which allows for a more nuanced reading of the data. Thus it is possible to see how the children experienced life in a lesbian headed family in a wide range of ways, many of which may not be captured by the use of quantitative data alone. The outcome of this is that lesbian headed families are demonstrated to provide a rich and supportive environment in which to raise children, in addition to enabling children to challenge what they see as wrong about the practices of heterosexism.

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Melbourne Networking Breakfasts

Melbourne GLIP Breakfasts are held approximately every 6th Sunday at 10am, at a cafe/restaurant around the city. Breakfasts are informal with an emphasis on peer support, GLBTI issues and private practice. If you would like more information, venue details or to RSVP, please contact Ela Jodko - GLIP Committee Member (Victoria) elaexplore@iprimus.com.au or 03-9539 1557.

Editorial Policy

Aims and Objectives

The Newsletter of the APS Gay and Lesbian Issues and Psychology Interest Group is produced by the National Executive, in collaboration with State Branch Committees. Its target audience is GLIP Interest Group members. It serves as a means of communication among Interest Group members. The Newsletter also promotes the work of Interest Group members, acts as a forum for discussion and keeps members aware of forthcoming events and professional development activities.

Contents

The contents will vary from issue to issue, but will attempt to include an editorial comment, a National Convener's report, State Branch reports, national news, promotion of training and professional development activities, brief notices and, assorted reviews and news from members. The views expressed by contributors to GLIP News are not necessarily those of the Australian Psychological Society Ltd or GLIP. Please note: final content is at the discretion of the editor.

Solicited articles

The Editor may approach suitable authors to write on relevant issues.

Unsolicited articles

The editor encourages GLIP members to contribute unsolicited articles to the Newsletter. Publication of unsolicited articles cannot be guaranteed. The Editor in consultation with regional representatives has the final decision for inclusion of material and the form that it takes. Unsolicited articles should not exceed 500 words, except with prior arrangement.

Advertising

Placement of an advertisement in the Newsletter is not necessarily an endorsement of the advertiser by GLIP. Approval of advertisements rests with the Editor who may consult with the National Executive. Advertising is at present free of charge, which may be reviewed at a later date.

Submission of material

Material should be submitted to the Editor by the relevant deadline. Submissions are to be in electronic format only via email to graeme.kane@iechs.org.au. Documents are to be in Microsoft Word, or text only format.