

# Gay and Lesbian Issues and Psychology Review

Editor  
Damien W. Riggs

The Australian  
Psychological  
Society Ltd.



ISSN 1833-4512

## **Editor**

Damien W. Riggs, *The University of Adelaide*

## **Editorial Board**

Graeme Kane, *Private Practice*  
Jim Malcom, *The University of Western Sydney*  
Liz Short, *Victoria University*  
Jane Edwards, *Spencer Gulf Rural Health School*  
Murray Drummond, *The University of South Australia*  
Gordon Walker, *Monash University*  
Jo Harrison, *The University of South Australia*  
Kirsten McLean, *Monash University*  
Maria Pallotta-Chiarolli, *Deakin University*  
Suzanne McLaren, *University of Ballarat*  
Christopher Fox, *La Trobe University*  
Vivienne Cass, *Private Practice*

## **International Advisory Committee**

Esther Rothblum, *San Diego State University, US*  
Jerry J. Bigner, *Colorado State University, US*  
Meg Barker, *The Open University, UK*  
Darren Langdridge, *The Open University, UK*  
Todd Morrison, *University of Saskatchewan, Canada*  
Elizabeth Peel, *Aston University, UK*  
Sonja J. Ellis, *Sheffield Hallam University, UK*  
Victoria Clarke, *University of the West of England, UK*  
Peter Hegarty, *University of Surrey, UK*  
Gareth Treharne, *University of Otago, NZ*  
Fiona Tasker, *University of London, UK*  
Jeffery Adams, *Massey University, NZ*

## **Aims and scope**

The Gay and Lesbian Issues and Psychology Review ('the Review') is a peer-reviewed publication that is available online through the Australian Psychological Society. Its remit is to encourage research that challenges the stereotypes and assumptions of pathology that have often inhered to research on lesbians, gay men, bisexual, trans and queer (LGBTQ) people. The aim of the Review is thus to facilitate discussion over the direction of LGBTQ psychology both within Australia and abroad, 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 LGBTQ 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, gender and racial groups. The Review encourages the elaboration of an expansive approach to psychological research on people of a diverse range of sexual and non-gender normative groups, and publishes articles from across a range of disciplines including (but not limited to) psychology, social work, cultural studies, sociology, gender studies, politics, history and legal studies.

All submissions or enquires should be directed in the first instance to the Editor. Guidelines for submissions or for advertising within the Review are provided on the final page of each issue.

## **Copyright**

It is the policy of the Australian Psychological Society to own the copyright to its publications, and the contributions contained therein, in order to protect the interests of the Society and its authors, and at the same time to facilitate the appropriate reuse of this material by others.

Therefore, upon acceptance of their manuscripts by the Society, authors will be sent a copyright transfer form to fill out and return to the Editor. Publication of the manuscript will be contingent upon receipt of the completed copyright transfer form.

Publications of the Society are distributed to various other publications for review and abstracting purposes. In addition, the Society has contractual agreements with various secondary publishers for the reproduction, in hard copy, microfilm or digital forms, of individual articles and journal issues as a whole.

It is the Society's position that abstracts that are published with its journal articles are indicative of and not a substitute for the work as a whole; therefore, access services are allowed free use of these abstracts without securing the permission of the Society.

Enquiries about policy and procedures relating to permission to reproduce material published in the journal should be directed to the Australian Psychological Society.

## **Disclaimer**

Work published within the Review does not necessarily reflect the opinions of the Australian Psychological Society. Whilst the APS supports the work of the Gay and Lesbian Issues and Psychology Interest Group, it also adheres to its own standards for practice and research that may at times conflict with those of the Review.

## **Indexing**

[http://www.groups.psychology.org.au/glip/glip\\_review/](http://www.groups.psychology.org.au/glip/glip_review/)

The Review is listed on Ulrich's Periodicals Directory: <http://www.ulrichsweb.com/>

The Review is indexed by:

EBSCO (LGBT Life database)

Directory of Open Access Journals

International Information Centre and Archives for the Women's Movement

Pandora Archive NLA

ProQuest (Genderwatch database)

The Review is eligible for DEST points and is recognised on the Australian ERA journal rankings as a level C journal.

# Gay and Lesbian Issues and Psychology Review

---

Volume 7 Number 3

---

## Contents

Editorial 178  
*Damien W. Riggs*

## Articles

Silences in healthcare education and practice: Gender and sexuality 180  
*Wendy Lowe*

Complicating trauma connections: Lesbian and queer survivor experiences 191  
*Georgia Ovenden*

Recognition and re-cognition: Lesbian/gay identity and the discourse of childhood memory 205  
*Rob Cover*

Breaking the shell: A study on Turkish students' reactions towards sexual identity issues in the language classroom 216  
*Mustafa Tekin*

## Book Reviews

Who's your daddy? And other writings on queer parenting 231  
*Thomas O'Neill*

## Calls for Papers

Special issue of GLIP Review featuring papers from the 2011 *International Society for Critical Health Psychology* conference and beyond



## EDITORIAL

DAMIEN W. RIGGS

Now at the end of its seventh year of publication, it is worthwhile taking stock of what has been achieved through the publication of the *Gay and Lesbian Issues and Psychology Review* to date, and where we might go next. The journal has gone from strength to strength, with an ever-increasing number of submissions, including those from established academics and international scholars. The journal has published special issues on key topics in regards to sexuality and psychology, including on as diverse a range of topics as the experiences of trans people, issues of body image, investigations into research methods, and several special issues on parenting and families, to name but a few. The journal has also published special issues from conferences, thus demonstrating its relationship to community concerns and the connection of research to practice. Also of note is the fact that the journal has published work to date from across a very broad range of fields, thus highlighting the many and complex relationships between the psychological and the social in regards to issues of gender and sexuality.

In terms of where the journal might go next, this is of course largely an issue of content and is determined by those who submit their work. As the Editor, I am very interested to continue to encourage the publication of research on topics and populations outside the 'usual suspects'. Whilst the journal title may seem somewhat narrow in focus (reflecting the Interest Group title from which it is derived), the remit of the journal (much like the remit of the Interest Group) is very broad, and seeks not simply to represent diverse genders and sexualities, but to ensure that the term 'diversity' truly captures a broad cross section of those who live outside the hetero- and gender norm.

This issue is no exception to the diversity of content outlined above, with articles from authors in media studies, psychology, healthcare and education. The issue features postgraduate work alongside the work of established academics, and work from those both within Australia and abroad.

The issue opens with a paper by Wendy Lowe, who explores the lack of attention paid to issues of gender and sexuality in the training of healthcare providers. Drawing on interviews with 17 practitioners, Lowe suggests that any discipline - and the educational structures that underpin it - which fails to provide training in regards to gender and sexuality will fundamentally leave its graduates ill-equipped to reflexively engage with the needs of clients.

In the second paper, Georgia Ovenden reports on research conducted with adult survivors of childhood sexual abuse, which explores the assumption that experiences of such abuse play a causal role in adult experiences of sexuality. Focusing specifically on lesbian and queer women, Ovenden argues that such women are forced to engage with a dominant narrative that constructs their sexuality as a by-product of their abuse. Yet in the face of this, Ovenden suggests, her participants actively create opportunities to live their sexual identities in ways that open up the possibility for recovery from experiences of abuse.

The next paper, written by Rob Cover, explores how coming out narratives and narratives of the childhoods of lesbians and gay men often involve the construction of a narrative in which lesbians and gay men were always already young lesbians and gay men. Such narratives, Cover suggests, whilst understandably produced in response to the dismissal

or denial of lesbian and gay identities, potentially close down consideration of the multiplicities and complexities of sexual identities. Whilst acknowledging the injunction to produce stabilised essentialised identities, Cover calls for a more nuanced understanding of the production of lesbian and gay identities.

In the final paper, Mustafa Tekin reports on research conducted with Turkish students, aimed at challenging homophobic views. Tekin's research suggests that a majority of the English as a Second Language students in his sample reported positive views towards non-heterosexual people, and that involvement in a workshop on the topic further improved their attitudes and willingness to engage with non-heterosexual people.

As a whole, then, this issue makes another step towards recognising the aforementioned goal of achieving a truly diverse representations of gender and sexuality within this journal. That the journal will continue to progress this aim is of course down to the diversity of submissions made, such as those that appear in this issue.



## **SILENCES IN HEALTHCARE EDUCATION AND PRACTICE: GENDER AND SEXUALITY**

WENDY LOWE

### **Abstract**

*Healthcare professional practice brings with it a range of epistemological, social and embodied gender issues. 'Gendered medicine' is a term used to describe gender issues that impact on health service providers and people that utilise health services. Yet despite the potentially significant effect of these issues, health professional training generally provides little information relating to gender (and even less to sexuality-related issues). The present paper explores this silence relating to gender and sexuality in the context of neo-liberal health professional curricula. Qualitative feminist poststructural research was conducted to examine curricular phenomena relating to power/knowledge structures. 17 health professionals were interviewed and a sample of their responses in relation to gender and sexuality issues within their training are examined. The responses indicate that most health professionals had not been exposed to any exploration of gender or sexuality issues. In fact, and within the context of a neo-liberal curriculum, part of the health professional identity may be formed around the denial of difference. This denial of difference (and the void it produces) is explored and suggestions are made for the inclusion of discourses that could deepen the framework available for discussion of gender and sexuality issues. It is suggested that a critically reflexive socially accountable practice demands that the role of privilege in perpetuating inequities in health must be spoken about clearly and openly.*

**Keywords:** Gender, sexuality, healthcare professionals, education, training, curriculum issues, silence, neo-liberalism

### **Introduction**

Gender is a significant and complex issue in the social provision of healthcare services (Broom, 1996). There are four main ways in which the significance and complexity of gender manifests itself. First, it occurs ideologically through the valued placed upon masculine knowledges and patriarchal relations (Richardson, 2001). Secondly, the distribution of women and men across the health service varies according to the status of the role. For example, men tend to occupy the most senior jobs and tend to occupy key positions within sub-specialisations (Broom, 2003; Kernick, 2004). By contrast, most nurses and allied health workers tended to be women (Broom; du Toit, 1996; Kernick, 2004). The hierarchy present in health services therefore follows a Victorian model of the patriarchal family whereby the head of the household is male and paternalistic relations are the norm (Broom, 1996). Third, the way that the experience of health and illness is constructed is itself a reflection of gender bias. That is, being ill, dependent, passive, and weak is associated with stereotypical images of the feminine (Broom, 1996). Additionally, there has been a shift away from a social model of health and a strong welfare state, and toward an outcome-based, population-focused, and market-driven (neo-liberal) health care system in which the dominant medical model has again subsumed a specific focus upon women's health into a generalised non-gender specific model (Willis, 2002). Yet despite this move towards a purportedly non-gender specific model of health care, in many instances healthcare provision still often involves the invocation of metaphors of competition and combat (such as the heroic doctor 'waging war' on cancer and medicine

as 'fighting' disease – Broom, 1996). Beyond This gendering of medicine thus highlights the fact that epistemological constructs (power/knowledge), social practices (norms, relations, discourses) and embodied placement (subjectivity) continue to shape the health professions in very gendered ways.

Yet despite these significant gender-related issues within the health professions, the gendered practice of healthcare has been little explored by healthcare professionals. An exception to this is work carried out by critical theorists such as Lawless and her colleagues (2005). An issue highlighted in their work is the disempowering 'frozen silences' (p. 148). Yet despite such silences, the impact of the failure to examine gender and sexuality-based imbalances within mainstream health services (Semp, 2008) and health policy documents (Adams, Braun & McCreanor, 2008) has been well established. This paper aims to make a further contribution to identifying the operations and effects of such silences by exploring how they occur in relation to the education of health professionals. This paper thus contributes to a recognition of the fact that issues of gender and sexuality require discussion within the curriculum in the first place.

### **Strategies of Silence**

It could be said that silence is used as a strategy to manage and contain gender issues. For example, in a recent paper describing research on power issues amongst medical trainees, gender as an issue was not mentioned once – either by the researcher or by the participants (Donnetto, 2010). Even 'socially accountable' medical education programs appear not to consider gender as an issue (Palsdottir, Neusy & Reed, 2008). This could result in the presumption on the part of many health care professionals that if gender or sexuality issues are not mentioned then they must not be an issue. Further, silencing can be used to prevent the raising of issues with which people feel unable to handle (Stead, Brown, Followfield & Selby, 2003).

Other reasons to use silence in relation to sexuality issues include embarrassment, lack of knowledge and experience, not feeling responsible, and lack of resources to provide support if required.

Of course, silence can also be an act of resistance. It is a powerful method of containment and management and should not be underestimated. Silence forms a covert practice. Covert practices are more powerful and more difficult to dismantle in their contribution to the invisibility of gender issues (Broom, 1996). Covert practices are included in the domain of the implicit curriculum of healthcare professionals. Implicit learning is that which is inferred and absorbed through social practices and norms (Tripp, 1994). Social practices and norms inform the professional practice of health professionals. Gender issues form part of the implicit curriculum in that gender issues are inscribed on the learner in practices and rituals of healthcare. This inscription takes place mainly in silence in that neo-liberalism upholds the white middle class able-bodied masculine as the norm for health: anything else is deviant and an exception in need of an explanation (Broom, 1996; Riggs, 2006a). The epistemological dominance of healthcare training by neo-liberal rhetoric means that little has changed over the last thirty or more years in terms of gender (though see Lawless et al., 2005 and their important work on gender and diversity in medical training).

As such, healthcare systems are inherently implicated in maintaining oppressive systems of privilege and disadvantage. Even though gender issues flow through epistemological, social and embodied practices of health service provision, there is little information relating to gender inequities and relations of power within those health services (CSDH, 2008; WHO, 2006). In spite of the acknowledgement of the gap in knowledge and understanding of gender issues, support and commitment to addressing these issues appears to be weakening (CSDH). In addition to this gap, knowledge structures and research perform gender biases in that women are usually excluded

from clinical research trials, investigation of health issues to do with women themselves are rarely given priority, there is a lack of understanding that 'women's health' and 'men's health' include conditions beyond reproduction, there is a lack of exploration of women's and men's health in their own right and not simply in comparison with each other, and there is limited understanding of how specific forms or aspects of gender are distinctively related to health and how these limited understandings are constructed by hegemonic epistemological constructions of health (Broom, 2003). The gap in knowledge and understanding is reflected by a widening gap between the health of disadvantaged people and that of advantaged people (CSDH).

Further, the social gradient of health means that disadvantaged groups of people suffer greater morbidity and mortality (CSDH, 2008). That is, disadvantaged groups of people tend to be those that are more marginalised in the context of neo-liberalism. Neo-liberalism limits health service provision in two main ways; firstly it assumes a level playing field in which all people are able to access services; and secondly, because it relies on specific constructions of difference in order to maintain the privileged position of predominantly white middle class healthcare professionals (Riggs, 2004). The intensifying maintenance of these constructions of difference over the reign of neo-liberalism is concomitant with the increasing gap between the privileged and disadvantaged in terms of health. Marginalised groups in terms of gender, sexuality, race and socio-economic determinants of health therefore suffer worse health and live shorter lives (CSDH). Marginalised groups of people tend to access health services more often and tend to form the greater proportion of health service recipients. Yet despite calls to develop a workforce that is trained in the social determinants of health, little has changed (CSDH; Palsdottir et al, 2008).

Issues concerned with gendered privilege and its role in widening the gap in health therefore require urgent elucidation. Challenging the

normative framework and addressing human rights will involve the explicit recognition of 'lived' realities as critical to acknowledging and providing legal and policy remedies (Ostlin, Sen & George, 2004; Riggs, 2004; Sen & Ostlin, 2007). Strategies to address the gendering of medicine have included training to prevent 'sexism' and including more women into medicine, but Broom (1996) holds out little hope of change. Broom (2003) suggests that a more complicated writing of gender is required beyond binary thinking: "We must remember that such dimensions as 'race', ethnicity, and age are all implicated in gender in ways that cannot be reduced to binary thinking" (p. 109). More complex models would, for example, link social circumstances with health care. However, rarely do complex models address the role that health professionals who occupy a privileged social location play in maintaining the status quo of health especially in relation to gender and sexuality issues.

The silence in mainstream health services and education relating to these issues allows the gendered subjectivities of people who utilise the service to remain at the level of the individual. Silence keeps any conflict at the level of the individual(s) and prevents political activism (Herman, 2001). That is, silence perpetuates the structuring binary by ignoring gender issues and thereby homogenising experience and people (Broom, 1996; Stehlik, 2007). The relation between the visible and the sayable is a relation of power (Kendall & Wickham, 1999). If experience cannot be stated then that experience is homogenised and a relationship between privilege and disadvantage is refused (Butler, 2005). Human service policy tends to homogenise people and therefore make certain groups invisible (Stehlik, 2007; Riggs, 2004). As part of an ethical practice response to this, Stehlik suggests that issues of invisibility and silence must be kept at the forefront of health professionals' work. This could also mean keeping the structuring binaries (Usher, Bryant & Johnson, 1997) at the forefront of health service work. These practices could form the social practices of a health professional self that is

committed to a socially accountable practice (Riggs). Such a practice requires speaking about the silences relating to gender issues in the health field. By doing nothing and remaining silent, one remains complicit:

In order to escape accountability for his crimes, the perpetrator does everything in his power to promote forgetting. Secrecy and silence are the perpetrator's first line of defense. If secrecy fails, the perpetrator attacks the credibility of his victim. If he cannot silence her absolutely, he tries to make sure that no one listens. To this end, he marshals an impressive array of arguments, from the most blatant denial to the most sophisticated and elegant rationalization. After every atrocity one can expect to hear the same predictable apologies: it never happened; the victim lies; the victim exaggerates; the victim brought it upon herself; and in any case it is time to forget the past and move on. The more powerful the perpetrator, the greater is his prerogative to name and define reality, and the more completely his arguments prevail (Herman, 2001, p. 8).

These comments, whilst made originally about domestic violence and political terror, could equally apply to gender and sexuality issues in the health field. Coupled with isolation, the individual can become complicit, or tied to their own subjectivity and that of someone else by control and dependence (Rabinow, 1984), and the experience thus becomes unspeakable (Herman, 2001). Given that there is silence on gender issues, how is it possible to maintain a socially accountable practice from the perspective of the privilege of healthcare professionals? Making the role of privilege visible in perpetuating the silence on gender issues through healthcare professional education and practice is an important means of addressing the oppression inherent in a system that assumes dominance on issues to do with gender and sexuality.

### **Methodology**

The research from which the findings presented here are drawn aimed to explore how health professionals are educated and some of the consequences of that education. In order

to do this, I drew on critical pedagogy, reflexivity, feminist critiques of education and Foucault's theories of power/knowledge. By choosing a feminist poststructuralist critique as a methodology for the research I was able to look specifically at how women's subjectivities were enacted and lived through their bodies and what this means within patriarchal neo-liberal discourses in health.

The reflexive research process began with the analysis of three case studies of professional education within health which were centred on curriculum development issues (manual handling, therapy assistant curriculum development and health promotion of physical activity). These case studies were used to foreground my own subjectivity through analysis of texts following a specific framework informed by my reading (Ball, 1991; Lather, 1991a and 1991b; Foucault, 1973, 1988, 2004; Gore, 1995; Usher, Bryant & Johnston, 1997). The case studies were also an opportunity to name some of the rules that operated independently of subjectivity to make knowledge possible (Fox, 1999). From the case studies, I developed concepts maps in order to explore the relationships and tensions between different themes of the field.

The second part of the research involved semi-structured face-to-face interviews with 17 health workers in Western Australia. It is the second stage of the research that is reported here. The research questions (e.g. "How are health professionals incited through training to embrace a particular understanding of health and well-being?") were developed from the theoretical framework informed by my readings and analysis of case studies. The interview questions (e.g. "Were issues to do with gender, sexuality, race, ethnicity or poverty addressed in your training?") were developed from the research questions. Health workers comprised a multidisciplinary group in order to provide breadth as well as depth to the study. Ethics approval for the study was granted by Murdoch University Human Research Ethics Committee. Volunteer participants were shown the information sheet and asked to

sign the consent form before they participated in the interviews. The interviews were tape-recorded, the tapes were transcribed, and key themes identified from the theoretical framework. Pseudonyms were used in order to guarantee confidentiality.

Most health professionals participating in this research were located in rural and remote Western Australia. That is, the context for health professionals' work is a land intersected with issues of race, ethnicity, poverty, gender and sexuality as well as supporting great privilege and containing great adversity. In Australia, rural and remote health is generally worse than urban health on all indicators (Australian Bureau of Statistics [ABS], 2006a). Whilst Australian males can generally expect to live 70.9 years of life without reduced functioning, and females can expect to live 74.3 years, thus placing Australia's life expectancy amongst the highest in the world (ABS, 2006b), this is not the case for all Australians. There is a significant divide between Indigenous and non-Indigenous health status, and between the most and least disadvantaged areas. The life expectancy for Indigenous males born in 1996 – 2001 is 59.4 years and that for females is 64.8 years after the adjustment for the underestimate of the number of deaths reported as Indigenous (HealthInfoNet, 2006). Furthermore, socioeconomic disadvantage is highest in remote areas of Western Australia (Department of Health, 2005). These figures demonstrate that the picture in Western Australia is similar to the global picture of health: that is, the gap in health between the rich and the poor has widened as some nations and people have experienced a collapse in life expectancies, with some of the poorest countries having half the life expectancy of the richest (WHO, 2006).

### **Analysis: Silence and Gender in the Health Field**

The following excerpts draw upon participants' responses to the question "Were issues to do with gender, sexuality, race, ethnicity or pov-

erty addressed in your training?". Most participants did not respond in relation to gender or sexuality. Only four participants (Alice, Ingrid, Joan and Polly) said that gender and sexuality issues had been included in their training. Usually these subjects had only been minimally touched on. Participants were more likely to respond that their training had included a small amount in terms of ethnicity and socioeconomic determinants of health. However sometimes this amount may have only been a tutorial lasting a couple of hours on differences in ethnicity.

When asked if issues of sexuality, gender and cultural differences were addressed as part of her training, Mary stated:

Mary: Umm no, I think it was, it was, if anything under mentioned. We're, we are all supposed to be equal and the same, we were all suppose to be doing the same work and there wasn't much issue made of it except that the two males who did the same job I did had been working in the system longer and they were paid at Public Service level 10 and I was paid at Public Service level 7, because I hadn't worked in the hospital for as many years, although I was doing the same work I was on a different pay level.

But that's the way the Public Service works.  
Wendy: And that wasn't mentioned as far as, you know, your prospective clients either, like differences in gender or differences in sexuality or...

Mary: No, no, we all just did the same work. We were supposed to be kind of non umm what do they call it – asexual really. Just uniform type products of the system.

Equality in pay for health professionals was seen as an issue, but seemed to obscure the inequalities that exist on a much greater level. Health professional performance of sexuality and how that was related to other people had not been explored except minimally within legal and ethical frameworks. Mary implied that being an asexual homogenised product of the system was her main way to deal with issues of gender and sexuality. Mary's response is an example of how a particular privi-

leged group benefits from the 'choice' of being able to sit back and not challenge inequalities. Being a white able bodied middle-class doctor meant that Mary was nearer to approximating the dominant norm of gendered medicine, and therefore that exploring differences in gender and sexuality and their impact on people who utilise the health system could have little interest for her. Homogenisation forecloses possibilities of exploration.

Reports of the homogenisation of gender and sexuality issues also came in the form of social practices of neutrality:

Alice: It may have, it may have been under you know psychology unit, units umm, yeah because it's something that, I guess gender, we were starting when I trained it was at that time of umm, they were changing 'he' and 'she' to 'people', you know taking 'he's out of you know, the text books and putting 'people' or 'person' or, making it more gender what do you call it,

Wendy: Neutral?

Alice: Neutral, yeah that's it. Umm, so that was –silence 2 secs – yeah that was just what was happening around us and so it wasn't actually umm, you know taught to us.

Gender neutrality within textbooks accessed at the time was the point that Alice remembered in relation to gender and sexuality. Even though such practices were probably deemed as being 'politically correct', in fact they served to homogenise and therefore mask practices of power.

Masking of power often takes place through the rhetoric of 'protecting' people who utilise the health service. Gender and sexuality in relation to clients seemed to represent an area where health professionals do not venture. For example, Joan stated:

From a clinical perspective yeah. I mean the gender issue was sort of picked up in a umm a bit of a mm what did they call it? Behavioural science unit, but the gender was focused on you know, I don't know if it was a particular lecturers' focus, but he

talked about gender in relation to health care field and how that's effected the umm the overall socialization of nurses, cause they're mostly female. You know I think if we had a...and that was the focus it wasn't so much the gender or the clients, it was more you know, look at the phenomena of it's all nursing females. You've got one or two males who are traditionally gay men. *Laughs* You know they are just written off as gay men. Umm and yeah that was sort of touched on. Umm sexuality? Again I mean, a client's sexuality wasn't ever umm the concern, it was about umm...the think that I picked up from my training in regards to sexuality is that you just, you don't sleep with patients *laughs* you know

Joan's response demonstrates some understanding of issues concerning gender and sexuality in that she could relate to the socialisation of female nurses. However, her response was lacking in relation to gender and sexuality in that she did not consider the impact of being 'just written off' as gay. Her laughter may have been to cover her own embarrassment in relation to sexuality. Especially as the concern about sexuality was ego-centric; it was not about considering the client or 'other'. Joan's focus on sexuality aside, however, mostly sexuality issues were not engaged with by the women healthcare professionals.

By contrast, the only male participant – Tom – had plenty to say about gender and sexuality issues. Tom taught within a tertiary institute that provided training to allied health students. When asked whether issues of sexuality, gender, cultural differences or poverty were addressed as part of the training, Tom believed that too much accommodation was made to encompass these issues:

Tom: Yeah, there's too much, if we look at it from an academic context, I think we have got too much context on providing a too, umm, providing you know a client service, which is way beyond reality.

Boundary markers (Rozario, 1991) to delineate issues concerned with gender in his re-

sponses included standards, accountability, responsibility and self-sufficiency. Tom found it difficult to talk directly about whether these issues were included in the training his institution provided. He deflected his response to discuss another university:

Tom: Yeah that's arr, that's probably a bit more core specific and discipline specific. I mean in ours, yes we do have umm, we do have content in various units arr, which would cover all of those. Umm some better than others. The division of Health Science does a reasonable job of that, but I don't know, I don't know how much [] but maybe in like engineering faculty or something it probably wouldn't hardly be touched. I don't know, I haven't seen them. Umm so that's there, but it's quite interesting that umm, you need to be you know, there's been again, advocates that that type of content should be very much given to the student, but I can think of two examples in Western Australian institutions where arr, it's actually backfired on us. There's a foundations unit at Y, which is atrocious, absolutely atrocious and it's a women's lib unit, yes, it's a women's lib unit. And my daughter has had to sit it and she's you know she has shown me the material and it is, it is umm so biased. I mean basically the ills and lows of the world are all derived from men. There might be some truth to that *laughs*. And there's been a lot of complaints which have gone through to Y that this is a unit that's out of control.

It is interesting that Tom perceived the unit as being 'out of control' and that students who differed in their opinion were penalised. Tom's responses ranged from thinking that there wasn't a gender issue any more in the tertiary sector, to thinking that men were discriminated against in the public health arena, to discussing the culture of joking about peoples' sexuality in relation to their academic achievement at that particular university. Tom believed that men were excluded from the academy because of the perception that their academic achievements were lower, that standing up to women colleagues was frightening, that women got preferential treatment at the hands of management, that women were

treated positively because they had reproductive rights whereas issues in men's lives were not considered, that being politically correct had gone overboard which meant that in the field of academy "we go nowhere", and that a collaborative approach was rubbish because it meant that the markers of productivity were just slipping away. Tom demonstrated "male fantasies about the 'dangerous sex' typically include images of being consumed, overwhelmed, or engulfed by the feminine" (Broom, 1996, p. 108).

Tom also demonstrated gender bias in research when he discussed the research programmes he was involved with.

Tom: Like we have done a lot of obesity insulin resistant type of studies and we deliberately chose viscerally obese men. We excluded women. And the reason we excluded women is because when women often become viscerally obese, the reasons for their obesity is not always because they have got difficulties in the way insulin is, well you are responding to insulin as a hormone. It could be because they're going into menopause and they have got estrogen issues, thyroid issues, and so forth. So if you want to look, scientifically if you want to look at say a specific intervention, a drug intervention or a dietary intervention or a lifestyle and you want to know, you want to ask that question for example, whether this intervention specifically improves insulin sensitivity and then you have to have all the other, all the other confounders removed from it. So if we, if we invited women to participate in that study we would have had to have been very very thorough in excluding all the other things which could be leading to their visceral obesity and insulin resistance. So for that reason we chose males only.

Hormones are given as the reason for excluding women since this means that women do not conform to the pattern based on results from men. As Broom (2003) notes:

This assumption in turn rests on an implicit conviction that the 'normal' body is not subject to perturbations as hormonal cycling,

pregnancy, lactation, or menopause, and that it is therefore acceptable to exclude the bodies subject to such perturbations from medical research because they 'complicate' the results" (p. 104).

There is no such thing as a gender neutral body, although to hear the health professionals speak it would seem as if this were the only type of body.

Overall, issues to do with gender, sexuality, race, ethnicity or poverty had been addressed only minimally in the education of participants in my sample. Further, what education they did receive was most often bounded by legal and ethical discourses within professional codes of conduct. Through this process of homogenisation, health professionals are able to maintain their dominance as they uphold the norm of white, male, able-bodied, middle class health. Health professionals can therefore rely on the constructions of differences to the norm in order to maintain their privileged position (Riggs, 2004). Of course, it could be that the way the question was asked meant that a conflation of issues occurred and therefore participants only responded to one or two of the issues out of practical necessity. However, it could also be argued that issues of gender, sexuality, race, ethnicity and poverty intersect in lived ways that are not easily delineated (Bottomley, De Lepervanche & Martin, 1991; Broom, 2003; Riggs).

### **Conclusion**

Revitalisation of the health curricula needs to take place at the epistemological level, through social practices and through an embodied being. The main thrust of this would be the development of a socially accountable practice that brings the context of health service provision and the location of the individual in that context into prominence (Riggs, 2004). Some suggestions for achieving this include a willingness to speak out about oppressive practices including homogenisation, acknowledging the history of oppression that structure gendered and racial subjectivities,

making a commitment to challenge the ways in which dominant systems of understandings impact upon the experience of people who utilise the service, and working to make visible the practices that shape gender and whiteness with a particular emphasis on the ways in which disciplines of privilege are complicit with oppressive practices (Riggs). Throughout these practices there is a need to hold in tension the contextual as well as the impact on people who utilise the services. These suggestions go far beyond including more women into medicine or training on (hetero)sexism (Broom, 1996). Instead, if change is to take place what is required is a thorough overhaul of health professional curricula.

A thorough overhaul of the curricula would include addressing the silence on epistemological categories of how the health professional self is formed and in what context. The knowing neo-liberal self is constructed as detached, self-controlling and intra-active (Ogden, 2002). This self is structured by binaries (Usher, Bryant & Johnston, 1997). The second less valued part of the binary is rejected by health professionals' epistemology in order to maintain their privilege through a denial of difference (Patel, 1998 cited in C. Butler, 2004). The process of socialisation of becoming a privileged health professional involves an education that denies difference and that includes that denial as part of their professional identity. An inclusive curriculum would contain a thorough deconstruction of differences attributable to gender, sexuality, ethnicity, race, class and poverty, with a focus on privilege and disadvantage in relation to these categories as being corollaries, as Riggs and Choi (2006) note:

.. we propose that there is a great need for dominant group members within the discipline to (a) explore how their/our identities are most often left unexamined, and thus (b) recognise how this often results in a failure to acknowledge how certain (dominant) groups experience privilege as a result of the oppression of other (marginalised) groups (Riggs & Choi, 2006, p. 288).

At present, health professionals draw on discourses of control, authority, objectivity and non-investment in order to narrate their professional selves, discourses that in many ways negate the need for a focus on the relationship between privilege and disadvantage. However, Butler (2005) suggests that giving an account of oneself (for example, as a health professional) only starts with a question from one who asks for such an account – it forces us to recognise that it is only through our relationship to another that we experience our 'selves' and through which we occupy our social location. Of course such a calling to account can be accompanied by fear, terror, or a desire to punish.

Discussion of gender issues has been experienced as uncomfortable and only engaged with reluctantly (Lawless et al, 2005). Freezing out controversial issues, experiencing disempowering 'frozen silences', and being met with obstructions in the form of overloading in terms of clinical, teaching and research commitments requires an approach that meets these challenges head on (Lawless et al). Revitalising the curricula means enlivening the issues through locating the professional self in context, which hooks (1994) suggests can be experienced as transformative. Locating the professional self in context may mean exploring the multiple ways in which we are all positioned in ways that move beyond simplistic accounts of discrimination and privilege that typically only serve to alienate dominant group students (Riggs, 2006b). Recognition of the creation of safe and unsafe spaces in the classroom requires a complex understanding, acknowledgement and demonstration of the contingency of subjectivity and the ability for educators to narrate ways out of normative spaces.

Discourses of vulnerability and susceptibility could be explored as alternative narratives for professional selves. These discourses deepen the normative frame thereby allowing narration out of the normative neo-liberal frame. Otherwise, for health professionals, a request for giving an account of one's self can be re-

fused by remaining silent in the face of such a question. In this case:

The refusal to narrate remains a relation to narrative and to the scene of address. As a narrative withheld, it either refuses the relation that the inquirer presupposes or changes that relation so that the one queried refuses the one who queries (Butler, 2005, p. 12).

Silence in health professionals' giving an account of themselves is a refusal of the relation with people who utilise the health services. In contrast, health professionals could develop a socially accountable practice (Riggs, 2004) that engages with critical reflexivity. Critical reflexivity exposes the limits – the epistemological and ontological horizons – within which subjects come to be at all: "To make oneself in such a way that one exposes those limits is precisely to engage in an aesthetics of the self that maintains a critical relation to existing norms" (Butler, 2005, p. 17). Giving an account of oneself as a privileged health professional requires an exposure of the role that privilege plays in forming subjectivities around the denial of difference. A critically reflexive socially accountable practice demands that role of privilege in perpetuating inequities in health must be spoken about clearly and visibly. It is no longer acceptable to remain in silence about issues concerned with gender or sexuality.

### **Author Note**

Murdoch University, South Street, Murdoch, Western Australia 6050. Email: wendydug-gie@btinternet.com

### **Acknowledgements**

I would like to acknowledge the sovereignty of the First Nations people of Australia. I would also like to thank the people who participated in the research. My thanks also go to Damien Riggs for his support and encouragement in the writing of this paper.

### References

- Adams, J., Braun, V., and McCreanor, T. (2008). Framing gay men's health: An analysis of policy documents. *Gay & Lesbian Issues and Psychology Review*, 4 (2), 109–126.
- Australian Bureau of Statistics. (2006a). *2006 Year book Australia*. No. 88. ABS Cat. No. 1301.0. Commonwealth of Australia: ACT.
- Australian Bureau of Statistics. (2006b). *National health survey: Summary of results 2004 – 05*. ABS Cat. No. 4364.0. Commonwealth of Australia: ACT.
- Ball, S. (1991). *Foucault and education – Disciplines and knowledge*. London: Routledge.
- Broom, D. (1996). Masculine medicine, feminine illness: Gender and health. In G.M. Lupton, & J.M. Najman (Eds.), *Sociology of health and illness – Australian readings*, (2<sup>nd</sup> Ed), (pp. 99 – 112). Macmillan Education Australia Pty Ltd: Melbourne.
- Broom, D. (2003). Gender and health. In J. Germov (Ed.), *Second opinion – An introduction to health sociology* (pp. 95 – 112), Oxford University Press: Melbourne.
- Butler, C. (2004). Lesbian and Gay trainees: The challenge of personal and professional integration. *Lesbian & Gay Psychology Review*, 5 (1), 22–29.
- Butler, J. (2005). *Giving an account of oneself*. Fordham University Press: New York.
- Commission for the Social Determinants of Health (CSDH) (2008). *Closing the gap in a generation – health equity through action on the social determinants of health*. Final Report of the Commission for Social Determinants of Health. Geneva: World Health Organisation.
- Department of Health. (2005). *Health measures 2005 – A report on the health of the people of Western Australia*. Perth: Department of Health, W.A.
- Donetto, S. (2010). Medical students' views of power in doctor-patient interactions: The value of teacher-learner relationships. *Medical Education*, 44, 187–196.
- du Toit, D. (1996). The allied health professions in Australia: Physio, occupational and speech therapy professions. In G.M. Lupton & J.M. Najman (Eds.) *Sociology of health and illness – Australian readings*. (2<sup>nd</sup> ed). (pp. 276 – 297). Victoria: MacMillan Education Australia Ltd.
- Foley, D. E. (2002). Critical ethnography: The reflexive turn. *Qualitative Studies in Education*, 15 (5), 469–490.
- Foucault, M. (2004). *Society must be defended – Lectures at the Collège de France 1975 – 1976*. England: Penguin Books.
- Foucault, M. (1988a). Technologies of the self. A Seminar with Michel Foucault. In L.H. Martin, H. Gutman, P.H. Hutton (Eds.), *Technologies of Self*. Amherst: The University of Massachusetts Press.
- Foucault, M. (1973). *The Birth of the clinic – An archeology of medical perception*. New York: Vintage Books.
- Fox, N.J. (1999). *Beyond health – postmodernism and embodiment*. Free Association Books: London.
- Gore, J.M. (1995a). On the continuity of power relations in pedagogy. *International Studies in Sociology of Education*, 5 (2), 165–188.
- Health Department of W.A. (2000). *New vision – Community health services for the future*. Produced by the Health Department of Western Australia.
- HealthInfoNet. (2006). Indigenous Mortality. Accessed September, 2006, from [http://www.healthinonet.ecu.edu.au/html/html\\_overviews/overviews\\_our\\_mortality.htm](http://www.healthinonet.ecu.edu.au/html/html_overviews/overviews_our_mortality.htm)
- Herman, J.L. (2001). *Trauma and recovery – From domestic abuse to political terror*. BasicBooks: London.
- hooks, B. (1994). *Teaching to transgress: Education as the practice of freedom*. New York: Routledge.
- Kendall, G., and Wickham, G. (1999). *Using Foucault's methods*. London: Sage Publications.
- Kernick, D. (2004). Organizational culture and complexity. In D. Kernick (Ed.), *Complexity and healthcare organisation – A view from the street* (pp. 105–116). Radcliffe Medical Press: Oxford.

- Lather, P. (1991a). *Feminist research in education: Within/against*. Victoria: Deakin University Press.
- Lather, P. (1991b). *Getting smart – Feminist research and pedagogy with/in the post-modern*. New York: Routledge, Chapman and Hall.
- Lawless, A., Tonkin, A., Leaton, T., & Ozolins, I. (2005). Integrating gender and culture into medical curricula: putting principles into practice. *Diversity in Health and Social Care*, 2, 143–149.
- Ogden, J. (2002). *Health and the construction of the individual*. East Sussex: Routledge
- Ostlin, P., Sen, G., and George, A. (2004). Paying attention to gender and poverty in health research: content and process issues. *Bulletin of the World Health Organization*, 82 (10), 740–745.
- Palsdottir, B., Neusy, A-J., Reed, G. (2008). Building the Evidence Base: Networking innovative socially accountable medical education programs. *Education for Health*, 21 (2), 1–6. Accessed September 6, 2010, from <http://www.educationforhealth.net/>
- Rabinow, P. (Ed.). (1984). *The Foucault reader*. New York: Pantheon Books.
- Report of the Health Reform Committee [HRC]. (2004). *A healthy future for Western Australians*. Perth: Western Australian Department of Health.
- Richardson, B. (2001). Professionalization and professional craft knowledge. In J. Higgs & A. Titchen (Eds.), *Practice knowledge and expertise in health professions* (pp.42–47). Butterworth Heinemann: Oxford.
- Riggs D. W. (2006a). Queer(y)ing rights: Psychology, liberal individualism and colonization. *Australian Psychologist*, 41 (2), 95–103.
- Riggs, D.W. (2006b). The ground upon which we stand: teaching sexuality through race. *Lesbian & Gay Psychology Review*, 10 (1), 42–46.
- Riggs, D.W. (2004). Challenging the monoculturism of psychology: Towards a more socially accountable pedagogy and practice. *Australian Psychologist*, 39 (2), 118–126.
- Riggs, D.W., & Choi, P. (2006). Heterosexism, racism and psychology. *The Psychologist*, 19 (5), 288–291.
- Rozario, S. (1991). Ethno-religious communities and gender divisions in Bangladesh: Women as boundary markers. In G. Bottomley, M. De Lepervanche & J. Martin (Eds.), *Intersexions – Gender/Class/Culture/Ethnicity* (pp. 14–32). Allen & Unwin: Sydney.
- Semp, D. (2008). *A public silence*: The discursive construction of heteronormativity in public mental health services and the implications for clients. *Gay & Lesbian Issues and Psychology Review*, 4 (2), 94–107.
- Sen, G., and Ostlin, P. (2007). Unequal, unfair, ineffective and inefficient. Gender inequity in health: why it exists and how we can change it. *Final report to the WHO commission on social determinants of health*. Geneva, World Health Organisation.
- Stead, M.L., Brown, J.M., Fallowfield, L., & Selby, P. (2003). Lack of communication between healthcare professionals and women with ovarian cancer about sexual issues. *British Journal of Cancer*, 88, 666–671.
- Stehlik, D. (2007). Working in community settings. In H. Freegard (Ed.), *Ethical practice for health professionals* (pp. 230 – 242). Thomson: Melbourne.
- Tripp, D.H. (1994). Putting the humpty into curriculum (or making it mean what I want it to mean) *E402 Curriculum Development – Unit reader first semester 1997* (pp. 18–46). School of Education, Murdoch University, Western Australia.
- Usher, R., Bryant, I., & Johnston, R. (1997). *Adult education and the postmodern challenge – learning beyond the limits*. London: Routledge.
- Willis, E. (2002). Interest groups and the market model. In H. Gardner & S. Barraclough (Eds.), *Health policy in Australia* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed), (pp. 179–200). Oxford University Press: Victoria.
- World Health Organisation. (2006) *The World Health Report: Working Together for Health*. Geneva, Switzerland: World Health Organization.



## COMPLICATING TRAUMA CONNECTIONS: LESBIAN AND QUEER SURVIVOR EXPERIENCES

GEORGIA OVENDEN

### Abstract

*Drawing on interviews from lesbian and queer female survivors, this article aims to problematise the trauma(tic) connection frequently made between child sexual abuse and sexuality in psychological and popular discourse. It also considers the ways that lesbian and queer survivor narratives might complicate mainstream assumptions about child sexual abuse and adult sexual pathology. As I argue, not only does psychological and popular discourse suggest that an abuse history can explain the outcome of lesbian sexuality; it rarely positions this outcome as positive. Rather, lesbian sexuality is often presented in the literature as a failed attempt by survivors to achieve 'normal' (hetero)sexuality, or is translated in terms of their 'impossibility to heal'. Yet, it was perhaps their unique positionality that allowed the lesbian and queer survivors in this study more opportunity to resist cultural discourses and to transcend usual modes of healing. Furthermore, by challenging simple connections between healthy (hetero)sex and recovery, lesbian and queer survivors were able to engage more fully in their own sexual subjectivities.*

**Keywords:** trauma, abuse, heteronormativity, lesbian and queer survivors

### Introduction

Same-sex sexuality has, until relatively recently, been depicted in psychological discourse as a pathological outcome of sexual abuse and/or as a 'sexual disturbance' (Beitchman, et al., 1992). Research that continues to adopt these types of 'explanations' for the aetiology of same-sex

sexuality emphasises purportedly elevated levels of child sexual abuse in lesbian women, and theorises 'plausible assumptions' - in terms of causality - of the relationship between the two.

Significant studies (Balsam, Rothblum, & Beauchaine, 2005; Hughes, Haas, Razzano, Cassidy, & Matthews, 2000; Lechner, Vogel, Garcia-Shelton, Leichter, & Steibel, 1993; Morris & Balsam, 2003) and large sections reserved in therapeutic texts (Matthews, Hughes, & Tartaro, 2005) suggest that child sexual abuse might have an impact on women's sexual identity formation. While homophobia is often implicit, research in this area suggests that early sexual experiences may lead to a 'chronic confusion about sexual identity' (Gonsiorek, 1988, p. 116) and 'may predispose victims to later homosexuality or gender identity disturbance' (Beitchman et al., 1992, p. 540). Notably, the literature overwhelmingly positions lesbian sexuality as a 'bad' outcome in terms of the long-term sequelae of child sexual abuse. Where this negative correlation is not explicit, studies draw connections between child sexual abuse and lesbian sexual identity as indicating 'poor outcomes', such as higher rates of alcohol abuse (Hall, 1996; Hughes, Johnson, & Wilsnack, 2001), depression (Hughes, Johnson, Wilsnack, & Szalacha, 2007) and obesity (Aaron & Hughes, 2007). Not surprisingly, few studies in this area offer a discussion of 'risk' that moves beyond the 'cataloguing of consequences' (Kendall-Tackett, 2005, p. 253).

In another, less comprehensive area of research, lesbians (and gay men) are positioned as more 'at risk' of abuse than heterosexuals (Corliss, Cochran, & Mays, 2002). For exam-

ple, Balsam (2005) suggests that a survivors' early awareness of same-sex attraction might lead to 'acting out' and 'risky' behaviours that could make them more vulnerable to abuse: 'For girls, early awareness of same-sex feelings may lead to acting out behaviors that could increase risk of sexual victimization by predatory men' (p. 484).

There has been some disquiet regarding the reporting of mental health findings that concern the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) population in general. As Hillier, Edwards and Riggs (2008) suggest, while there are clear advantages surrounding the dissemination of LGBT mental health statistics, these findings are also likely to add to the pathologisation and marginalisation of the community (p. 65). Furthermore, they suggest that while quantitative research seeks to magnify difference when reporting risk, there is a lack of research examining positive differences specific to the LGBT community. The absence of positive representations is perhaps a reflection of current social conditioning. As Hillier and Harrison (2004) concluded in their study, there were 'no positive discourses' in participant stories to suggest that same-sex attraction is 'good, healthy and/or natural' (p. 91). Rather, positive (and 'normal') positions were likely to be created by same-sex attracted people themselves, and often through avenues of resistance (p. 88). Taking this need for positive stories as a starting place, the research presented here attends to the complex and complicated aspects of lesbian survivor sexuality, including participant pathways to more sex-positive positions.

### **Impossible to Heal? Survivorship Outside the Bounds of the Heterosexual Matrix**

While there has been increased discussion in feminist literature regarding the need to address lesbian health concerns, there is a dearth of research that addresses positive outcomes for lesbian survivors. In many ways, the tendency of the literature to focus on les-

bian sexuality or same-sex sexual preference as a negative outcome of abuse for survivors reifies heteronormative ideals regarding 'healthy' subjects that have long informed the psychology and sexology fields. From this perspective, the elevated levels of child sexual abuse among lesbian and bisexual women are positioned as a defiant end for women who have struggled to achieve a 'normal' heterosexuality. In other words, the 'outcome' of lesbian sexuality for survivors reflects survivor inability to regain trust and safety in a male sexual partner (see Kitzinger, 1992). Thus, given that heterosexuality is always already positioned as the default identity, childhood sexual experiences are often theorised as a point of divergence from an otherwise healthy pathway to heterosexuality. Yet, while there continues to be the difficulty of heterosexual survivors to 'heal from', 'reclaim' and 'restore' their heterosexual desire in adulthood (Kitzinger, 1992), lesbian identity for survivors has come to stand for an impossibility to heal. Subsequently, lesbian and bisexual survivors of child sexual abuse are not viewed as agents, but as inevitably 'damaged' by their abuse history. As Lindsay O'Dell (2003) has argued, the 'abuse' is constructed as the 'source' of sexual identity, rather than as a natural, inevitable process or a positive, deliberate choice (p. 141).

In her text *An Archive of Feelings* (2003), Ann Cvetkovich explores the difficult and stigmatised relationship that exists between lesbian public cultures and child sexual abuse. For Cvetkovich, sexual abuse has traditionally been linked to queer communities in ways that signal 'harm', where lesbian sexuality has been 'caused by the abuse' and where women need to be 'healed'. This notion is reaffirmed in popular discourse where sexual trauma is situated as an 'interruption of heterosexual identity' (Noble, 2006, p. 73). Cvetkovich cites examples to demonstrate how the connection between survivorship and queerness has been disavowed in lesbian and gay communities. Most significant for Cvetkovich is the lack of discussion afforded by the lesbian authors of *The Courage to Heal* (1988), Ellen Bass and

Laura Davis, whose comments 'on being a lesbian and a survivor' fail to engage in a dialogue beyond lesbianism as 'a problem'. Re-viewing the section in question, Cvetkovich's argument becomes glaringly obvious. Bass and Davis's use of defamatory statements such as 'You're a dyke because daddy did this to you' in their excerpts taken from survivor narratives tend to disallow, rather than present an understanding of, lesbian sexuality as a positive outcome (p. 268). As Cvetkovich (2003) explains: 'But why can't saying that 'sexual abuse causes homosexuality' just as easily be based on the assumption that there's something right, rather than something wrong, with being lesbian or gay?' (p. 90).

Cvetkovich (2003) draws a line between lesbian identity and sexual trauma, however she also uses the term 'queer' to signify 'the unpredictable connections between sexual abuse and its effects, to name a connection while refusing determination or causality' (p. 90). As I return to later in this article, it is when this association is actively taken up by queer women, that the 'productive' and 'dense connections' between the two terms can yield subversive qualities and reformulate simple relationships between past (trauma) and present (sexuality).

### Methodology

The findings reported here draw exclusively on in-depth interviews conducted with three same-sex attracted young women survivors. The participants were part of a larger project, which included 22 young women (aged 19–28 years) who identified, and did not identify, as survivors of child sexual abuse.

Of the three participants that I draw on in this article, one identified as queer, and two as lesbian. The young women were recruited through advertisements posted at a young LBQT (lesbian, bisexual, queer, and transgender) community group operating in inner Sydney, Australia. Participants were also informed about the study through a notice

posted on the wider email network, operated by this group. Participant anonymity was ensured through the allocation of pseudonyms, many of which were chosen by participants themselves.

The interview schedule explored a wide range of themes, including women's: a) reflections on 'good' and 'bad' adult sexual experiences; b) experiences with their bodies and empowerment/disempowerment; c) first experiences of consensual sex; e) experience of any changes over time in their sexual relationships.

This study was approved by the University of Western Sydney Human Research Ethics Committee (Approval Number: H6189). Prior to their interview, participants were given a general verbal description of the study, and at this time they were reassured about the confidentiality of their interview data. The face-to-face interviews ranged between 50 minutes and 1.5 hours.

The feminist poststructuralist position I take up in this article was driven by an *interpretative* framework. Pointing to the danger in making 'truth' claims, this framework acknowledges the discursive and unstable construction of narratives through language (Scott, 1992). From this perspective, narratives are never 'representative', but at the same time they provide glimpses of the world from a vantage point mediated by multiple factors, including the interview process itself. At the same time, I do want to acknowledge that the participants narratives presented in this article are largely representative of a specific (white, privileged, tertiary educated) position. Reflecting back on the young women who volunteered to be interviewed for this study, I suspect that the cultural silences that surround child sexual abuse, and sexuality more generally, may have limited the range of people who were comfortable about speaking about their experiences.

Overall, my analysis of the interviews with lesbian and queer survivors identified 3 dis-

tinct themes. This article will explore each of these areas, using participant excerpts and theoretical perspectives in an attempt to create a more critical dialogue and to 'open up new frames' in which to contemplate same-sex survivor identities (Fine, 1992; Fine, Weis, Weseen, & Wong, 2000).

### **Coming Out and Coming Out? Delinking Associations Between Child Sexual Abuse and Lesbian Sexual Identity**

There are some apparent similarities in the ways that survivors of abuse and lesbian and queer women are located politically. For both groups, the act of disclosure and 'coming out' about their identity as a survivor and/or as same-sex attracted is positioned as transformative, particularly in terms of restructuring feelings of shame and fear into feelings of pride and strength (Whittier, 2001). For Rosaria Champagne, 'coming out' collectively symbolises a rejection of 'normalising' practices which have sought to locate particular identities outside of public consciousness by inducing shame and stigma (1998, p. 6). Specifically, feminist and queer groups who advocate 'coming out' as a survivor of sexual abuse or as a lesbian/queer underline the importance of rejecting 'polite silence' and using emotional strategies to speak out about experiences (Champagne, 1998).

The lesbian and queer survivors in this study often complicated the relationship between their sexual identity and childhood sexual trauma. On one level, they were active in delinking associations between child sexual abuse and lesbian sexual identity. Significantly, the following narratives from survivors suggest that the only way to deflect the 'damaged' identity is to deny the influence of child sexual abuse altogether. One survivor, Kristy, who identified as a lesbian, explained that she had often been made to question her sexual preference after friends alerted her of the possible connection:

Sometimes it takes someone else to alert me because a lot of my friends are aware of the situation, but I don't think it's really influenced me that much. I mean, sometimes I wonder if I'm gay because of it but then think I had, even before I appreciated that I'd been sexually abused—even before I appreciated it was wrong, I had gay urges so that kind of makes me think it's not as a direct result or anything. Maybe there are some people who are traumatised by it and they say look for the same-sex relationships but I think there might be nothing to it. Either way, I'm gay. I don't know how it happened, but it happened.

Although Kristy points to the importance of 'gay urges' when she was younger, the above excerpt also suggests that the 'source' of her sexual identity has generated some scrutiny from those around her. Further, there is some emphasis in her narrative that her sexual identity was not a 'direct result' of her child sexual abuse, but rather a destined, innate component of her identity. While I do not wish to dispute the very individual ways in which lesbian, queer and bisexual women conceive their identity - whether it be formulated as a positive choice or envisioned as an innate part of the self - the emphasis on biological or genetic routes to explain sexual desire may take on particular meaning for survivors of abuse. Kristy's positioning of her lesbian sexuality as 'biological' or 'genetic' also allowed her to adopt a more powerful position in relation to her sexual subjectivity. Specifically, by advocating a sexuality that is always already formed, Kristy is able to construct a schism between the sexual trauma (not-self) and her sexual subjectivity (self).

There has been considerable debate in gay and lesbian, as well as queer theory, regarding the significance and legitimacy of lesbian and gay men's pathways to sexual subjectivity (Halperin, 1995; Warner, 1993). For example, disputes over the authenticity of lesbian sexuality, coupled with a lack of positive representation of lesbian survivors, in many ways delimit the subject positions available for lesbian survivors. In this scenario, lesbian survivors

must lean on biological or genetic origins to sexual subjectivity or otherwise risk the oversimplified conclusion that links their sexuality (self) to the pathological symptoms of sexual abuse. As a result, the pathway to a more 'authentic' self offered in these theories has also led to an increasing silence surrounding sexual abuse in lesbian communities. This is most visible when considering the lack of representation of the issue beyond psychological and quantitative literature which maps a 'strong relationship' between the two (Hall, 1996; Roberts & Sorensen, 1999; Robohm, Litzenberger, & Pearlman, 2003).

This 'strong relationship' was recognized by participants such as Vivian, who spoke about the assumptions surrounding lesbian sexuality and sexual violence and her inability to 'dispute' and 'disprove' psychological and popular understandings:

I find it really annoying when people assume that because I'm a lesbian I must have been assaulted. And it's even more annoying for me because I can't dispute it. I wish I could, but I can't. I was assaulted so I can't disprove it. But you know, I knew I was a lesbian when I was seven and I was assaulted years later and things got confused but that's kind of normal. So for me it doesn't really relate but again, it annoys me that I can't dispute it.

Similar to Kristy, Vivian's position reflects the ways that lesbian and queer sexuality has historically been negatively attached to trauma and victimology. As a result, her position as a childhood abuse survivor *and* a lesbian inevitably become caught up in narratives of causality—where abuse 'led her to become a lesbian'—which have long been generated in psychological and popular discourse. Similar to Kristy, Vivian's assertion that 'she knew [of her sexual identity] when she was seven' suggests that it was something that formed before the abuse, and thus exists aside from sexual violence. By framing her sexual identity history 'outside' her trauma history, Vivian's narrative ensures that it does not encompass a harmful impact of abuse, and therefore is not something that she needs to 'heal from'.

However, while exposing some of the taken-for-granted connections between child sexual abuse and 'disorder' can open up another dialogue in which to speak about trauma, acceptance of this previously stigmatised identity may also operate to de-authorise lesbian survivor stories. For example, the narratives from lesbian survivors point to the dangers of accepting popular and expert accounts when telling stories about trauma, sexual abuse and sexuality (Marecek, 1999). As Vivian suggests, the connection between her sexual abuse and lesbian sexuality also has the capacity to erase her own unique story. She explains her frustration with the overriding narrative of lesbian trauma in the following excerpt:

I know it's terrible but there was a girl recently who came out and was speaking publicly 'I'm a lesbian' and she chose to speak publicly about the fact that she was abused but her take on her abuse, like it led her to become a lesbian. For her, that was her story and it upset me because it was her representation of her story. For her, she had been abused and for her it had played a role in her sexuality but I just felt that it was an unfair representation and her story could potentially be taken as the norm and I don't feel that it is really.

Clearly, the assumed relationship between lesbian identity and sexual trauma not only undermines lesbian pathways to authentic desire and sexuality, but it also threatens to engulf the guiding narratives of 'choice' or 'biology' which may inform sexual subjectivity.

Vivian's assertion in the above excerpt that the public speaker's story was an 'unfair representation' breaks away from the perceived notion that lesbian and queer sexual trauma is somehow caught up in 'the same' history. However, Vivian's admission that the women's story 'upset her' because 'her story could potentially be taken as the norm' also speaks to the difficult relationship between child sexual trauma and sexuality from within the lesbian community.

For Kristy, revealing any long-term impact of

abuse was difficult, and as a result, her narrative was contradictory at times. For example, although Kristy did not 'look at (her) abuse as traumatic or a big deal any more', she felt that her abuse experience had contributed to her 'unhealthy' and 'negative' view of men.

Just with men I think I have an unhealthy view and that's about it. It hasn't really impacted that much...I think if I hadn't—and this is just speculation—but I think that if I hadn't those experiences as a child I wouldn't be as aware of how much men require sex and how much...Maybe I wouldn't fear men that much and they would just be like 'Blah', but they're not; they're kind of to be wary and watchful and that kind of thing. They are unpredictable. They might not be able to help themselves. You've got to be constantly wary. I don't know if other people are like that...It sounds so unhealthy actually, when I talk about it.

Kristy's internalisation of her fear of men as 'unhealthy' suggests that this may be a complicated position for her to take up openly. While Kristy did not elaborate this further at this point in the interview, later in the interview her 'unhealthy' feelings about men are juxtaposed with her 'healthy' engagement in the gay scene, as the following excerpt shows:

I think that I've now got more confidence—that I can say 'No' and more awareness of everything. I'm more confident now so if I want to say 'No', I can say 'No' and that kind of thing. So it's developed...I'm more healthy. I know what I want and that kind of thing and getting into the gay scene has probably helped a little bit as well as an alternative that feels comfortable.

Vivian's and Kristy's narratives call attention to the dangers of the association between lesbian identity and 'harm' stories that inevitably return focus to the 'woundedness' of this identity in an effort to establish a subject position. As Wendy Brown (1995) has argued, the organising of social identities around 'wounded attachments', and narratives which

chiefly centre on harmful, traumatic and painful histories, also ensures that minority groups are continuously caught up in their own oppression. More than this, and as Linda Alcoff (2006) comments, Brown's argument is based on the premise that we are 'maintaining a cycle of blaming that continues the focus on oppression rather than transcending it' (p. 79).

On another level, Vivian's above extract also suggests that the position of harm may be particularly harmful for those identities that are always already marked by heteronormative prejudice. In *Excitable Speech*, Judith Butler (1997) addresses the ways that names adopt historical, injurious meanings over time:

Clearly, injurious names have a history, one that is evoked and reconciliated at the moment of utterance, but not explicitly told. This is not simply a history of how they have been used, in what contexts, and for what purposes; it is the way that such histories are installed and arrested in and by the name... The force of a name depends not only on its iterability, but on a form of repetition that is linked to trauma, on what is, strictly speaking, not remembered, but relived, and relived in and through the linguistic substitution for the traumatic event. (p. 36)

To borrow from Sara Ahmed (2004), the 'sticky connection' between trauma and lesbian sexuality conjures more entrenched epithets of homophobia that continue to be caught up in popular discourse about lesbians. From this perspective, if a lesbian is not 'naturally' or 'biologically' gay, her sexual preference is evidence that she is instead a 'man-hater', an 'angry lesbian' or is 'damaged' in some way which makes it difficult for her to have relationships with men. It is this story that Vivian vehemently rejects in the following excerpt:

It's really frustrating to me that there is this perception that you know, I'm a lesbian, so I must hate men and I must have this really bad deal with men and I just don't. But I was assaulted so I can't really disprove it...I was a bit 'Mm, okay, you're playing into this already

existing notion that people have that we're all 'damaged goods' and we choose to be with women because we can't cope with men, or because we've been damaged in some way'.

For Vivian, her experience of sexual assault affirms rather than disproves the popular belief that lesbian sexuality is interconnected with a 'damaged' past, or an avenue chosen solely to vent rage against the (male) perpetrator. From this perspective, lesbian sexuality is 'damaged' by default, and representative of a group of women who purposely turned away from heterosexuality and a 'normal' identity. However, the association that binds trauma and lesbian sexuality is difficult to dislodge. As Ahmed (2004) has argued in her examination of race and ethnicity, identities are often caught up in the transference of emotion, and the product of this transference makes these identities 'sticky' by association:

When a sign or object becomes sticky it can function to 'block' the movement (of other things or signs) and it can function to bind (other things or signs)... but it is a relation of doing in which there is no distinction between passive or active, even though the stickiness of one object might come before the stickiness of the other, so that the other seems to cling to it. (p. 91)

While Ahmed specifically examines the ways that racial identities are rendered sticky through historical attachments, her notion of relationality could also be used to explain why lesbian and queer sexuality is bound to trauma and to other cultural slurs—such 'man-hater', 'dyke', and 'queer'—which are used to publicly ridicule lesbians.

### **Queer Trauma/Queer Shame**

On another level, it could also be argued that these 'sticky signs' which connect lesbian sexuality to trauma are also marked by what Cvetkovich (2003) terms queer *unspeakability* (p. 7). From this perspective, representations of sexual harm remain unacknowledged because lesbians and gay men have historically been denied participation in wider discourses

of trauma and mourning. Following from her earlier text, Cvetkovich (1992, 2003) suggests that child sexual abuse accounts are also caught up in queer trauma, most saliently in the battle against AIDS, where queer cultures have often been denied the full expression of emotion or an avenue in which to tell trauma stories openly, without shame. Thus, it is the connection of sexual trauma to lesbian culture itself that ensures lack of representation in public discourses of trauma, including therapeutic and self-help genres. Yet rather than focusing on the ways that queer culture has been excluded from mainstream discussions of trauma, Cvetkovich instead examines the productive elements of this fissure (I will return to this later).

Following from Cvetkovich's argument, the unspeakability she raises could be easily mapped in terms of shame, or rather, the 'double-shame' of identity that encompasses sexual victimisation and queer sexuality. In this context, unspeakability becomes an equivalent of therapeutic shame, and shares undercurrents with self-help genres, which advocate survivors 'let go of' or 'move beyond' the shame of their childhood abuse. Similarly, popular versions of shame and queer sexuality are suggestive of what remains unspeakable, but ever-present, for gay and lesbian youth who contemplate the exposure of their 'coming out' of the closet. In recent years, queer theorists have re-embarked on the centrality of shame in the formulation of gay public culture and identity. For example, in their recent edited book, David Halperin and Valarie Traub (2009) argue that queer pride is intimately tied to shame, albeit often subtly whereby 'collective affirmations of pride' conjure 'residual experiences of shame' (p. 4). In this context, gay shame is more about revisiting the 'demonization of homosexuality' and acts of homophobia which essentially instigated the movement of queer pride. As Heather Love's chapter suggests, the connection demonstrates that 'the experience of queer historical subjects is not safely distant from contemporary experience: rather their social marginality and abjection mirror our

own. The relationship to the queer past is suffused not only by feelings of regret, despair and loss, but also by the shame of identification' (Love, 2009, p. 263). However, the impetus of work in this area appears counter-productive, particularly in terms of its stalling of the queer identity within the bounds of shame; where pride becomes the only avenue to countering shame.

Eve Sedgwick's (1993) insightful work on shame underlines the possibility of moving beyond the childhood instance of shame as spectacle toward more performative expressions of shame as integral to identity construction. As Sedgwick argues, the performance of shame is intimately attached to identity because it is these parts of ourselves—our gender, sexuality—that 'may be established and naturalised in the first instance through shame' (Sedgwick, 1993b, p. 12). From this perspective, therapeutic and political strategies which aim to diminish or to excavate shame from particular populations, such as incest survivors and 'gay pride' advocates, fail because 'shame are not toxic parts of a group or individual that can be excised; they are instead integral to and residual in the process by which identity is formed' (2003, p. 63).

Further, Sedgwick (1993a) argues that shame might instead be viewed as a foundational component, particularly given its power to re-configure the queer subject. Thus, 'queer' shame not only becomes malleable with the self, it can also assume creative or destructive influences on identity, as she illustrates in the following passage: 'If queer is a politically potent term, which it is, that's because, far from being capable of being detached from the childhood scene of shame, it cleaves to that scene as a near-inexhaustible source of transformational energy' (Sedgwick, 1993a, p. 4). Similarly, David Halperin's (2007) work has drawn attention to the ways that gay subjectivities might also operate to counteract notions of shame and abjection. Specifically, Halperin suggests that by taking up alternative pathways in their approach to sexuality, loss and community, gay subjectivities also

exists outside, and alternate to, prevailing social norms which pathologise gay men. The following excerpt from Eliza, who identified as a queer survivor, illustrates the subversive potential of both refusing and transforming the shame attached to sexual abuse into positive self-identity. Specifically, Eliza's refusal to embody shame as a marker of the self, rather than to 'integrate the experience into her personality' suggests a queer process, which embraces the 'transformative', 'peculiarly individuating' potential of the experience:

I think that's why it makes it kind of problematic because by keeping abuse kind of secret and closeted, it makes people feel ashamed of it instead of being 'Yeah, it happened', whatever...In terms of the amount of the people that it happens to—kind of demystifying it a little bit more—just because of all the shame that's associated with it and it doesn't necessarily have to be shameful. Yeah and I guess I've kind of integrated that experience into my personality. It's not something that I'm ashamed about, so maybe it's messed up in saying this but I don't actually view it as a negative experience anymore.

I view it as something that's, in terms of phenomenology and the loop or whatever and how every experience shapes who you are as a person. It has obviously shaped me somehow and I actually feel comfortable with how it shaped me. I can't really pinpoint what exactly it's done or how it's impacted on me because there's nothing to compare it to but I feel comfortable with who I am now and I feel okay with who I am now, because how much I struggled through it, through the end of high school to me kind of says it was obviously something important in my life, to shape me and because the end result right now, I'm actually kind of happy with so I don't really view it as a negative.

Eliza's narrative is unique because it evokes questions about what shame does, rather than how shame feels. Thus, it reflects on shame's performative, transformative potential rather than exclusively on its attachment to the survivor identity. In this way, shame in Eliza's account is not embedded in the intra-

psychic but following Sedgwick's interpretation, exists as 'a kind of free radical that attaches to, and alters the meaning of...a named identity' (2003, p. 62).

### **Engaging Queer Pleasure and Danger in Accounts of Sexual Subjectivity**

As I have outlined, current theorisations of lesbian sexuality in psychological and trauma discourse position non-heterosexual identities as a hangover of child sexual abuse, rather than as a natural, inevitable process or a positive, individual choice. The narratives from the lesbian survivors in this study tended to resist psychological and therapeutic notions of sexual abuse and victimhood, which situate trauma as a permanent hollowing-out of women's sexual desire. For example, Eliza spoke about bringing trauma and sex together in a way that refused pathology and enabled her to be present and honest in her sexual desire and activity:

I don't like 'promiscuous' because promiscuous has negative connotations to it and I've never really thought of sex like that...I guess, I like people and I like being with people and I wouldn't identify as being a promiscuous person but maybe according to definitions then I might be and I've never really thought about that in terms of 'Oh yeah, I'm promiscuous because I was sexually abused when I was young'...I'm quite happy to do rape role-play, all that sort of stuff and it doesn't...If anything, rape role-play turns me on more but I haven't felt not okay about anything. Maybe I haven't allowed any situations to come up where it might trigger something but I can't think of any sexual activity that I feel weird about.

In many ways, Eliza's narrative actively challenges some mainstream and therapeutic assumptions surrounding sexual abuse survivors. Notably, her account of sexual pleasure in promiscuity, fantasy and role-play disrupt one-dimensional accounts which automatically pathologise sexual subversive behaviour as 'symptoms of trauma'.

In recent years, a number of books have been published which espouse diverse lesbian sex practices such as S&M, role-play and promiscuity in the realm of sex-positive practice (Bright, 1999; Califia, 1988). For example, Felice Newman's (1999), 'The Whole Lesbian Sex Book' included a section on role-play which demystified some common assumptions surrounding fantasy rape role-play for lesbian survivors. Notably, her book suggested that 'many women opt for play that intentionally pushes their buttons' because 'things that make us feel intense shame or anger can also evoke great sexual heat' (p. 188).

Eliza's experience is also intimately connected to the historical debates by lesbian feminists surrounding 'pleasure' and 'danger'. Specifically, the divergence of lesbian feminist writing to address a sex-positive agenda, which has now come to be called 'the sex wars' or 'the lesbian sex wars', contributed to a transformation of thinking about sexuality, particularly lesbian sexuality. Carol Vance's (1984) edited book, *Pleasure and Danger*, a forerunning text of this era, raised very important questions about the inherent contradictions that construct women's sexuality both as a site of repression and danger, and a site of pleasure and exploration. For Vance (1984), 'overemphasis on danger' not only 'follow(ed) the lead of the larger culture', but the result of 'hiding pleasure' also failed in making women 'feel empowered':

When pleasure occupies a smaller and smaller public place and a more guilty private space, individuals do not become empowered; they are merely cut off from the source of their own strength and energy...If women increasingly view themselves entirely as victims through the lens of the oppressor and allow themselves to be viewed that way by others, they become enfeebled and miserable. (p. 7)

The shift toward sex-positive writing during this time was undoubtedly influenced by the AIDS crisis, which inadvertently increased the visibility of lesbian sex practices. As Dawn Atkins (1999) has argued, 'the proliferation of

lesbian erotica in the past decade may be interpreted as a form of reinforcement for a sexual liberation movement severely debilitated by the right wing and AIDS, but it is also a response to the initial invisibility of lesbian sex and sexuality' (p. 97). The sex-positive movement led by lesbian feminists, whose campaign beginnings and promotion of 'queer' sex practices such as S&M, butch and femme roles and pornography were unashamedly vocal and visible, has also bolstered contemporary safe sex campaigns for lesbian and queer women.

The impetus of sex-positive writing was not just on recognising women's sexual desire, it also included complicated narratives of victimhood from a number of prominent lesbian survivors, such as Dorothy Allison (1984), who wrote openly about her own life:

When we speak of sex, grief should not be where we have to start...I never wanted fear to be the only impulse behind political action. As deeply as I wanted safety or freedom I wanted desire, hope and joy. What after all was the worth of one without the other. (p. 107)

Accounts of incest and trauma from lesbian subculture have also emerged alongside, and in response to, the denial of more nuanced accounts of sex and violence from mainstream feminism. Most importantly, the debates, performances and activist work led by lesbian sub-cultures during this time did not attempt to separate feminist binaries of 'pleasure' and 'danger', but instead wrote about how they sometimes come together in women's lives. As Allison (1996) writes:

Two or three things I know for sure, but this one I am not supposed to talk about, how it comes together—sex and violence, love and hatred—I am not supposed to put together the two halves of my life. (p. 45)

As Cvetkovich (2003) suggests, unlike feminist theories, which often embrace 'desexualised', 'sanitised' and largely therapeutic accounts of trauma and heal-

ing, lesbian subcultures often complicate the ways that trauma and sexuality intersect with lesbian identity. Allison's wider project— 'politically incorrect sexuality'— was supported by other sex-positive lesbian feminists (such as Gayle Rubin, Joan Nestle and Cherrie Moraga) who wrote about lesbian sexuality in relation to classism, racism and other types of prejudice. As Cvetkovich (2003) comments, 'Allison is breaking the silence, but she is doing so in a way that is fiercely uncompromising that doesn't edit out anger, or lesbianism, or complex sexual lives.' (p. 4)

In the following excerpt, Eliza spoke about her desires openly, honestly, and did not pause to explain or self-silence her story or allow it to be caught up in the language of pathology. Rather, Eliza spoke about the complexity in her relationship in regard to 'being in control sexually' and complicated the relationship between bottom/passive (bad) and top/active (good), particularly with reference to her position as a survivor:

I'm definitely not in control sexually. Oh, maybe—I don't like the top/bottom thing. I don't like definitive terms but I'm probably more of a bottom than a top but maybe it's just with my current partner because it just works better that way. But I'm not like a bottom/bottom. (My partner) says that I'm an 'active bottom'. I guess it depends on the person you're with because you just have to negotiate what sort of dynamic you kind of work at. It works in our relationship at the moment...and I really enjoy being an active bottom. And I don't feel sort of 'Oh, no it's really bad to be a bottom; should be a top' thing. With like S&M stuff, I'm quite happy to be beaten and restrained and stuff like that — that's a different sort of relationship because it's not complete lack of control because I feel comfortable with the person that if I said 'Hey no, you have to stop', then they would stop. So maybe I haven't had an experience where I've got complete lack of control but I'm quite willing to relinquish it within a safe environment—like faux relinquish of control.

Similarly, Vivian spoke about the dichotomy of these positions in her sexual life:

I feel in control of the pursuit and of whether or not I take someone home. I'm very in control of that and usually it's at my place and it's kind of all of that stuff, but once we're actually in bed, I don't mind relinquishing that. It depends on the person. It does depend, in fact, a lot on the person but there's an interesting dichotomy there for me. If I have a partner that I trust or that I can see potential in them for certain things, then I'll relinquish all control and let them go for their life.

Eliza and Vivian's narratives challenge broad assumptions about abuse survivors as 'passive' and 'powerless' in terms of their sexual identity and relationships. However, the queering of this position in their same-sex relationship—and their refusal to anchor themselves in terms of 'passive' or 'active'—also presents an other avenue for sexual pleasure beyond the realm of 'healthy sexuality'. In many ways, the debate surrounding women's sexual desire which began in the 1980s 'sex wars' not only succeeded in breaking the silence about sexual practices that feminists had long regarded as sexually 'abusive', but their work also contributed to the more desirable position of the lesbian as a 'sexual outlaw'. As Sally Munt (1998) suggests, it is this position 'beyond, out there, exterior, peripheral, foreign and different' that enables lesbian women to 'occup(y) a deregulated space unconstrained by the norms and common sense of mainstream culture. It is a utopic space she can operate with self-determination' (p. 96). Significantly, for the participants in this study, engagement in 'voluntary passivity' and S&M sexual play ensures that they are no longer defined in terms of 'harmed' sexuality, but instead become agents of their own desire and sexual pleasure. It may be the unique positionality of lesbian survivors like Eliza and Vivian who, because they perceive themselves 'outside' of traditional heterosexual discourses, are given more opportunities to engage agentic sexual practices. Following the work of same-sex

researchers like Lisa Diamond (2005), lesbian survivors may be able to better resist cultural discourses, and thus map out their own experiences of sexual agency.

## Conclusions

While I acknowledge the limitations in making generalisations from a restricted number of participant narratives, their stories offer significant insights into understandings of same-sex attracted survivor experiences. Rejecting the one-dimensional accounts currently offered in psychological discourse, the same-sex attracted survivors in this study revealed diverse and complex narratives when commenting on their sexual subjectivities. In many ways, the assumed connection between their (past) sexual abuse and (present) sexuality thwarted their ability to take up an 'authentic' lesbian sexuality, or, alternatively, one mediated by their own choices. Ultimately, given the negative and 'sticky' association between abuse and lesbian sexuality, it is not surprising that participants felt they were denied the full expression of emotion in which to tell trauma stories openly, and without shame.

At the same time, by combining individual pathways of sexual pleasure as 'healing', the participant narratives also complicated mainstream assumptions regarding trauma and survivor sexual dysfunction. For lesbian survivors like Eliza and Vivian, taking up 'passive' and 'active' positions and engaging in S&M sex and role-play was connected to gaining sexual agency and pleasure in relationships. Thus, rather than position their sexuality as indicative of an 'impossibility to heal', their responses allude to a widening of *possibilities* for 'healthy sexuality' in the context of their same-sex relationships. Importantly, the narratives from lesbian survivors point to the potential of engaging in new links which promote sexual play, survivor agency and 'healing'.

From this perspective, existing heteronormative approaches taken up in trauma counselling, and in the trauma literature more gener-

ally, may be working against lesbian and queer survivors. Indeed, the current framework of survivor healing not only draws a line between *heterosexuality* and healing, it also fails to adequately engage with the potentiality of lesbian, queer and bisexual narratives to offer a 'different' story. In widening the possibility of what might count as 'healthy' sexuality, lesbian and queer sex-positive practices may also encourage new links which promote survivor agency and alternative pathways to healing. This connection is important, and the current lack of exploration of lesbian, queer and bisexual survivors points to a need for future research in this area.

### Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Associate Professor Moira Carmody, Associate Professor Kerry Robinson, and Dr Damien Riggs who each dedicated their time to reading drafts of this article.

### Author Note

Georgia Ovenden has recently submitted her PhD at the University of Western Sydney. Her thesis focuses on the ways that survivors of sexual abuse and non-abused women positioned accounts of sexual pleasure and danger in their adult sexual lives.

### References

- Aaron, D. J., & Hughes, T. L. (2007). Association of childhood sexual abuse with obesity in a community sample of lesbians. *Obesity, 15*(4), 1023-1028.
- Ahmed, S. (2004). *The cultural politics of emotion*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.
- Alcoff, L. (2006). *Visible identities: Race, gender, and the self*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Allison, D. (1984). Public silence, private terror. In C. S. Vance (Ed.), *Pleasure and danger: Exploring female sexuality* (pp. 103-114). Boston: Routledge.
- Allison, D. (1996). *Two or three things I know for sure*. New York: Plume Books.
- Atkins, D. (1999). *Lesbian sex scandals: Sexual practices, identities and politics*. New York: Harrington Park Press.
- Balsam, K. F., Rothblum, E. D., & Beauchaine, T. P. (2005). Victimization over the life span: A comparison of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and heterosexual siblings. *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology, 73*(3), 477-487.
- Bass, E., & Davis, L. (1988). *The courage to heal: A guide for women survivors of child sexual abuse*. New York: HarperPerennial.
- Beitchman, J. H., Zucker, K. J., Hood, J. E., DaCosta, G. A., Akman, D., & Cassavia, E. (1992). A review of the long-term effects of child sexual abuse. *Child Abuse & Neglect, 16*(1), 101-118.
- Bright, S. (1999). *Susie Sexpert's lesbian sex world*. Pittsburgh: Cleis Press.
- Brown, W. (1995). *States of injury: Power and freedom in late modernity*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Butler, J. (1997). *Excitable speech: A politics of the performative*. New York: Routledge.
- Califia, P. (1988). *The Lesbian S/M safety manual*. Boston: Alyson Publications.
- Champagne, R. (1998). *The politics of survivorship: Incest, women's literature, and feminist theory*. New York: New York University Press.
- Corliss, H., Cochran, S., & Mays, V. (2002). Reports of parental maltreatment during childhood in a United States population-based survey of homosexual, bisexual, and heterosexual adults. *Child Abuse and Neglect, 26*, 1165-1178.
- Cvetkovich, A. (1992). *Mixed feelings: Feminism, mass culture, and Victorian sensationism*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press.
- Cvetkovich, A. (2003). *An archive of feelings: Trauma, sexuality, and lesbian public cultures*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Diamond, L. M. (2005). 'I'm straight, but I kissed a girl': The trouble with American media representations of female-female sexuality. *Feminism Psychology, 15*(1), 104-110.
- Fine, M. (1992). *Disruptive voices: The possi-*

- bilities of feminist research*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.
- Fine, M., Weis, L., Weseen, S., & Wong, L. (2000). For whom? Qualitative research, representations and social responsibilities. In D. Lincoln & Y. Lincoln (Eds.), *The handbook of qualitative research* (pp. 107-132). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Gonsiorek, J. C. (1988). Mental health issues of gay and lesbian adolescents. *Journal of Adolescent Health Care*, 9(2), 114-122.
- Hall, J. M. (1996). Pervasive effects of childhood sexual abuse in lesbians' recovery from alcohol problems. *Substance Use & Misuse*, 31(2), 225-239.
- Halperin, D. M. (1995). *Saint Foucault: Towards a gay hagiography*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Halperin, D. M. (2007). *What do gay men want?: An essay on sex, risk, and subjectivity*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.
- Halperin, D. M., & Traub, V. (2009). *Gay Shame*. Chicago: University Of Chicago Press.
- Hillier, L., Edwards, J., & Riggs, D. W. (2008). Guest editorial: Mental health and LGBT communities. *Gay and Lesbian Issues and Psychology*, 4(2), 65-68.
- Hillier, L., & Harrison, L. (2004). Homophobia and the production of shame: Young people and same sex attraction. *Culture, Health & Sexuality*, 6(1), 79-94.
- Hughes, T. L., Haas, A. P., Razzano, L., Cassidy, R., & Matthews, A. (2000). Comparing lesbians' and heterosexual women's mental health: A multi-site survey. *Journal of Gay & Lesbian Social Services*, 11(1), 57-76.
- Hughes, T. L., Johnson, T., & Wilsnack, S. C. (2001). Sexual assault and alcohol abuse: A comparison of lesbians and heterosexual women. *Journal of Substance Abuse*, 13(4), 515-532.
- Hughes, T. L., Johnson, T. P., Wilsnack, S. C., & Szalacha, L. A. (2007). Childhood risk factors for alcohol abuse and psychological distress among adult lesbians. *Child abuse & neglect*, 31(7), 769-789.
- Kendall-Tackett, K. A. (2005). *Handbook of women, stress, and trauma*. New York: Routledge.
- Kitzinger, J. (1992). Sexual violence and compulsory heterosexuality. *Feminism & Psychology*, 2(3), 399-418.
- Lechner, M. E., Vogel, M. E., Garcia-Shelton, L. M., Leichter, J. L., & Steibel, K. R. (1993). Self-reported medical problems of adult female survivors of childhood sexual abuse. *Journal of Family Practice*, 36, 633-633.
- Love, H. (2009). Emotional history. In D. M. Halperin & V. Traub (Eds.), *Gay shame*. Chicago: University Of Chicago Press.
- Marecek, J. (1999). Trauma talk in feminist clinical practice. In S. Lamb (Ed.), *New versions of victims: Feminists struggle with the concept* (pp. 158-182). New York: New York University Press.
- Matthews, A. K., Hughes, T. L., & Tartaro, J. (2005). Sexual behavior and sexual dysfunction in a community sample of lesbian and heterosexual women. In A. M. Omoto & H. S. Kurtzman (Eds.), *Sexual Orientation and Mental Health: Examining Identity and Development in Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual People* (pp. 185-206). Washington, DC: American Psychological Association Books.
- Morris, J. F., & Balsam, K. F. (2003). Lesbian and bisexual women's experiences of victimization: Mental health, revictimization, and sexual identity development. *Journal of Lesbian Studies*, 7(4), 67-85.
- Munt, S. (1998). *Heroic desire: Lesbian identity and cultural space*. New York: New York University Press.
- Newman, F. (1999). *The whole lesbian sex book*. San Francisco: Cleis Press.
- Noble, J. B. (2006). *Sons of the movement: FtMs risking incoherence on a post-queer cultural landscape*. Toronto: Women's Press.
- O'Dell, L. (2003). The 'harm' story in childhood sexual abuse: Contested understandings, disputed knowledges. In P. Reavey & S. Warner (Eds.), *New feminist stories of child sexual abuse: Sexual scripts and dangerous dialogues*. London: Routledge.
- Roberts, S. J., & Sorensen, L. (1999). Prevalence of childhood sexual abuse and related sequelae in a lesbian population. *Journal of the Gay and Lesbian Medical Association*, 3(1), 11-19.
- Robohm, J. S., Litzenberger, B. W., &

- Pearlman, L. A. (2003). Sexual abuse in lesbian and bisexual young women: Associations with emotional/behavioral difficulties, feelings about sexuality, and the coming-out process. *Journal of Lesbian Studies*, 7(4), 31-47.
- Scott, J. (1992). 'Experience'. In J. Butler & J. W. Scott (Eds.), *Feminists theorize the political*. New York: Routledge.
- Sedgwick, E. K. (1993a). Queer performativity: Henry James's the art of the novel. *GLQ* 1(4), 1-16.
- Sedgwick, E. K. (1993b). *Tendencies*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Sedgwick, E. K., & Frank, A. (2003). *Touching feeling: Affect, pedagogy, performativity*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Vance, C. S. (1984). Pleasure and danger: Exploring female sexuality. In C. S. Vance (Ed.), *Pleasure and danger: Towards a politics of sexuality*. New York: Routledge.
- Warner, M. (1993). *Fear of a queer planet: Queer politics and social theory*. Minneapolis: University Of Minnesota Press.
- Whittier, N. (2001). Emotional strategies: The collective reconstruction and display of oppositional emotions in the movement against child sexual abuse. In J. Goodwin, J. M. Jasper & F. Polletta (Eds.), *Passionate politics: Emotions and social movements*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.



## RECOGNITION AND RE-COGNITION: LESBIAN/GAY IDENTITY AND THE DISCOURSE OF CHILDHOOD MEMORY

ROB COVER

*Memorial recollections of a childhood past play a significant role in the production lesbian/gay identities, particularly through the narrative of the coming out story which often relates the ways in which childhood events, thoughts and feelings operate as a 'proof' of sexual identity. This paper examines some of the ways in which memorial claims of a queer childhood are utilised as a retrospective form of lesbian/gay identity performativity in order to produce stable, coherent and intelligible selves by re-signifying an individual's past as always having been a 'queer past'. Examining the notion of a remembered queer past through Butler's theories of performativity alongside a Derridean reading strategy, it is argued that, in taking memory to task, it is possible to open the field of sexual possibilities beyond essentialist claims to identity. Rather than being a proof of authenticity or a record-of-the-past, memorial accounts of a queer childhood, it is argued, can be understood as a product or effect of lesbian/gay sexual subjectivity, a non-foundationalist construct that is deployed to stabilise queer sexuality in the present and for future, and to disavow the constructedness of sexual subjectivity.*

**Keywords:** recognition, childhood memory, lesbian and gay identity

The 'memory' of having had a queer childhood, of always having been different from others, and of never quite knowing the name until one first encountered discourses, is regularly invoked in reflective narratives, stories exchanged between lesbian/gay persons, community articulations of sameness and belonging, YouTube-delivered accounts of coming out and in queer fiction. For many, this sense that one recalls always having had a lesbian or gay psyche, selfhood and knowl-

edge of oneself without necessarily knowing the name is part of a "deeply felt sense that their sexuality and gender identity are congenital" (Rosario, 2003, p. 34). This deep feeling is frequently given as a proof of a fixed and coherent non-heterosexual self, rather than discussed as the product of a nexus between performative behaviour and performative articulation, that is, through performances that retroactively establish the illusion of a fixed inner core that founds our desires, behaviours, attitudes and sense of subjectivity (Butler, 1990, p. 143). Within a queer theory understanding of identity, the subject is constituted by the very expressions and behaviours that are commonly seen to emanate from a core psychic self, articulated within frameworks of normativity and recognisability in order to present a self that is coherent, intelligible and recognisable.

The production of an intelligible (sexual) identity simultaneously covers over its construction in discourse by articulating the 'necessary fiction' of an essentialism or a social constructedness that results in sexual identity as unchanging from very early childhood. That this psychic self is expressed through memorial accounts of 'always having been so' is an example of what Steven Epstein refers to as individual legitimization:

An additional assumption is that lesbians and gay men in our society consciously seek, in a wide variety of ways, to *legitimate* their forms of sexual expression by developing explanations, strategies, and defenses. These legitimations are articulated both on an individual level...and on a collective level (Epstein, 1987, p. 11).

This is an individual justification but it is not produced in any humanist individual epis-

teme—rather it is the effect of a particular type of identity performativity that requires the linear, analogue production of a past-present-future coherence in order to make sexual identity intelligible and innate. It is thus one that is produced in the nexus between lesbian/gay discursive or community norms and the productive negotiation of (sexual) selfhood. Prevalent among articulations of non-heterosexual sexualities is the claim of having had a lesbian or gay childhood *prior* to accessing the discourses which categorise and name contemporary (hetero and homo) sexual identity; the argument that one 'always already knew' one's sexual minority status is deployed in humanist discourses of homosexuality in order to deny any possibility of being seen to be non-essentialist. In other words, the story is told that one is not the subject of discourse, but follows a linear path from unnamed queer childhood to an encounter with the name (lesbian, gay etc.) and to a recognition of one's self or sexuality identity in that name, category, norm or knowledge. From a queer theory perspective, this process of recognition is, instead, a *re-cognition* of the past, a rethinking of the past and childhood in terms of the sexual subject in the present. The citations 'lesbian', 'gay' and 'straight' depend on invoking the hetero/homo binary and the 'truth value' placed upon it in contemporary society. The binary prevents the sliding of signification of sexuality and, more importantly, halts a proliferation of alternative discourses and inter-discursive formations of sexuality. It is in this sense, then, that what might in the past (in memorial accounts) have been 'experienced' or 'desired' *otherwise* is continuously re-cognised in terms of the hetero/homo binary and the gendering of sexual object-choice, upholding an essentialist and genetic account of selfhood.

Given the veracity of queer theory, anti-foundationalist and constructionist positions that critique any essentialist account of fixed hetero/homo sexual identity, it might well be asked how it is possible to account for the thousands of lesbian/gay claims to having had an un-named 'gay childhood'. Is it possible to

reconcile an anti-foundationalist stance with the 'fact' of lesbian/gay childhood memory? Does the articulation of these childhood recollections not prove once and for all that one is not the subject of a discourse one accessed at the appropriate age (that is, not as a young child) and the effect of a cultural demand for sexual identity coherence? Does the *evidence* of lesbian/gay childhood memory negate the post-structuralist idea that lesbian/gay subjectivity is the result of discursive positioning and performativity without knowable foundation? Is it not the case that a lesbian childhood *proves* the steadfastly held claim within lesbian/gay discourse of an essential core identity with which one is born and which, today, is commonly seen to be the result of a gay gene (or straight gene)? Or can the very notion of childhood memory as the justificatory antecedent of this 'proof' be put in question?

Following Butler and her important contribution to queer theory, there is a counter-argument that childhood memory, rather than being a proof or a useful claim to a 'truthful experience' or a 'record-of-the-past' needs to be re-conceived as a product or effect of lesbian/gay sexual subjectivity, a non-foundationalist construct that is deployed to (a) stabilise a non-normative sexual identity in the present and future, and (b) disavow the moments or encountering discourses of sexuality that constitute and produce the lesbian/gay self. Subjects have memories, and there is no disputing the critical importance of memorial accounts as a type of affirmative discourse. In reading accounts from a queer theory understanding of how the lesbian/gay childhood memory operates in the context of the encounter with the text and identification with similar subjective memories, memorial accounts of a queer childhood can be deployed as a 'recognition' of a similarity, it can be understood as a *re-cognition* of the past, a resignification of past events *in terms of* the contemporary discourses of sexuality, the ways in which lesbian/gay discourse invokes an inside/outside through the imperative of having to speak a sexual identity by 'coming out', and by the fixity of the hetero/homo bi-

nary on which the discourse rests. I will show how this recognition as re-cognition (or re-signification or re-configuration) operates as a particular mode of Butlerian subjective performativity in order to maintain the fiction of a lesbian or gay fixed identity. A theoretical account of re-cognition of childhood memory is not, of course, to disallow the possibility that young children who, in encountering the dominant discourses of sexuality, might identify as lesbian or gay—such articulations should be taken seriously. However, the lesbian or gay subject is as much dependent on the re-configuration and re-signification of experiential memory as she or he is on a reiterative performance of sexuality: both are methods of persuading the self that 'self' *itself* emanates from an 'inner core'. Memory, then, is a tool used to forge belonging not through articulating lesbian/gay sameness but a tool located in a mythical nexus between a future subjectivity as process and a past 'always already was' which works to sustain biologically-essentialist assertions in lesbian/gay culture.

This paper explores ways in which memorial claims of a queer childhood are utilised as a retrospective form of lesbian/gay identity performativity that produces stable, coherent and intelligible selves by re-signifying an individual's past as always having been a 'queer past'. Firstly, I will overview some of the ways in which articulations of childhood memory have been used to assert an essentialist foundation by showing how memorial accounts are deployed to disavow the construction of a queer self in discourse, whereby narratives and stories of childhood become an essential element in forging lesbian/gay community belonging. Secondly, working with Butler's theories of performativity alongside a Derridean reading of Freudian/Lacanian concepts of memory, I will argue that the liberal-humanist compulsion to 'remember' a queer childhood constrains subjectivity, regimenting sexual identities in such a way that prevents critical possibilities for thinking sexuality otherwise. Engaging against essentialist arguments is important in the current climate of sexual politics, particular as alternative and contestatory

narratives of identity are further marginalised by the lobbying, legislative, and media representation of new millennial sexualities. In other words, no matter how useful essentialist argument might be, and no matter how powerfully reinforced by childhood recollection and the actual voices of lesbians and gay men, it is a matter of considerable concern that by virtue of popularity or authorised discourse there be any foreclosure of alternative stories of sexual selfhood.

### **Childhood Memory as 'Community' Discourse**

'Childhood memory', or memory of the past, is part of a stock community rhetoric of lesbian/gay dialogue on identity. In dozens of coming out stories, examples of lesbian and gay fiction, lesbian and gay memoirs, biographies and accounts of childhood, there are references to a childhood sense of alienation, to an 'always having had known' the truth of one's sexuality, always being aware of a same-sex attraction without the linguistic or cultural skills to express it. *I was always different. I couldn't relate to the activities of other boys/girls at school. I knew I was a lesbian in kindergarten but didn't know the word until I was thirty. I was born gay, I know this for a fact.* This is not deployed just to refer to an invisibility of lesbian and gay characterisations in contemporary discourse available to younger persons, nor deployed to indicate a confusion or anxiety over the social codes of sexuality in western society. Instead, this rhetoric is mustered to suggest a lesbian or gay past as an assurity for the lesbian or gay present 'self'. As Donohoe puts it:

Lots of gay guys say that they knew that they were 'different' from an early age. Some say for as long as they can remember. When we're kids, though, this difference has no name. It is often only with hindsight that we recognise this difference at all (Donohoe 1998, p. 3).

And to quote gay Australian rugby league footballer Ian Roberts:

I've always been gay. I know that for sure even though I never made a connection with the word 'gay' until my mid-teens (Roberts, 1999, p. 130).

What is it, then, that occurs when the connection with the 'name' is made to make a performative subject know "for sure" that she or he *is* and *always was* lesbian or gay?

In her *Outside Belongings* (1996), Elspeth Probyn provides a reading of some lesbian and gay fictional writing in terms of the way childhood memory and nostalgia are constructed. She points out that although in theoretical writing 'childhood' itself is regarded as a construct that emerges in part from the child labour laws of the Nineteenth Century, in much contemporary discourse 'childhood' is treated as the sacrosanct (Probyn, 1996, p. 122). As Probyn notes, much research has uncritically incorporated the folk beliefs of homosexuality as the result of flawed maleness or femaleness (Probyn, p. 105; Sedgwick, 1993, p. 42). This sort of research has often attempted to point out that gay male children were 'nonathletic' and that lesbian children were 'tomboys' or, worse, 'aggressive' (Probyn, p. 110). Importantly, such contentions declare evidence of a queer childhood in very *bodily* terms around sport or the physical display of force. In his explication of lesbian/gay adolescence, Mark Goggin suggests that lesbian and gay children were highly likely to experience "far-ranging and deep-seated gender nonconformity than were heterosexuals" (1993, p. 111). While such links seem logical in terms of the available knowledge on lesbian and gay reminiscence of youth, the problem with these statements is that they *ground* lesbian and gay sexuality with an essential core that, in spite of the belief in asexual childhood sacredness, is seen to be present from early childhood claiming gender non-conformity as its evidence. Where Goggin sees "deep-seated" gender non-conformity among lesbian and gay reminiscences of youth, I suggest that this belief in non-conformity can be understood as retroactively produced and signified. Regardless, in a

western society in which there have been frequent manifestations of anxiety over the 'correct' codes of gender performances, I am doubtful if either those identifying as heterosexual or homosexual are free from evidences of gender non-conformity as children. The widespread policing of 'gender performances' in children (Read, 1996, p. 37), the proliferate marketing of gender-specific toys to children (Silverblatt, 1995, p. 6) and the articulation of gendered 'scripts' throughout education, media and family institutions (Walsh-Childers & Brown, 1993, pp. 117,119), make it possible to suggest that the *consideration* of gender non-conformity is the very condition of the categorical subject-position 'child'. Childhood and its memorial accounts are thus part of another sort of sacredness: not an asexual sacristy of innocence, but a sacrosanct area of *proof* of straight/queer identity that can officially be neither denied nor denounced. Critiquing childhood memories/proofs of an early sense of sexual difference is invasive—a trespass not on one's recollections but on the very lesbian/gay soul. While there is evidence of a necessary distancing from issues of 'the child' by lesbian/gay community discourse in order to avoid fuelling the right-wing linkage of non-heterosexuality with paedophilia (Sedgwick, 1993, p. 157) there is also an embrace of sacred childhood seen in the frequency with which lesbian/gay subjects (in writing, memorabilia, biography and explanatory discourses) invoke their own childhood as one of 'alienation', 'difference' or 'secret knowledge' as yet un-named.

The narrative by which childhood memory as 'gay childhood' or 'lesbian childhood' is articulated involves the suggestion that one *really did know* but nevertheless required the 'resource' of sexuality discourses in order to name oneself and thereby articulate oneself as lesbian or gay. This is a claim that there is indeed an 'inner core' of sexuality and one knows this for having 'always been' in spite of the gap between birth and the moment at which one encounters the discourses providing the necessary cultural codes for the 'outer' denoters of that sexuality. Such memorial

stories are shared always in a vein of similarity, as what Margaret Reynolds refers to as an "exchange of calling cards" (cited in Probyn, 1996, p. 111). Belonging is forged through narratives of sameness and recollection, and in the instabilities of lesbian/gay belonging the production of reminiscence is a central part. The many volumes of reminiscence, of interviews about sexual identity, of coming out stories, the biographies, the art and underground films and more recently the television and mass-circulation representations as well as the websites and homepages archiving so many stories—all of these form a major part of the lore of lesbian/gay culture. What is important to note is that such childhood memories are deployed *only* in the context of a reminiscence. Goggin makes an important point when he states that:

While the accounts of coming out are enormously informative, a common criticism is that they are essentially a developmental psychology of the remembered past . . . Early recollection may be coloured by subsequent life experiences. The sense of being different as a child or adolescent may be an adult interpretation of earlier life events. The true chronology of time may be obscured by the passage of time . . . Little is yet known about how gay and lesbian adolescents experience their lives *as they are living them*, rather than as they are remembered (Goggin, 1993, p. 120).

This points to a cultural manifestation in lesbian/gay discourse of the reminiscence deployed as the 'proof' of the essence of sexuality, of its fixity. On one hand, childhood memory can operate as a useful place for genealogical retrieval, whereby it is in what we feel is without history—"sentiments, love, conscience, instincts" (Foucault, 1977, p. 139-140). At the same time, however, it is necessary to bear in mind the point that these are sought "not in order to trace the gradual curve of their *evolution*" (Foucault, 1977, p. 140, *emphasis added*). In other words, while the deployment of childhood memory can operate as a useful counter-position to those discourses more generally authorised, it is important not

to use 'memory' or 'childhood' to set up evolutionary patterns and trajectories. As Probyn suggests, the critique of childhood can be used to "turn identity inside out" (Probyn, 1996, p. 99) or, better, as "evidence of the necessary absence of any primary ground in queer politics" (Probyn, 1996, p. 97). What is important here is that in the very fact that it is in the *reminiscence* of childhood that the statement of the lesbian or gay childhood (as having always had an essential (homo) sexuality, as having always been about specificity-as-difference) is made, it is 'memory' which must be interrogated. In order to produce the lesbian/gay subject through a lesbian/gay childhood, there is a certain 'forgetting' of the instability of memory itself.

### Memory and the Subversion of Time

The memory of events, feelings, sensations and a sense of identity is broadly understood to be easily distorted by the present framework in which one communicates a past story as a memorial account. In the context of communication, memory exists "*between* subjects and not *within* them" (Welzer, 2010, p. 5). The framework of communication thus governs how memorial accounts of an individual 'remembering always being lesbian/gay' are given: coming out stories in a collection for queer youth (e.g., Gray, 1999; Shale, 1999) simplify accounts for a targeted audience; the million or so YouTube coming out narrations articulate memory within a time-limit, a narrative style, a non-interacting audience. In this context, memory of a lesbian/gay childhood is always a distortion and a limitation. But what of memory in the act of communicating to oneself? Can we expect this to be more 'accurate' since it is not just a narration but "a deeply felt sense"; a memory of an affect that does not emerge through a deliberative act of remembering (Probyn, 2005, p. 2) and thereby at most a re-orientation rather than a re-vision (Ahmed, 2004, p. 8) constructed in the act of articulation? In other words, does the memory of how one felt one's identity, difference or sense of erotics or attraction in childhood precede and formulate

our current, present sense of identity - a non-spoken memory being the evidence of an essence?

A psychoanalytic perspective is useful here in indicating some of the ways in which memorial accounts do not represent a self-truth but are produced in the present act of narrating that account and the framework in which that narrative is given. For Freud, memory is an integral element of psychoanalytic practice; a role of the psychoanalyst is to unchain childhood memories from present distortions. Freud takes the memory as given. In his essay 'A Child is Being Beaten' (Freud, 1979), he suggests that memory of an original fantasy or event is reinforced by later experiences and can have its content "noticeably modified" (Freud, 1979, pp. 163-4). Although such memory-traces are open to distortion and modification, Freud relies on the notion of an originary memory-trace, preserved clearly in a memory that may at first be inaccessible (Freud, 1979, p. 175). He suggests that psychoanalysis is only successful when "it has succeeded in removing the amnesia which conceals from the adult his knowledge of his childhood from its beginning," a fact which "cannot be said among analysts too emphatically or repeated too often" (Freud, 1979, p. 168). From this perspective there *is* a memory: one which has been not only distorted by later experiences but is inaccessible to the conscious. Again, Freud makes this clear in his 'Note Upon the Mystic Writing-Pad' (Freud, 1984): memory-traces can be likened to the erasable pad, whereby he discovered in his examination of the tool that although the writing was erased, a permanent impression was left in the wax beneath the celluloid sheet (Freud, 1984, p. 432). For Freud, this is representative of the operations of perception on the unconscious: permanent traces of perception may not be available to the perceptive conscious mind, but the traces are clearly reproduced in the unconscious. He extends this point when he suggests in 'Civilization and its Discontents' (1985) that "in mental life nothing which has once been formed can perish . . . everything is somehow preserved and that in

suitable circumstances (when, for instance, regression goes back far enough) it can once more be brought to light" (Freud, 1985, p. 256).

Lacan extended Freud's analysis by putting memory and its cultural reliance on a temporal trajectory in question. Lacan writes:

I might as well be categorical: in psychoanalytic anamnesis, it is not a question of reality, but of Truth, because the effect of a full Word is to reorder the past contingent events by conferring on them the sense of necessities to come, just as they are constituted by the little liberty through which the subject makes them present (Lacan, 1968, p. 18).

If the unconscious is to be the site both governing the process of subjectivity and from which, in part, recollection and re-presentation emerge, then, memory outside of a framework of communicating or giving a memorial account is always formed by the present. "Hypnotic remembrance," Lacan suggests, "is doubtless a reproduction of the past, but it is above all a spoken representation—and as such implies all sorts of presences" (Lacan, 1968, p. 17). Thus the possibility of a 'real' memory must be separated from the remembering of an event or feeling, both of which are the result of the instability of representation. What remains, though, is the possibility of a 'real' imprint of memory-trace in the field of the unconscious. In the conscious speech of a memory, other influences come into play.

More recent analyses of 'memory' itself suggest that there is no necessary real 'impression' in the unconscious (as for Freud), nor are such traces open to re-ordering (in Lacan's analysis). In their *Images of Memory* (1991), Walter Melion and Susanne Küchler point out that memory can no longer be seen as a "tablet waiting to be inscribed" (Melion & Küchler, 1991, p. 4), but instead is socially and culturally constructed and embedded in active processes of cognition (Melion & Küchler, 1991, p. 7). Popularly, memory continues to be viewed as a "container-object" stor-

ing images, concepts and representations available for retrieval (Johnson, 1991, pp. 75-76), but in theory it is not just the communication or deliberate articulation of a memory which is constructed in the present but the memory itself which is, as Harald Welzer puts it, an idealised vision that is "constantly overwritten in light of new experiences and needs, and especially under conditions of new frames of meaning from the present" (Welzer, 2010, p. 15). That memory itself is reconstructed in the frame of what one presently knows, how one presently expressed an identity, how one names one's identity and the cultural codes that make that identity coherent, sensible and intelligible suggests that there is no accessible, knowable memory of having always been lesbian/gay, of having always felt difference and distinction—rather, any form of difference and distinction is re-written within the collective stories of minority sexuality. In a tongue-in-cheek but highly poignant passage, Mark Simpson points to the gay penchant for re-writing of memory:

Early playground friendships with members of the same sex are now seen for what they were: passionate gay attachments which no one straight could possibly have entertained. On the other hand, any encounters with, interest in or marriage to the opposite sex is now quite rightly seen as nothing but an ill-judged attempt to satisfy one's peers, parents, guilt, false consciousness or just sisterly feeling. You know the scenario: I thought I loved you, but really I just envied your make-up skills (Simpson, 1996, p. 6).

In other words, a gay man, for example, re-writes the most common-place childhood occurrences *through* a discourse which posits same-sex attraction in order to suggest that any element which might point to a same-sex attraction was in fact just that, but anything which points to an *external* from same-sex attraction was an aberration. Simpson goes on to say that

the newly emerged out person also discovers that a sense of difference and apartness, feelings of aloneness and hollowness com-

mon to most at some time or other . . . are in fact a product of being homosexual but unable to become gay. It is surely a great consolation to know that the real reason for your sense of smallness and strangeness in the universe as a child was not because you were human and frail, or separated from God (Simpson, 1996, p. 6)

What is indicated here is that not only does one re-write past experience in terms of a particular 'available' discourse, but that seemingly non-related events or feelings relegated to 'memory' are re-articulated in accord with the binary-based discourse operating as a meta-narrative of categorisation. This entails a categorisation of the self in terms of identity, and the categorisation of the past in accord with that subjective identity. The past is drawn into the sexual subjectivity in a way which gives the pretence of a *totalised* subject. Disparate elements, experiences, ideas and actions of the subject are re-organised and re-signified under sexual categorisation in such a way that one performs one's sexual subjectivity as *coherent* and *unified* over time, over the *whole time* of one's being—that is, since conception.

Rather than relying on memorial accounts as a proof of an essentialist sexual identity, memory needs to be understood in terms of a flux of temporality. As Fredric Jameson has pointed out, the experience of temporality, "past, present, memory" is "an effect of language" (Jameson, 1985, p. 119). It is language which makes possible linear temporality, it is a conception which operates within discourse, and it is one which becomes unstable in terms of the lesbian/gay childhood memory. Instead of this temporal location of memory reporting the 'facts' of a lesbian or gay childhood *past*, it reports the *present* fact of a lesbian or gay subjectivity. The traces of the past in memory are thus signifiers which, in the process of communication or unconscious recollection, are only given meaning through codes supplied by present frameworks of nostalgia, childhood, difference, trajectories and sameness, that these memorial signifiers come to signification. Memory-traces are *not* the signifieds by which a vocal

articulation signifies. Nor are they the signifieds which a psychoanalyst interprets and merges with a signifier that has been vocally articulated on the psychoanalyst's couch. Memory (in its signification via the present) is thus open to being seen as nothing but a support or prop for the *linear* performativity of lesbian/gay subjectivity in the present moment by masquerading (signifying) as a proof of a fixed, temporal trajectory lesbian/gay identity. In his critique of Freud's analogy of the Mystic Writing-Pad, Derrida suggests that the production of the trace may be "reinterpreted as moments of deferring" (Derrida, 1978, p. 202). In a Derridean analysis of signification, all signifiers fail to signify effectively because the difference necessary to match signifier to signified is equally open to a deferral of its alternatives and others. Thus, similarly, the memory-trace as signifier can never fully signify in a self-present or 'real' or 'truthful' way.

What we can take from this is that the conventional understanding of memory as contained knowledge of past feelings, sensations and events is invoked not just for others but for the ongoing construction of the self through temporally present and coherent articulations of identity. The connection between producing and re-signifying the past sheds light on how particular narratives of queer selfhood and queer becoming can be understood. In his *Telling Sexual Stories* (1995), Ken Plummer reproduces a discussion with one of his interviewees on sexuality and childhood reminiscence:

Early on I acquired a taste for reading history, particularly ancient history . . . . I was fascinated by pictures of the nude male torsos. There was something about smooth, headless torsos, the irisless eyes of ephebes that made me stop flipping through pages and touch the papers where these things were depicted. By the time I was twelve I understood that my fascination was rooted in my sexual nature (Plummer, 1995, p. 85).

The interviewee reads the memories he has of looking at pictures in such a way as to re-code

the reason for his enjoyment of the images. It is only at a specific, temporal juncture—age twelve—that he recognises his fascination emerges from his 'sexual nature'. *Post hoc ergo proctor hoc* and linearity: the development and constitution of a sexual psyche is not caused by looking at and enjoying the images (which would be feasible, if politically problematic). Rather, a sexual nature—unnamed and unknown but written in terms of contemporary sexual personae—is temporally shifted to form a *prior* to the recalled pleasures taken in viewing the photographs, thereby allowing those pleasures to act as a kind of proof of a singular sexual nature. The recalled pleasures are thereby re-thought and re-signified as gay pleasures, obscuring the possibility that there was a moment of sexual identity constitution and articulating instead an 'always having had been'.

### **Recognition as Re-cognition: Memory's Role in Performing the Coherent Queer Subject**

The 'confessional' mode in much lesbian/gay writing provides evidence of a 'looking back' at the childhood past in order to make the spurious claim that one was *always* lesbian or gay. This is a realisation that is seen to occur after one has *recognised* oneself in sexual discourses; the moment of the 'encounter' with the hetero/homo binary discourses carrying the codes of discrete, fixed lesbian/gay subjective performativity. These confessions are a looking back and reflecting on a feeling of difference as a child. In her compilation of lesbian/gay youth recollections, Mary Gray titles a section *One of These Kids Is Not Like the Others* (Gray, ed., 1999, pp. 21-43). An example of memorial reflection includes this entry by interviewee Eileene Coscolluela:

I came out to myself when I began to meet other gays, lesbians, and bisexuals, and they were just wonderful people. I then started questioning my sexuality, and I came out as being bisexual. When I look back, and I realize that I've always had an attraction to members of the same sex and

that I've had fantasies about it. Come to think of it, I never denied it to myself; I just never outwardly thought about it (Gray, ed., 1999, p. 29).

Similarly, another entry states:

I knew I was gay at an early age—of course, I didn't know it was being 'gay,' but I felt a close desire to be with guys my age as early as age five. I knew the feelings I felt had a name by junior high (Gray, ed., 1999, p. 33).

The following is presented in Erin Shale's *Inside Out*—a collection of 'coming out' stories:

I always knew in some indefinable way that I was not like the other kids. I just knew. At the age of thirteen, I could put a name to it. (Shale, 1999, p. 28).

The key terms employed in all of these (and so many other examples) are 'knowing' in "some indefinable way" or being 'unable to name' this set of feelings or desires. All these are also written in a context of "looking back", governed by the specific communication frameworks at play. As I have argued, the act of invoking memory for oneself operates under a different communication framework, but is governed by a present sense of selfhood that re-signifies difference under a new name. The fact that many of the interviews refer to a moment in which the subject could *name* her or his 'difference' is significant. The popular narrative of lesbian/gay selfhood commonly posits a moment of *encounter* with discourses of sexuality which present a name for minority identityhood; for example Valerie Jenness writes of the case of a woman who, in encountering a lesbian magazine, *The Ladder*, in a magazine shop in Greenwich Village, New York, suddenly found access to a "legitimate universe" and subsequently adopted a 'lesbian' subjectivity (Jenness, 1992, p. 70). Similarly, William Leap points to the ways in which young people, who have later identified as 'gay', often recall a moment of 'first encounter' with sexuality through graffiti and fundamentalist christian tracts against homosexuality (Leap, 1996, pp. 75, 126-131). The ability to

name one's desire and identity—which may be more accessible today to a younger person through broadcast and online media depictions—is given always as a recognition of selfhood, a relieving if anxiety-provoking acknowledgment of what one has always been.

However, once we look at such moments of encounter from a critical perspective, rather than seeing these childhood memories as proof of essential sexuality in a temporal trajectory from childhood onwards, these can be understood as memory re-signified in accord with a discourse that was 'accessed' later. By this, I mean a discourse which compels the speaking of past events in the language of the hetero/homo binary and the contemporary understanding of sexuality as fixed, essential and gendered. Within a framework of performativity, one is compelled to cite, perform and stabilise categories, names and knowledges of identity (Butler, 1990) in order to fulfil a cultural demand for belonging and social participation (Cover, 2000; Cover, 2002) and in the encounter with the discursive codes of performativity, the subject is compelled to produce a trajectory that led him or her to that discourse in the first place. Stuart Hall suggests that the terms of identity are always pointed in the two directions of past and future: "mythically it constructs and invests its past" (Hall, 1996, p. 132). Part of this production of a performative self involves producing the past through a resignification of memories within a framework of demands for conformity (Scott, 1995, p. 10) and the avoidance of self ambiguity (Offord & Cantrell, 1999, p. 209-210). Alexander Düttmann provides a useful trope in exploring the political/social notion of representation through the possibility of *re-cognition*, of the iterability of cognition and understanding, indicating that in order to fulfil the demand to be recognised, one is re-recognised (Düttmann, 1997, p. 31). That is, at the moment where one is able to 'put a name' to one's minority sexuality through recognising oneself, there is a necessary act of *re-cognition* or re-thinking, re-configuring, re-organising the past in order that the present self is thinkable as a coherent, always-having-

had-been queer subject. The memory of difference as a child is now re-recognised or re-thought through discourses of sexuality. The close childhood same-sex friendship, which may have meant one thing once, now *signifies* that 'I was *always* gay'. The isolation one felt as a child or the inability of the boy to play football now signifies 'I was therefore *always* different, I was therefore *always* gay'. In the adoption of the language of lesbian/gay sexuality, the subject recognises herself, but *only* because it is a re-cognition of the past in order to *produce* that recognition; a re-cognition of the past in order to produce the fiction of a present and self-present subject.

As Plummer has pointed out, we 'tell' sexual stories not to reveal some sort of truth about our sexual lives, but to turn ourselves into socially organised biographical objects (Plummer, 1995, p. 34). Ultimately, the subject is required to recognise the self—in a *retrospect* which is denied—in order to disavow the non-foundation of subjectivity and the moment of becoming that is governed by that 'encounter' with discourses of sexuality. As Butler has neatly argued, the "'I' emerges upon the condition that it deny its formation in dependency, the conditions of its own possibility" (Butler, 1997, pp. 9-10). This re-cognition, the re-remembering or re-writing of memory through a particular discursive stance is thus part of constitution of the self that establishes, in Butler's terms, an inner identity core, unifying the past and the present in linear time, and covering over the possibility of construction in order to perform as an intelligible, coherent and recognisable queer self within the demands of Enlightenment subjectivity. Performative selfhood depends on repetition, which of course is not a set of segmented repeated acts, but an ongoing production or process of selfhood: "a subject only remains a subject through a reiteration or re-articulation of itself as a subject" (Butler, 1997, p. 99). An element of the repetition of performance occurs backwards through time in the resignification of memory. Rather than recognising oneself in the discourse, or recognising the memory as 'having always been'

this identity without the proper name by which to articulate it, the memorial past is re-recognised, re-configured, re-signified in order to further stabilise the reiterative play of the identity.

### Author Note

Dr Rob Cover is senior lecturer in the School of Humanities at The University of Adelaide. He researches and publishes on digital media theory, queer youth suicide and media/cultural studies.

### References

- Ahmed, S. (2004). *The cultural politics of emotion*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.
- Butler, J. (1990). *Gender trouble: Feminism and the subversion of identity*. London & New York: Routledge.
- Butler, J. (1997). *The psychic life of power: Theories in subjection*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.
- Cover, R. (2000). First contact: Queer theory, sexual identity, and 'mainstream' film. *International Journal of Sexuality and Gender Studies*, 5(1), 71-89.
- Cover, R. (2002). Re-sourcing queer subjectivities: Sexual identity and lesbian/gay community media. *Media International Australia*, 103, 109-123.
- Derrida, J. (1978). *Writing and difference*. Trans. A. Bass. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Donohoe, S. (1998). *Out there: A sexual health guide for young gay men*. Sydney, NSW: The Australasian College of Sexual Health Physicians & the Australian Federation of AIDS Organisations.
- Düttmann, A. G. (1997). The culture of polemic: Misrecognizing recognition. Trans. N. Walker. *Radical Philosophy*, 81, 27-34.
- Epstein, S. (1987). Gay politics, ethnic identity: The limits of social constructionism. *Socialist Review*. 17(3-4), 9-48.
- Foucault, M. (1977). *Language, counter-memory, practice: Selected essays and in-*

- terviews*. Ed. D. F. Bouchard, Trans. Bouchard & S. Simon. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.
- Freud, S. (1979). A child is being beaten. *Penguin Freud Library*, 10. London: Penguin.
- Freud, S. (1984). A note upon the mystic writing-pad. *Penguin Freud Library*, 11. London: Penguin.
- Freud, S. (1985). Civilization and its discontents. *Penguin Freud Library*, 10. London: Penguin.
- Fuery, P. (1995). *Theories of desire*. Melbourne: Melbourne University Press.
- Goggin, M. (1993). Gay and lesbian adolescence. In S. Moore & D. Rosenthal (Eds.) *Sexuality in adolescence*. London and New York: Routledge.
- Gray, M L. (ed.) (1999). *In your face: Stories from the lives of queer youth*. New York: Harrington Park Press.
- Hall, S. (1996). Politics of identity. In T. Ranger et al. (Eds.) *Culture, identity and politics: Ethnic minorities in Britain*. Aldershot, UK: Avebury.
- Jameson, F. (1985). Postmodernism and consumer society. In H. Foster (Ed.) *Postmodern culture*. London: Pluto Press.
- Jenness, V. (1992). Coming out: Lesbian identities and the categorization problem. In K. Plummer (Ed.) *Modern homosexuality: Fragments of lesbian and gay experience*. London and New York: Routledge.
- Johnson, M. (1991). The imaginative basis of meaning and cognition. In S. Küchler & W. Melion (Eds.) *Images of memory: On remembering and representation*. Washington & London: Smithsonian Institution Press.
- Lacan, J. (1968). *The language of the self: The function of language in psychoanalysis*. Trans. A. Wilden. Baltimore & London: Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Leap, W. L. (1996). *Word's out: Gay men's English*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Melion, W. & Küchler, S. (1991). Introduction: Memory, cognition, and image production. In S. Küchler & W. Melion (Eds.) *Images of memory: On remembering and representation*. Washington & London: Smithsonian Institution Press.
- Miller, N. (1995). *Out of the past: Gay and lesbian history from 1869 to the present*. London: Vintage.
- Offord, B. & Cantrell, L. (1999). Unfixed in a fixated world: Identity, sexuality, race and culture. In P. A. Jackson & G. Sullivan (Eds.) *Multicultural queer: Australian narratives*. New York & London: Haworth Press.
- Plummer, K. (1995). *Telling sexual stories: Power, change and social worlds*. London & New York: Routledge.
- Probyn, E. (1996). *Outside belongings*. New York & London: Routledge.
- Probyn, E. (2005). *Blush: Faces of shame*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Read, M. (1996). Our media, ourselves: Identity, culture, and the experience of super media. In M. J. Carter (Ed.) *Society and the media: A collection of essays*. New York: HarperCollins.
- Roberts, I. (1999). No big deal. In E. Shale (Ed.) *Inside out: An Australian collection of coming out stories*. Melbourne: Bookman Press.
- Rosario, V. (2003). New gene theory rests on bad science. *The Gay & Lesbian Review Worldwide*, 10(6), 34-36.
- Scott, J. (1995). Multiculturalism and the politics of identity. In J. Rajchman (Ed.) *The identity in question*. New York & London: Routledge.
- Sedgwick, E. K. (1993). *Tendencies*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Shale, E. (ed.) (1999). *Inside out: An Australian collection of coming out stories*. Melbourne: Bookman Press.
- Simpson, M. (1996). Gay dream believer: Inside the gay underwear cult. In M. Simpson (Ed.) *Anti-gay*. London: Freedom/Cassell.
- Walsh-Childers, K. & Brown, J. D. (1993). Adolescents' acceptance of sex-role stereotypes and television viewing. In B. S. Greenburg et al. (Eds.) *Media, sex and the adolescent*. Cresskill, NJ: Hampton Press.
- Welzer, H. (2010). Re-narrations: How pasts change in conversational remembering. *Memory Studies*, 3(1), 5-17.



## **BREAKING THE SHELL: A STUDY ON TURKISH STUDENTS' REACTIONS TOWARDS SEXUAL IDENTITY ISSUES IN THE LANGUAGE CLASSROOM**

MUSTAFA TEKİN

### **Abstract**

*The present study is an investigation into the use of sexual identity issues in an English as a Foreign Language (EFL) speaking class in the Turkish context with the purpose of describing how a group of Turkish learners felt about discussing sexual identities with accompanying gay-themed materials. A quantitative research methodology was used. The results indicate that Turkish learners do not see homosexuality as an unspeakable topic. The students had a generally positive attitude towards the use of gay-themed materials and activities in the language classroom. The results also indicate that such discussions make a positive impact on students' perceptions of non-heterosexual sexual identities.*

**Keywords:** EFL speaking class, queer pedagogy, homosexuality, gay, taboo

### **Introduction**

Lesbian, gay, bisexual trans and questioning (hereafter LGBTQ) issues have become an ever-increasing part of our lives due to, for example, news about same-sex marriage presented in the media and gay-themed TV shows. Yet despite life being saturated with queer images, the inclusion of curriculum with LGBTQ content still lags behind (Loutzenheiser & Macintosh, 2004). There has, however, been growing interest in making teaching practices and curricula more inclusive and affirmative of LGBTQ identities and issues across a range of educational areas (Nelson, 1993). Numerous scholars believe that it is time for a curricular reform (Evans & Saxe, 1996) for the purpose of addressing real global necessities

(Thanasoulas, 2001). This is especially the case in the context of foreign language teaching (as was the focus of the present study) which, it has been argued, should foster critical awareness of social life (Small, 2003). Yet despite this growing recognition of LGBTQ issues in education, there are still relatively few studies in the field and much more is needed (Harrison, 2008).

Whilst it has been suggested that educators should give attention to the rights, needs and inclusion of LGBTQ students as well as to the education of all students on issues related to sexual and gender identity (e.g., Vandrick, 2001), these efforts are challenged by queer theory. In terms of queer theory, it is important to be clear how the term 'queer' is here used. Warner (1993) suggests that the meaning of *queer* is typically two-fold: 1) the word is often used to encompass LGBTQ people as a collective, and 2) the word *queer* in queer theory is used to challenge clear-cut notions of sexual identity, and blur the limits between and among identity categories. In terms of the latter use of the word, 'queer theory' is a constantly evolving approach to examining gender and sexual norms (Synder & Broadway, 2004). Nevertheless, it is possible to summarise that queer theory is primarily about disrupting normalised ways of thinking and living (Kumashiro, 2003) by entertaining the unthinkable (Morris, 2005). The underlying idea is that identities can be fluid (Vandrick, 2001). Therefore, rather than legitimising subordinate sexual identities *per se*, queer theory investigates all sexual identities with the aim of questioning how norms are constructed as such.

The notion of queer as opening gender and

sexuality to challenge or interrogation has been more recently applied in the development of 'queer pedagogy', which has only recently gained popularity among educational researchers (Kumashiro, 2000; Shlasko, 2005). It is suggested that such an approach has important implications for education (Britzman, 1995; Blackburn & Buckley, 2005). Queer pedagogy challenges all students and teachers regardless of their sexual identities (Winans, 2006), and by doing so, promises exciting possibilities for educational practice (Shlasko, 2005). Asking questions like what is normal and how we know that something is normal can help us understand our lives in general and more specifically, our teaching, our learning and our questioning, and thus can provide major contributions to educational outcomes (Dilley, 1999).

Of course queer theory and queer pedagogies have been criticised on the grounds that queer theorists ignore the real world and its inhabitants (Smith, 2003). Furthermore, researchers like Dilley (1999) argue that it is difficult to put queer theory into practice. Similarly, Bredbeck (1995) claims that queer pedagogy is impossible, because queer theory cannot create a system to teach a questioning of the world. The only alternative, according to Britzman (1995), is to promote "pedagogies of inclusion". Hamilton (1998 in Blackburn & Buckley, 2005) claims that teaching inclusion provides students with opportunities to challenge and be challenged. Yet despite these concerns that a queer pedagogy is impossible, and given that queer theory promotes inquiry of all sexual identities by reexamining differences and what they mean to us (Kumashiro, 2003), it may indeed be possible to conceive of a queer pedagogy as one that promotes inclusion at the same time as it questions the terms on which inclusion itself is offered. In other words, and as opposed to the simple inclusion of LGBTQ issues in course materials and curricula (which may do very little to actually challenge norms of gender and sexuality), queer theory might facilitate examination of the ways in which inclusion is offered and the norms that accompany it. As such, it would

appear important not simply to assess the impact of curricula involving LGBTQ issues upon students, but also to examine what knowledge is gained from such curricula and whether this necessarily repeats or alters popular understandings of gender and sexuality.

Schall and Kauffmann (2003) suggest that discussions on homosexuality should be placed under the broader umbrella of diversity together with discussions of family, relationships, and discrimination. Vandrick (2001) suggests that the best way to introduce sexual identity issues in the ESL classroom is to do it within the broader context of fighting any form of discrimination including racism and sexism. As Vandrick further suggests, texts, songs or videos about homosexuality might help to give dominant group (i.e., heterosexual) students a clearer understanding of the many factors that shape the lives of LGBTQ people. The present study was designed to do just this, though before reporting the findings previous research in the area of teaching gender and sexuality issues in the context of a language classroom is first presented.

### **Previous Literature**

Addressing questions of sexuality in the language classroom seems to constitute a valuable language learning activity for students due to the fact that EFL classes provide a lot of opportunities to bring real life issues to the classroom, and that language learning cannot be possible without presenting the target language in meaningful contexts. In fact, as Dumas (2008) suggests, "the ESL classroom can become the one place where learners do not feel shy or afraid to explore and negotiate their identities" (p. 9). Schweers (1997) points out that sexual identity issues needs to be incorporated into English-as-a-Second-Language (ESL) teaching in an effort to promote awareness, positive self-concept, and healthy attitudes, and to reduce stereotyping. However, Blackburn and Buckley's (2005) study shows that the majority of students feel themselves deprived of issues pertaining to sexuality merely because their teachers do not

open such issues in their classes. In fact, their study reveals that only a small number of teachers are willing to teach LGBTQ material in their classes. Nevertheless, there are a number of researchers who have successfully included such material in their classroom practices as discussed below.

The first study that will be mentioned here is by Nelson (1999). She observed students' reactions during three different English as a Second Language (ESL) classes for two consecutive weeks while the topic of sexual identities was discussed by carefully selected teachers. In addition to her observations, interviews were carried out with the participating teachers and about half of the students, all of which revealed positive attitudes towards a class discussion of the topic of sexual identities. Similarly, Benesch (1999) had a successful discussion on the murder of a gay university student with her English for Academic Purpose class.

In his study, Schweers (1997) recommends a thematic approach alongside the communicative approach to language teaching. He then describes a number of activities that can be incorporated into this framework, including conversational activities, relevant readings, films on homosexuality and writing exercises. Schweers reports on the positive results of using this framework and the related activities in his language classroom.

O'Mochain (2006) used local queer narratives in an EFL classroom as a part of a study conducted in Japan. This study demonstrates that using local queer narratives as teaching material may be an effective way of exploring issues of sexuality, gender and language, especially within contexts in which open discussion of sexual orientation may seem challenging and unfamiliar.

Curran (2006) tried to challenge heteronormativity in his work by answering and analysing students' heteronormative questions in an Australian ESL class. Curran

achieved this aim by reframing a question such as *Is homosexuality a choice or are people born that way?* to *What leads people to think they're straight or gay?* Furthermore, on the level of policy development against heteronormativity in schools, Mitchell and Ward (2010) report on the positive effects of developing a model of best practice around school ethos and sexuality education for the purpose of meeting the needs of all parents in a primary school in Inner Melbourne. The school is reported to have established a continuing dialogue with all its families, which produced positive results in terms of integrating same-sex parents to the school policies.

Epstein (2000) conducted a study on a group of 9-10 year-old learners who read gay and lesbian themed passages in small groups. Epstein underlines the importance of small and whole group discussions which can facilitate thinking as well as feeling. She further argues that the teacher should always play the role of facilitator during these discussions in an honest and intellectual way. Similarly, Schall and Kauffmann (2003) made use of literature to introduce lesbian and gay content to fourth and fifth graders. More specifically, they read gay and lesbian themed picture books in small groups and did a lot of related activities like talking about family relations etc. This study together with the Epstein's study shows very clearly that lesbian and gay topics can be used in the classrooms effectively even with very young children.

Finally, in their study, Smith and Drake (2001) drew attention to the discrimination and isolation felt by homosexual teens in connection with the abuses and high suicide rates among them.

### **The Present Study**

The present study was an investigation of the use of sexual identity issues and gay-themed materials in an EFL speaking class at a Turkish University. Unlike previous studies, and rather than being merely inclusive, a more compre-

hensive method of inquiry driven by queer theory was chosen. The study sought answers to the following two research questions: 1) What do Turkish students think about homosexuality in general and more specifically its inclusion in English speaking classes; and in what ways their thoughts will change after several homosexuality-themed lessons accompanied by a large variety of gay-themed materials? 2) How do Turkish students react to the use of various gay-themed materials in the language classroom?

### **Methodology**

#### ***Setting and participants***

A total of 68 students (58 females and 10 males all aged between 17 and 20, participated in the study. Not all of the participants were heterosexual, and in fact one of the students was openly gay, however there was no means of knowing the exact number of non-heterosexual students, since in Turkey a great majority of LGBTQ hide their sexual orientation. The participants were all undergraduate students studying in the preparatory class of an English Language Training (ELT) department at a medium-sized state university in western Turkey. This school receives students from families living all around Turkey.

#### ***Procedures***

The study was carried out as a part of the compulsory English speaking course. As the lecturer of this course, the author had designed a course on gender and sexuality with content on a variety of topics including homosexuality, religious beliefs, political views, pre-marriage sex, pornography, prostitution, and AIDS. Following the course outline, each week a different topic was brought to the classroom for discussion. Therefore, the students knew beforehand that the topic would be sexual identities.

The study was carried out during normal class hours in two different three-hour sessions (a total of 6 class hours) on two successive days.

Each session lasted 135 minutes including a fifteen-minute break. Neither attendance nor participation was compulsory, and the students were allowed to leave the classroom at any phase of the discussion as long as they filled a short form afterwards clearly explaining the reason why they wanted to leave.

Before the sessions, the students were given a survey for the purpose of determining their initial attitudes towards homosexuality and more specifically its use as an issue in the classroom.

The first session started with a picture slideshow of gay symbols. For the great majority of the participants, it was the first time that they saw these symbols. Following this introduction, they commented on a picture of two men holding hands, similar to the discussion on two women walking hand-in-hand in Nelson's (1999) study. The students were then asked what their reaction would be if such a thing happened around them. They, then, read a short text on gay terminology to understand the differences between terms like *gay*, *lesbian*, *straight*, *transgender*, *queer*, *LGBTQ*, *coming out*, etc.

The next activity was a discussion on statistical information about homosexuality and homosexuals. They discussed what these statistics told them about the lives of LGBTQ people and whether they approved of LGBTQ people. Following this, the students were given a handout with two columns. On the left column, they read conservative views on homosexuality, and on the right column a number of liberal views. They then discussed in pairs to what extent they agreed or disagreed with these contradictory views. The conservative view was supported with a five-minute documentary on Sodom, and the liberal views were supported with a five-minute video about love-at-first sight between two lesbians. After watching the videos, the students expressed their own views on the topic freely. The first session ended with two gay-themed poems written by a Turkish gay boy and a Turkish lesbian. The assignment was to write two

paragraphs: one on how life would be if they were homosexual, and the other on how they would react if their best friends came out to them.

The second session, which was held on the following day, started with a slideshow of posters belonging to several gay-themed movies, and continued with a very short scene from a Turkish gay-themed movie. Some of the students were surprised to see their favorite actor starring in one of these movies. After this video activity a two-page text about Turkish gay culture was handed out. Students read about homosexuality in the Turkish culture, gay-friendly venues in Turkey, Turkish LGBTQ organizations and students' clubs at some Turkish universities. Meanwhile, scenes from Turkish gay life were continuously reflected on the screen through a data projector. The students finally read a paragraph about a Turkish gay couple and their life in order to discuss what they would do if a gay couple moved to their neighborhood.

Next, after reading a newspaper report on a gay celebrity wedding ceremony, the students talked about gay marriage and sought an answer to the question: 'Should Turkey allow gay marriages and if it did, what would happen?' During this discussion too, they continuously saw gay couples with their adopted children, holding hands, kissing etc on the screen. This group discussion was followed by a whole class discussion on the same topic. The lesson ended with a cartoon on gay marriage.

At the end of the session the students were given the same survey that they had been given at the very beginning but with an extra part added in order to learn about their reactions to the activities and materials used in the sessions.

### ***Materials and Instruments***

A variety of materials were chosen to present an image of homosexuality. The materials included different pictures of LGBTQ people kissing, holding hands, raising children etc., a

popular song about the feelings of a girl who desperately fell in love with a gay boy, posters of and scenes from famous gay-themed movies, a cartoon on gay marriage, short texts presenting opposing views on the issue an illustrated report on a gay couple's wedding ceremony, a text containing statistical information on homosexuality, a short documentary video about Sodom, and finally pictures and texts presenting Turkish gay culture. None of the materials used in the study contained nudity or pornographic elements.

In the survey, whether it was the first time they attended a class discussion on homosexuality, to which question, they unanimously said 'yes'. There were also questions about how comfortable it would be for them to talk about homosexuality with their parents, friends and in a class discussion. The students were also asked about how knowledgeable they were on the topic and how successful a lesson on homosexuality would be in terms of motivating them by creating an enjoyable learning environment. The same items were put in the post-survey as well as a new part with the purpose of comparing the students' initial and post attitudes and reactions towards homosexuality, its use in the classroom and the accompanying gay-themed materials. All of the items, except for the ones in the part they evaluated the gay-themed materials, were in the format of a 5-point Likert Scale from strongly agree to strongly disagree. The part which asked the participants how appropriate they found each gay-themed material was in the format of a 7-point Likert Scale from 1 (extremely inappropriate) to 7 (extremely appropriate). The students answered both parts in the pre-survey and the post-survey.

The data presented in this article consist of descriptive analysis of the participants' responses to a number of survey items related to their attitudes towards homosexuality in general and more specifically its use in their speaking classes with accompanying gay-themed stories, pictures, videos, reading texts, songs, etc. The participants' initial atti-

tudes were measured with the help of a questionnaire. The same questionnaire but with an extra part was given at the end of two sessions to determine possible attitudinal changes. Descriptive statistics as well as paired samples t-tests were utilized to analyze the collected data on SPSS for Windows 15.0.

### Results

Findings related to Research Question 1: *What do Turkish students think about homosexuality in general and more specifically its inclusion in English speaking classes; and in what ways their thoughts will change after several homosexuality-themed lessons accompanied with a large variety of gay-themed materials?*

The two items given in Table 1 below clearly indicate that homosexuality is still seen as a taboo topic in Turkey according to 85.3 % of the participants. The decrease from 85.3 % to 66.2 % after the sessions were held is statistically significant ( $p \leq .05$ ). The second item in this table is related to the first one in that it questioned whether or not the students' concerns for moral values was the reason for exclusion of the topic of homosexuality from schools. According to 60.3 % of the students (73.5 % in the post-survey, indicating a significant change at  $p \leq .01$  level), discussing in the classroom does not damage moral values.

Table 2 (over page) presents the analysis of 5 items related to how comfortable the participants were with homosexuality in their personal lives. These 5 items are presented together due to a high level of parallel reliability (Cronbach's alpha of .78) among them.

A reading of Table 2 reveals that the majority of the students do not see homosexuality as an unspeakable topic. The percentage, 63.2, reflects the views of the students who either said disagree (44.1) or totally disagree (19.1) to this item, which in sum increased to 72 % after the two sessions.

A look at the next three items which compare students' comfort level to talking about homosexuality in different contexts, however, shows significant differences in terms of how speakable they found homosexuality. Before the sessions, 64.7 % of the participants reported that they could not talk about homosexuality with their families. After the sessions this number decreased to 55.8 %, which was in fact a significant change ( $p \leq .05$ ) but it is still relatively high. Answers to the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> items reveal that the participants are much more comfortable with talking about homosexuality with their friends (85.3 %, which becomes 89.7 % after the lessons) than they are with their parents (16.2 %), and they can more easily discuss this topic in class than at

Table 1: Participants' views on the taboo nature of homosexuality in Turkey

Item	SA	A	U	D	SD	Mean	Std. Dev.	Mean df	Sig. (2-tailed)
Homosexuality is seen as an unspeakable (taboo) topic in Turkey									
Before	25.0	60.3	7.4	7.4	0.0	3.17			
After	11.8	54.4	7.4	26.5	0.0	3.57	1.45	.39	.028*
Discussing homosexuality in the classroom damages moral values									
Before	7.4	13.2	19.1	35.3	25.0	3.57			
After	0.0	7.4	19.1	38.2	35.3	4.01	.99	.44	.001**

(SA= Strongly Agree, A= Agree, U= Undecided, D= Disagree, SD= Strongly Disagree)

home. Initially, 39.7% of the participants found it appropriate to speak about homosexuality in the classroom and the number significantly increased up to 70.6 % after the discussions.

The results presented in Table 2 clearly show that the participants started to feel much more comfortable with the topic of homosexuality after the lessons. Especially, the increase (from 39.7 % to 70.6 %) in the number of the students who believed that they could talk about homosexuality during a class discussion is quite noteworthy as well as statistically significant at  $p \leq .01$  level. Another very important finding is the significant ( $p \leq .01$ ) increase from 10.3 % to 76.4 % in the number

of the participants who believed that they knew a lot of things about homosexuality. In making sense of the data from Table 1 and Table 2, it is clear that the class discussions on homosexuality resulted in a positive attitude change towards the taboo nature of homosexuality for some students who previously thought that it was an unspeakable topic.

Different from Table 2, Table 3 (over page) focuses on the participants' views on the use of homosexuality as a discussion topic in their speaking class. Just like the items in the previous table, the items in this table also have a high level of parallel reliability (Cronbach's alpha of .82).

Table 2: Items related to the participants' level of comfort with homosexuality

<i>Item</i>	<i>SA</i>	<i>A</i>	<i>U</i>	<i>D</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>Std. Dev</i>	<i>Mean df.</i>	<i>Sig. (2-tailed)</i>
I see homosexuality as an unspeakable (taboo) topic.									
<i>Before</i>	4.4	16.2	16.2	44.1	19.1	3.57			
<i>After</i>	2.9	14.7	10.3	44.1	27.9	3.79	1.14	.22	.117
I can talk about homosexuality with my family.									
<i>Before</i>	1.5	14.7	19.1	27.9	36.8	2.16			
<i>After</i>	2.9	20.9	20.6	25	30.9	2.39	.91	.23	.038*
I can talk about homosexuality with my friends.									
<i>Before</i>	35.3	50.0	4.4	5.9	4.4	4.05			
<i>After</i>	35.3	54.4	5.9	0.0	4.4	4.16	.75	.10	.265
I can talk about homosexuality during a class discussion									
<i>Before</i>	13.2	26.5	30.9	29.4	13.2	3.10			
<i>After</i>	29.1	44.1	8.8	14.7	2.9	3.82	.92	.72	.000**
I know a lot of things about homosexuality.									
<i>Before</i>	1.5	8.8	14.7	51.5	23.5	2.13			
<i>After</i>	8.8	67.6	14.7	8.8	0.0	3.76	1.04	1.63	.000**

The findings presented in Table 3 reveal that the majority of the students perceived nothing wrong with bringing homosexuality to the classroom as a discussion topic. In fact, before the lessons 76.4 % of the participants thought that homosexuality could be an interesting topic for their speaking class, and after the lessons the number of those who found homosexuality interesting increased significantly ( $p \leq .05$ ) to 82.4 %. It seems that there were initially some reservations about the appropriateness of homosexuality as a discussion topic because the analysis of the second item clearly indicates that initially only 45.6 % of the participants found the topic of homosexuality appropriate for a class discussion. It should be noted that there was a large group of undecided students (39.7 %) and a small group (14.7 %) who thought that the topic would be inappropriate. After the sessions,

though, these numbers changed in a positive way and the number of students who approved homosexuality in the classroom increased from 45.6 % to 60.3 % (though a paired samples t-test showed that the change was not statistically significant).

The 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> items questioned what the students thought about the motivational aspect of homosexuality. The findings from the pre-survey show the students' lack of belief in the motivational power of the topic, because only 14.7 % of the participants agreed that homosexuality had the potential to motivate them whereas 52.8% stated the opposite. It is worth noting here that one third of the participants were undecided. Similarly, only 29.9 % of the participants thought that lessons on homosexuality would be enjoyable. However, post-survey data point to a significant change

Table 3: Participants' views on the use of homosexuality in their speaking class

<i>Item</i>	<i>SA</i>	<i>A</i>	<i>U</i>	<i>D</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>Std . Dev</i>	<i>Mean df</i>	<i>Sig. (2-tailed)</i>
Homosexuality is an interesting topic for my speaking class									
<i>Before</i>	27.9	48.5	7.4	14.7	1.5	3.86			
<i>After</i>	30.9	51.5	11.8	5.9	0.0	4.07	.80	.20	.038*
Homosexuality is an appropriate topic for my speaking class									
<i>Before</i>	16.2	29.4	39.7	10.3	4.4	3.42			
<i>After</i>	20.6	39.7	22.1	16.2	1.5	3.61	.98	.19	.113
The topic of homosexuality has the potential to motivate me									
<i>Before</i>	5.9	8.8	32.4	44.1	8.8	2.58			
<i>After</i>	11.8	26.5	32.4	23.5	5.9	3.14	.98	.55	.000**
The topic of homosexuality has the potential to create an enjoyable English lesson									
<i>Before</i>	8.8	21.1	41.2	23.5	4.4	3.07	1.1		
<i>After</i>	19.1	44.1	19.1	13.2	4.4	3.60	1	.52	.000**
It is ok for teachers to open a class discussion on homosexuality									
<i>Before</i>	8.8	45.6	29.4	11.8	4.4	3.42	1.4		
<i>After</i>	20.6	48.5	17.6	13.2	0.0	3.76	0	.39	.023*
It is ok for English textbooks to have units on homosexuality									
<i>Before</i>	11.8	45.6	27.9	13.2	1.5	3.52			
<i>After</i>	16.2	44.1	23.5	13.2	2.9	3.57	.78	.04	.643

in the students' attitudes. After the lessons, 37.3 % of the students thought that homosexuality could be a motivating topic in fact, and 63.2 % of them reported believing that homosexuality had the potential to create an enjoyable lesson and the change in both items was statistically significant ( $p \leq .01$ ).

The last two items in this group questioned what the students' thoughts about teachers' right to bring the topic of homosexuality to the classroom as well as the publishers' right to put a unit on homosexuality in English textbooks they publish. The findings indicate that the participants were quite positive on both issues even before the lessons. The majority (54.4 %) believed that it was OK for a teacher to open a class discussion on homosexuality

and that there was nothing wrong with the inclusion of homosexuality as a separate topic in English textbooks (57.4 %). After the lessons, this positive attitude became even clearer with the increase from 54.4 % to 69.1 % and from 57.4 to 60.3 % respectively. The results of a paired samples t-test indicated that the increase in the number of the students who thought that it was OK for a teacher to open a discussion on homosexuality in the classroom was significant ( $p \leq .05$ ), whereas it appears that the lessons did not affect the students' thoughts related to the inclusion of homosexuality in English textbooks significantly.

The following figure, together with the table beneath it, present the participants' responses

Figure 1: Participants' responses to the survey item measuring their level of satisfaction with the topic homosexuality in their speaking class.

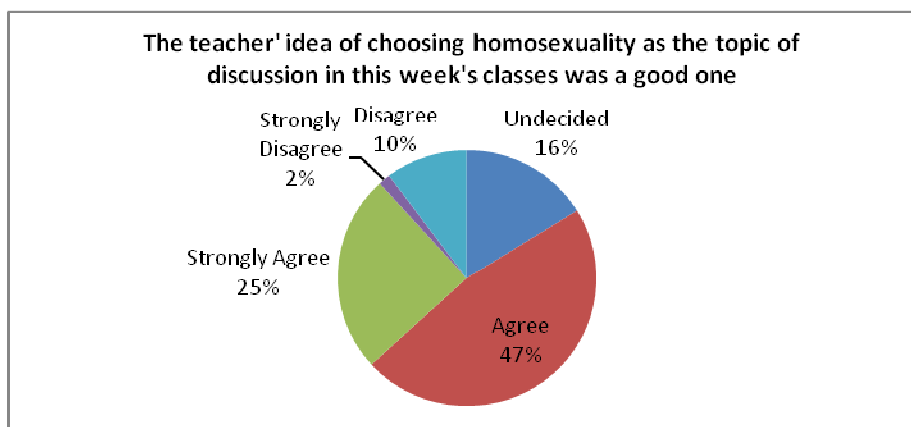


Table 4: Participants' views on the lessons on homosexuality

Item	SA	A	U	D	SD	Mean	Std. Dev.
I enjoyed this week's lessons on homosexuality	30.9	45.6	7.4	11.8	4.4	3.86	1.11
I learned many new things in this week's lessons on homosexuality	58.8	38.2	1.5	1.5	0.0	4.54	.07
The discussion on homosexuality contributed to the improvement of my English	17.6	30.9	29.4	19.1	2.9	3.41	1.08
During the class discussion, I openly expressed my views on homosexuality	35.3	42.6	7.4	13.2	1.5	3.97	1.05
The teacher should go on using the topic of homosexuality in his courses with his other/ future students.	26.5	42.6	20.6	10.3	1.5	3.83	.97
The lessons were propaganda of homosexuality	1.5	0.0	16.2	25	57.4	4.36	.86

to several items related to how they found their first experience with a class discussion on homosexuality. Figure 1 will be of great help to answer that question because it clearly displays the satisfaction of 72 % of the participants with the discussion topic of the week. For a more detailed discussion on the participants' responses to the survey items related to the lessons on homosexuality, see Table 4.

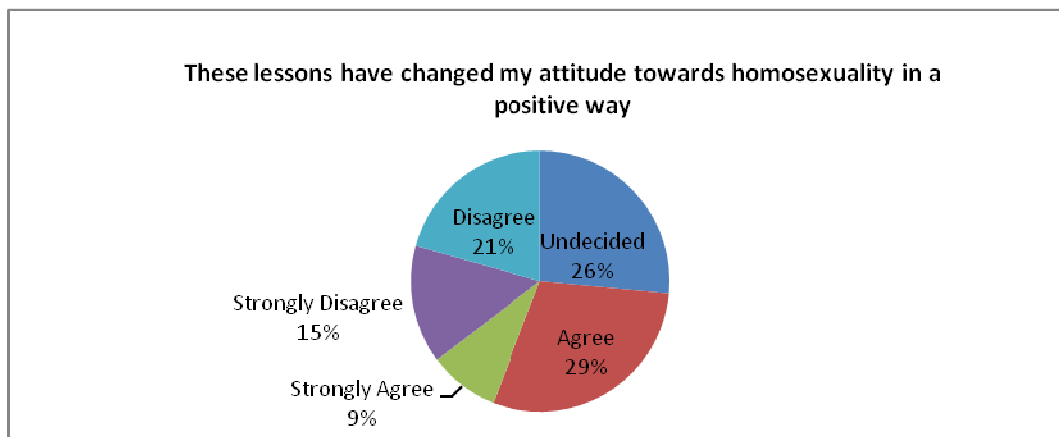
A reading of Table 4, in which six items with an internal reliability of .83 (Cronbach's alpha) are presented together, reveals that 76.5 % of the participants agreed that they enjoyed the lessons on homosexuality and 89 % of them reported that they learned a lot of new things. Almost half of the students (48.5 %) also found these lessons useful for the improvement of their target language skills. These findings are hardly surprising given the fact that 77.6 % of the participants said they were able to express their opinions openly. It seems the topic of homosexuality was not actually unspeakable for them after all. Furthermore, none of the students (except for one) thought that the lessons were propaganda of homosexuality; and except for eight students (11.8

%), all of the participants unanimously agreed that the teacher should go on using the topic of homosexuality in his lessons with future students.

Figure 2 below is quite meaningful in summarising the effect of the study on the students' attitudes towards homosexuality. According to Figure 2, the lessons on homosexuality were effective in changing the attitudes of 38 % of the students towards this topic in a positive way whereas almost the equal number of students disagreed with this claim, and 26 % of the students were undecided.

Table 5 (over page) presents a list of all the materials used throughout the discussions on homosexuality. In this table, students' pre and post thoughts about the appropriateness of each item are given together with the significance levels in order to provide a better view about in what direction the students' perceptions changed and how significant this change was for each material. The items in this table were listed according to the participants' initial responses starting from the item they saw the least appropriate.

Figure 2: Effects of homosexuality-themed lessons on participants' attitudes towards homosexuality



TEKİN: BREAKING THE SHELL

Table 5: Participants' evaluation of each gay-themed material according to how appropriate they found it for use in the classroom.

Item	Before the Lessons on Homosexuality				After the Lessons on Homosexuality				Paired Samples t-test results		
	No	Unde- cided	Yes	Mean	No	Unde- cided	Yes	Mean	Std. Dev	Mean df.	Sig. (2-tailed)
<i>Pictures of gay men kissing</i>	58.8	17.7	23.5	2.89	50.0	13.2	36.8	3.45	1.25	.55	.000**
<i>Pictures of lesbians kissing</i>	52.9	19.1	18.0	3.20	48.5	14.7	36.8	3.54	1.29	.33	.036*
<i>Writing homework: 'How would your life be different if you were gay?'</i>	52.9	14.7	32.4	3.30	32.4	8.8	58.8	4.72	1.87	1.41	.000**
<i>Watching a short video about the love of two gay men</i>	44.1	8.8	47.1	3.97	35.3	13.2	51.5	4.38	1.37	.41	.016*
<i>Posters of gay-themed movies</i>	39.7	11.8	48.5	4.32	23.5	5.9	70.5	5.13	1.75	.80	.000**
<i>Watching a short video about the love of two lesbians</i>	39.7	11.8	51.5	4.16	30.8	11.8	57.4	4.58	1.51	.42	.024*
<i>Pictures of gay men holding hands</i>	36.7	11.8	51.5	4.48	32.4	7.4	60.3	4.76	1.45	.27	.118
<i>Pictures from a gay dating website showing profiles</i>	35.3	13.2	51.5	4.39	19.1	7.4	67.6	5.14	1.62	.75	.000**
<i>Question: 'what would you do if your best friend told you that s/he was a homosexual and loved you?'</i>	35.3	16.2	48.5	4.17	27.9	8.8	63.3	4.92	1.84	.75	.001**
<i>Pictures of lesbians holding hands</i>	33.8	11.8	54.4	4.63	29.4	8.8	61.8	4.92	1.35	.29	.070
<i>Being asked 'do you have a friend/relative who is gay?'</i>	33.8	13.2	53.0	4.44	29.4	13.2	57.4	4.82	1.49	.38	.039*
<i>Gay-themed songs and related activities</i>	29.4	10.3	60.3	4.70	20.6	7.4	72.0	5.29	1.46	.58	.002*
<i>Pictures of gay families with their adopted children</i>	27.9	17.6	54.5	4.15	35.3	11.8	52.9	4.48	1.56	-.07	.700
<i>Seeking an answer to the question 'what would you do if your son/daughter told you that s/he was a gay/lesbian?'</i>	27.9	19.1	53.0	4.55	23.5	5.9	70.6	5.02	1.98	.47	.036*
<i>Pictures of lesbian families with their adopted children</i>	25.0	17.6	57.4	4.76	29.4	11.8	58.8	4.82	1.70	.05	.776
<i>Pictures of street activities organized by homosexuals in Istanbul</i>	23.5	13.2	66.3	4.82	14.7	8.8	76.5	5.44	1.38	.61	.000**
<i>Pictures of homosexual symbols (rainbow flag, lambda etc.)</i>	22.1	11.8	66.1	5.13	10.3	7.4	82.4	5.76	1.43	.63	.001**
<i>Discussing the place of homosexuality in our daily lives</i>	22.1	11.8	66.1	5.22	14.7	8.8	76.5	5.61	1.40	.39	.023*
<i>Watching a funny cartoon about gay marriage and gay rights</i>	20.6	10.3	69.1	5.13	8.8	10.3	80.9	5.82	1.38	.69	.000**
<i>Watching a documentary about Sodom</i>	20.6	17.6	61.8	5.01	10.3	11.8	77.9	5.82	1.43	.80	.000**
<i>Poem about the feelings of a gay man</i>	20.6	10.3	69.1	5.26	14.7	8.8	76.5	5.57	1.49	.30	.094
<i>Discussing homosexuality and Islam</i>	19.1	4.4	76.5	5.54	19.1	0.0	80.9	5.63	1.37	.08	.600
<i>Discussing the place of homosexuality in Turkish culture</i>	17.6	7.4	75.0	5.50	13.2	5.9	80.9	5.83	1.37	.33	.047*
<i>Pictures of gay cafés, bars and restaurants in Istanbul</i>	14.7	10.3	75.0	5.25	11.7	7.4	80.9	5.66	1.13	.41	.004*
<i>Basic information about homosexual terminology</i>	14.7	10.3	75.0	5.38	16.2	7.4	76.5	5.67	1.29	.29	.065
<i>Pictures from a gay couple's Wedding Ceremony</i>	11.8	22.1	66.1	5.16	14.7	7.4	77.9	5.57	1.12	.41	.004*
<i>Information about gay life and places in Turkey</i>	11.8	10.3	77.9	5.67	10.3	7.4	82.4	5.92	1.47	.25	.168
<i>The life story of a gay couple</i>	11.8	11.8	76.5	5.52	20.6	5.9	73.5	5.47	1.55	.05	.756
<i>Reading different views both for and against homosexuality</i>	5.9	13.2	86.8	6.22	5.9	4.4	89.7	6.17	.99	.04	.717
<i>Statistical information</i>	5.9	5.9	88.2	6.04	7.4	7.4	85.3	5.97	.91	.07	.512

Table 5 (previous page) as a whole shows that the majority of the students did not display very negative attitudes towards the use of gay themed materials either before or after the sessions, although it seems that some of them had concerns at the beginning especially about visual materials. The table also shows that these lessons created positive attitudinal changes in students towards the use of gay themed materials and activities, and these changes were statistically significant in 20 out of 30 items. Most of the students who had serious concerns before the lessons about the use of certain materials and activities changed their opinions in a positive way after these materials and activities were actually used in the classroom without any problem.

A quick look at the table reveals that pictures of gays and lesbians kissing each other were found the least appropriate by the participants: pictures of gay men kissing each other were not approved by the 58.8 % of the participants at the beginning. Pictures of lesbians kissing were found less inappropriate (52.9 %) by the participants, which reminds Endres's (2005) claim that male homosexuality is perceived as more threatening than lesbianism. Both pictures of gay men and lesbians were found more appropriate after they were used during the sessions. In fact, the number of the students who found pictures of gay men kissing inappropriate decreased significantly to 50.0 % ( $p \leq .01$ ) and pictures of lesbians kissing to 48.5 % ( $p \leq .05$ ).

The writing homework that required students to imagine themselves as gays and lesbians was thought to be inappropriate by the majority (52.9 %) of the participants before the lessons, probably because of the high level of personalisation as Dellar (2006) puts it. After the lessons, those who found this activity inappropriate displayed a significant decrease to 32.4 % at  $p \leq .01$  level.

The videos about homosexual love and posters of gay and lesbian movies were also found inappropriate by different degrees initially, but after they were actually used in the classroom,

the students' attitudes changed in a positive way significantly as can be seen in the same table. The relatively high percentage (39.7 %) of those who initially thought that posters of homosexual themed movies would be inappropriate can be attributed to some misconceptions about gay movies (i.e., that they necessarily include pornography). After they saw that gay movies do not have to be pornographic, the number decreased to (23.5 %), which was statistically significant at  $p \leq .01$  level.

The participants' attitudes did not change significantly towards the following materials after they were used in the classroom: pictures of lesbians holding hands, pictures of gay and lesbian families with their adopted children, poems about the feelings of a homosexual, a discussion on the place of homosexuality in Islam, homosexual terminology, information about gay life in Turkey, life story of a Turkish gay couple, reading different views and statistical information about homosexuality. For the other materials and activities the change was significant as explained below.

A look at the bottom of the table where the items that were found the least inappropriate by the students shows the interesting fact that the majority of the students have always been comfortable with more intellectual activities like discussing, learning, reading about homosexuals. In fact, only a very small number of them found them inappropriate even before the lessons and their positive attitudes did not change at the end either, which is in striking contrast with the items that were initially found very inappropriate as given at the top of the table, because they were mostly visual (pictures, videos, posters etc.). Even if students' negative attitudes softened significantly after the lessons, the results show that they still displayed much more negative attitudes towards the use of visual materials than the use of materials like reading passages. Pictures from a gay wedding ceremony were an exception.

### Conclusions

Before drawing any conclusions, some limitations of the study need to be acknowledged. Firstly, this study was limited in scope and number of participants. Therefore, the findings of this study need to be verified with learners of all ages from different cultural and social backgrounds.

In spite of these limitations, this present study yielded significant results in terms of understanding student reactions to class discussions of sexual identity issues. Although Turkey's political regime is highly secular, the great majority of people (statistics say around 98%) are Muslims, which makes the present study unique and different from the previous studies because they were mostly conducted in a Japanese EFL context or western societies.

It can be concluded from this study that the students in the sample were ready to welcome homosexuality in the language classroom, and mature enough to respect one another's ideas on the issue. Although the students strongly believed that homosexuality is still seen as a taboo topic in the Turkish society, they still wanted to talk about this topic in class because they found it interesting as well as appropriate. By looking at the findings, it is also possible to say that the students were against the exclusion of sexual identity issues from course content and materials because they believe in the motivational value of them.

Another very important finding of the study is that a comprehensive unit on homosexuality can actually contribute a lot to the general knowledge of students on sexual identity issues. Almost all of the participants of this study (except for two students) unanimously agreed that they learned many new things on homosexuality thanks to these lessons. We all know that ignorance only creates animosity. From this aspect, 44 % of the participants reported that these lessons changed their attitudes towards homosexuality in a positive way and only 30 % rejected any kind of positive attitudinal change after the lessons. This find-

ing is better appreciated if the importance of tolerating differences in modern democracies is taken into consideration.

Finally, the present study is unique in terms of its in-depth analysis of student reactions to a variety of gay-themed materials and activities in the language classroom. Depending on the results, it can be claimed that students are mostly disturbed by visual images of homosexual romanticism like gays or lesbians kissing or videos on homosexual love; but quite comfortable with learning about new things on homosexuals through reading a text and discussing it. Post survey results indicate significant positive changes in students' attitudes towards the use of almost all gay-themed materials and activities especially visual ones, which once again shows the importance of bringing sexual identity issues to the classroom.

In conclusion, the present study has a lot of implications for classroom practices. Although further research to validate these results is still necessary, it can be suggested that teachers should bring sexual identity issues to their classes if they want to have enjoyable and motivating lessons, and their students will improve their linguistic skills as well as learning a lot of new things about an issue they keep encountering everywhere, which, as this study shows, result in better tolerance of queer identities and individual differences.

### Author Note

Mustafa Tekin can be contacted via Çanakkale Onsekiz Mart University, Anafartalar Kampusu C Blok 202, 17100 Çanakkale / Turkey. E-mail: [tekinmustafa@hotmail.com](mailto:tekinmustafa@hotmail.com)

### References

- Benesch, S. (1999). Thinking critically, thinking dialogically. *TESOL Quarterly*, 33(3), 573-580.
- Blackburn, M. V., & Buckley, J. F. (2005). Teaching queer-inclusive English language arts. *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy*,

- 49(3), 202-212.
- Bredbeck, G. W. (1995). Analyzing the classroom: On the impossibility of a queer pedagogy. In G. E. Haggerty & B. Zimmerman (Eds.) *Professions of desire: Lesbian and gay studies in literature* (pp. 169-180). New York: The Modern Language Association of America.
- Britzman, D. (1995). Is there a queer pedagogy? Or, stop reading straight. *Educational Theory*, 45(2), 151-165.
- Curran, G. (2006). Responding to students' normative questions about gays: Putting queer theory into practice in an Australian ESL class. *Journal of Language, Identity, and Education*, 5(1), 85-96.
- Dellar, H. (2006). Taboo or not taboo? That's in the question!. Retrieved 27 January, 2008, from [http://www.centercom.ru/user\\_files/1153/File/Taboo%20or%20not%20taboo.doc](http://www.centercom.ru/user_files/1153/File/Taboo%20or%20not%20taboo.doc).
- Dilley, P. (1999). Queer theory: Under construction. *Qualitative Studies in Education*, 12(5), 457-472.
- Dumas, J. (2008). The ESL classroom and the queerly shifting sands of learner identity. *TESL Canada Journal*, 26(1), 1-10.
- Endres, N. (2005). *Queering our classrooms. Pedagogy*, 5(1), 131-9
- Epstein, D. (2000). Reading gender, reading sexualities: Children and the negotiation of meaning in "alternative" texts. In W. J. Spurlin (Ed.) *Lesbian and gay studies and the teaching of English*. Washington, DC.: National Council for Teaching of English
- Evans, R. W., & Saxe, D. W. (1996). *Handbook on teaching social issues*. Washington, D. C.: National Council for the Social Studies.
- Harrison, M. (2008, March). The closet in the classroom: Re-positioning queer sexuality in the TESOL classroom. Poster presented at the American Association of Applied Linguistics Annual Conference in Washington, DC.
- Hartmann, D., & Faulkner, M. (2002). "To boldly go...": Taboos in German as a foreign language ... and beyond. *GFL Journal*, 1, 127-159. Retrieved 27 January, 2008, from [http://www.gfl-journal.de/1-2002/pr\\_hartmann\\_faulkner.html](http://www.gfl-journal.de/1-2002/pr_hartmann_faulkner.html).
- Kumashiro, K. (2000). Toward a theory of anti-oppressive education. *Review of Educational Research*, 70, 25-53.
- Kumashiro, K. (2003). Queer ideals in education. *Journal of Homosexuality*, 45, 365 - 67.
- Leather, S. (2003). Taboos and issues [Review of the book *Taboos and issues: Photocopiable lessons on controversial topics*]. *ELT Journal*, 57, 205-206.
- Loutzenheiser, L.W., & Macintosh, L.B. (2004). Citizenships, sexualities, and education. *Theory into Practice*, 43, 151-158.
- Morris, M. (2005). Queer life and school culture: Troubling genders. *Multicultural Education*, 12(3), 8-13
- Mitchell, A., & Ward, R. (2010). Rainbow washing schools: Are primary schools ready for same-sex attracted parents and students? *Gay and Lesbian Issues and Psychology Review*. 6(2), 103-106.
- Nelson, C. (1993). Heterosexism in ESL: Examining our attitudes. *TESOL Quarterly*, 27 (1), 143-150.
- Nelson, C. (1999). Sexual identities in ESL: Queer theory and classroom inquiry. *TESOL Quarterly*, 33(3), 371-391.
- Pennycook, A. (1999). Introduction: Critical approaches to TESOL. *TESOL Quarterly*, 33 (3), 329-348.
- Schall, J., & Kauffmann, G. (2003). Exploring literature with gay and lesbian characters in the elementary school. *Journal of Children's Literature*, 29(1), 36-45.
- Schweers, W. (1997). Resources and ideas for working with gay/lesbian themes in the ESL classroom. Paper presented at The Annual Meeting of the Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages, Orlando, Fl.
- Shlasko, G. D. (2005) Queer (v.) pedagogy. *Equity & Excellence in Education*, 38(2), 123-134.
- Small, J. (2003). The potential of language education: A global issues perspective . *The Language Teacher Online*, 27(3). Retrieved 12 February, 2008, from <http://www.jalt-publications.org/tlt/articles/2003/03/small>
- Smith, M., & Drake, M. (2001). Suicide & homosexual teens, what can biology teachers do to help? *The American Biology Teacher*, 63, 154-162.

- Synder, V. L., & Broadway, F. S. (2004). Queering high school biology textbooks and pedagogy. *Journal of Research in Science Teaching*, 41(6), 617-636
- Thanasoulas, D. (2001). The importance of teaching culture in the foreign language classroom. *Racial Pedagogy*, 3(3), 1-24. Retrieved 27 January, 2008, from [http://radicalpedagogy.icaap.org/content/issue3\\_3/7-thanasoulas.html](http://radicalpedagogy.icaap.org/content/issue3_3/7-thanasoulas.html)
- Vandrick, S. (2001). Teaching sexual identity issues in ESL classes. Paper presented at The Annual Meeting of the Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages, St. Louis, MO.
- Warner, M. (1993). Introduction. In M. Warner (Ed.) *Fear of a queer planet*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press
- Winans, A. E. (2006). Queering pedagogy in the English classroom: Engaging with the places where thinking stops. *Pedagogy*, 6 (1), 103-122



## BOOK REVIEW

THOMAS O'NEILL

*Epstein, R. (Ed.) (2009). Who's your daddy? And other writings on queer parenting. Toronto: Sumach Press, ISBN: 1894549783.*

The topics of queer parenting, coupled with marriage, have consumed the commercial and socio-political focus of current gay community issues and the broader community's response to this. The striving for gay marriage rights in Australia, for example, alongside attempts at resolving different state surrogacy legislative disputes are both hot topics being entertained in the media, parliament houses, in private circles, in the queer and broader communities at large. Public campaigns to broaden awareness of queer couple needs, rights and choices, and celebrity role-models reinforcement of this voice is providing even more publicity on the core needs of some members of queer communities, and greater confidence in asserting the right to have a relationship legally recognised and to queer parent children. This evolution in queer community agendas stands a striking contrast to various idealisms in the GLBTQ communities, as recent as the 1980s and early 1990s – and of course prior.

"Who's your Daddy?" is an exposition into the history of gay parenting, predominantly through lesbian socio-political and sometimes feminist lenses, providing extensive stories into the dimensions of gay parenting; the joys, pain and dilemmas that it brings, and further social deconstruction on what it means to be a parent – who in essence is "daddy", and the ambiguity of being a parent with a GLBTQ identification. It is a comprehensive collection that at times captures curiosity, is peppered with some very unique life circumstances and yet can have a lack of contrast that encourages complete digestion. Some books are con-

suming, others provide a dipping in and out experience. Depending on the reader, and his or her unique needs in reading such material, this book lies somewhere between the these two types of book. Is it a useful guide to the history of queer identity and parenting in North America? Is it a voice for a unique life circumstance? Is it a provocative read for those contemplating or planning to parent? It may be all of the above to some, and yet not to others. It would probably be of most interest to those contemplating or planning to be a gay parent, or those who already are.

There are parts of this book that stick. The editor, Rachel Epstein, provides the most lively, fluent and interesting introduction of how and why this book came about. She outlines the history to queer parenting rights evolution in Canada, shares her own personal queer parenting history, her participation in the "Lavender Conception Conspiracy", where she met with others interested in and wanting support in becoming parents. She also introduces the birth of her daughter Sadie. Both Rachel's narrative on being a lesbian, entering a relationship and becoming a mother; and Sadie's story of being a psychologically healthy daughter of a lesbian couple, become interwoven with other stories of predominantly lesbian, but also gay, transgender, bisexual and other parents. Rachel shares her dynamic attempts to progress the rights of gay parents in Canada, from ground roots involvement in the Queer Xchange, to advocating for LGBTQ communities' rights and needs with various legislative authorities to enable queer parenting without prejudice. From her stories reminiscing about the days of the "turkey baster", to a current world where gay surrogate parenting and use of sperm banks are now the

norm, she provides a reflective and at times comical recollection of an era where queer choices for individual, community and sexual expression, let alone getting married or having a baby, were void of legislative support.

"Who's your Daddy?" is divided into five sections, each attempting to capture dimensions of being a queer parent or its offspring. "Red Rock Candy Babies" has some interesting dilemmas on when one partner wants a child and the other does not – in Emma Donoghue's situation, the relationship wins out and two children are born and loved. Syrus Marcus Ware shares the unique experience of being a transgender male, where being a pregnant male is, in his own words, "to be a spectacle". He reminds the reader of the role support groups, and in his case "Trans Father 2B", in developing a healthy sense of being who and what he is. Shira Spector also provides a useful reminder that those who wish and plan for a child can be infertile and miscarry, and the relative silence on this topic that can occur in an already marginalised community of people.

In Part II covering queer to paternity, some interesting anecdotes and history are shared by gay men who were sperm donors between the 1980s to now, and why some chose to have an active role in parenting, whilst others did not. Recognising the absence of any "guidebook" on how to queer parent, Aviva Rubin shares her story in having a child to an older gay friend, and the roles that trust and commitment played for her in a family scenario that worked well. On one of the few references to bisexuality, Eadie, Ross, Epstein and Anderson share results of a qualitative study with bisexual individuals trying to adopt in Ontario between 2006-8. Most cases reported it being harder to disclose bisexuality in the adoption context, and the unique challenges this brings, given there is a tendency for agencies to view bisexuals as gay or lesbian, regardless of the bisexual disclosure. Challenging the stereotype of the teen GLBT parent being non-middleclass, homeless, poorly educated and with low socioeconomic status is taken up well by Rebecca Trotzky-Sirr

and again, is a reminder of the need for community and support groups.

Maura Ryan introduces the the very unique challenges of transphobia, transgender oppression and parenting. Understanding that transgender individuals have less sense of normalcy than gays and lesbians in itself requires them to write their own script on what it is to be a good enough transgender parent, in a world where parenting "is a gendered exercise". She highlights with interest that transphobia exists within the broader GLB communities, where many still scorn transitioning while an individual may also choose to be a transgender parent. She highlights the irony of this, given that many transgender individuals were originally instrumental in the evolution of gay human rights. It also highlights, however, that the concept of GLBTQ communities sharing similar values and outlooks has always been a precarious position. Useful resources are referred to, such as the 12 week 'Transfathers 2B' course providing education on legal, practical and other choice issues in transparenting.

A critical review of children's picture books on gay parenting suggested that despite the Western World's somewhat recent progress in accepting gay parenting, that children's books on the topic adopt similar conservative family values to nongays, and has more room for inclusivity.

Section III - "Handing Out Cigars" - explores history, visibility and social change with GLBTQ communities. These stories highlight how context and legislative restrictions impact on the fight for or complacency with the entitlements that living in a different place brings. Being a book based on North American queer history and legislation, this section has less relevance for Australian contingents than other sections. The advice of "Queer Spawn Speak Out" provide useful and empowering strategies to the offspring of queer parents on how to deal with phobic responses to their two mom or two dad scenarios.

Section IV's "All Our Roots Need Rain" provides more intimate narratives on the day to day dilemmas of gay parenting. For example, what do a lesbian academic couple with children do, when one offered an opportune work transfer from gay friendly Vancouver to white conservative Kelowna? The couple use letters to share how they dealt with this. Tobi Hill-Meyer shares a very unique experience of being a transwoman of queer parents who is non-white, facing racism and homophobia, and questions the potential meaning of her race being diluted in the adoption process. This story highlights the complexities of considerations many GLBTQ potential and current parents may have to contemplate preparing a young child for the world it is being introduced to. Again, there is some sound advice on providing children with factual information on heritage and planning ways to deal with racism, in rather the same fashion that any parent would help a child deal with a bully.

The personal reflections in these chapters provides a reminder that many GLBTQ considering and becoming parents give significant consideration to the dilemmas they as parents may face, as well as how their spawn will deal with the world and being offspring of queer parents. The narratives convey a sensitivity that prospective queer parents give to what it means to be a queer parent and this, one would imagine, sets the groundwork for some excellent psychological resilience coaching for the children and parents involved.

The exhaustion factor begins to set in with Part V "Celebrating Houses Full of Love – What We Offer Our Children". By this stage, the main points of the book have been made, and now get repeated again with more narratives.

This book is a potentially useful and at times interesting resource for parents, academics and individuals interested in queer parenting and its history. It can be dipped in and out of. The writings by the spawn of GLBTQ parents may be particularly helpful to children and their communities who may find themselves in

unique as well as more common scenarios. It would have been useful to have included scientific research on the psychological health outcomes of children with gay parents that currently exists. Given our current social context and the fact that more queer parenting is occurring, future research in this field will be helpful to parents in making informed decisions about being an effective queer parent and for the community at large. A version of the "7 Up" series would provide not only a fascinating developmental trajectory, but also a reflection for queer parents on the life path of queer spawn .

### **Author Note**

Thomas O'Neill is a Sydney based clinical psychologist with over twenty years experience in the assessment and treatment of child, family, adult and couple related mental health issues. He uses evidence based practice to develop interventions and works collaboratively with other agencies on a needs basis. In addition to offering supervision and seminars, he has extensive experience assessing work-related stress and injuries, and making recommendations for intervention. Email: [thomasoneill@smartchat.net.au](mailto:thomasoneill@smartchat.net.au)

## **CALL FOR PAPERS**

### **PAPERS FROM THE 2011 INTERNATIONAL SOCIETY FOR CRITICAL HEALTH PSYCHOLOGY CONFERENCE *AND BEYOND***

*SPECIAL ISSUE OF GLIP REVIEW, AUGUST 2011*

The 2011 ISCHP conference provides a vibrant opportunity for health psychologists and scholars from related disciplines to explore ongoing and emerging issues in critical theory and practice in relation to health and health care. A particular strand featured in the conference pertains to issues of gender and sexuality in regards to health. This special issue of the Gay and Lesbian Issues and Psychology Review will feature papers from the conference that address aspects of gender and/or sexuality. Those who did not attend the conference but who research in the area of health on topics related to gender and/or sexuality are also welcome to submit their work for inclusion in the issue.

We welcome full length empirical and theoretical papers (7000 words) as well as shorter commentary papers (2000 words). Topics might include

- ✧ Interventions into the gendered constructions of health
- ✧ Feminist examinations of health
- ✧ Gender differences in terms of health experiences
- ✧ Representations of sexuality within health practice
- ✧ Media representations of gender and/or sexuality
- ✧ Masculinities research
- ✧ LGBT critical health-related research

Papers should be submitted to the editor by March 5th, 2012: [damien.riggs@flinders.edu.au]. Reviews will be returned to authors by late April 2012 with final revisions to papers due late July 2012. Any questions about a potential submission should be directed to the special issue editor.

## Preparation, submission and publication guidelines

Types of articles that we typically consider:

A)

Empirical articles (6000 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*. 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 14 points all caps left aligned, author 12 points all caps left aligned, abstract 10 points italics justified, article text 10 points justified, footnotes 9 points justified.

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