



Editorial Introduction: Special Section on Methodology and LGBT People

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Editorial Introduction

1.1 The aim of this Special Section is to provide an opportunity to engage with methodological issues that arise when research is being carried out with people who experience desire for other people of the same sex and/or engage in some level of sexual relations with people of the same sex. The terms, 'lesbian', 'gay', 'bisexual' and 'transgender' and the shorthand LGBT are used here as an inclusive umbrella description for those populations. The need for this Special Section arises from the recognition that people, such as LGBT people, who do not belong to dominant cultures, and/or do not conform to dominant norms, can easily experience exclusion.

1.2 In this introduction we do not seek to provide a manifesto for any particular school of the theory of sexualities; rather we seek to illuminate some of the influences that have shaped the debates that have led us to the production of this Special Section. We begin by exploring some of the debates that have led us to define lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender in the ways we have done. We go on to explore some of the debates around methodology that have impacted upon us and upon many of the authors in this Special Section. We conclude by introducing key aspects of the ten articles that form this collection. It is important to acknowledge that this Special Section is just one small part of a much wider international dialogue that is going on within the academy, within civil society and on the streets and in the bars and bedrooms about our understanding of the people who identify themselves and/or are identified by others as being lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender.

1.3 Since becoming involved in the Gay Liberation Front in the early 1970s, Bob Cant has engaged with the politics of challenging heteronormative assumptions in the trade unions, in the voluntary sector, and many campaigns in both London and Scotland. Currently an academic, whose specialism is gay men's social networks, he has also edited several anthologies of lesbian and gay oral history (most recently, Cant 2008). Ann Taket's academic and extra-academic lives have involved journeys from positivist through to postmodernist, with spells sojourned under a variety of labels (in vague chronological order): confused, feminist, anti-sexist, bisexual, lesbian, bisexual, heterosexual hasbian. Within all parts of her life, her activities are directed towards encouraging respect for, and positive engagement with, diversity in all its many forms.

1.4 Central to our perspective is the view that, following McIntosh (1981), one becomes lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgendered in a particular social context. That is not to engage with arguments about

essentialism (Norton 1999) or to take a stance in the nature versus nurture debate around the causes of homosexuality and transgender. We also acknowledge the importance of literature that engages primarily with gender or ethnicity in leading us towards the position that sexuality is something that cannot be studied usefully in some state of isolation. We have been particularly influenced by the theories of Judith Butler (1999) in relation to the development of gender identity, Stuart Hall (1987) in relation to black identity and Michel Foucault (1978) in relation to the development of sexuality. We have been influenced by a wide range of literature so as to focus upon social experiences and narratives relating to sexuality, upon their discursive construction and limitation and resistance to this, as well as upon methodologies used to explore and understand them, that also serve to increase the possibilities of changing them.

Definitions

2.1 The historical roots of the development of terminology used about and by the populations here defined as lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgendered offer useful insights. It is only just over one hundred years ago since Havelock Ellis and other intellectuals began to popularise a name to identify sexual relations between people who consciously desired other people of the same sex and had sexual relations with others of the same sex (Weeks 2000). Previously, in the English-speaking world, there had been words, such as sodomy, to describe sexual acts but there was no term to identify the people who took part in such acts. There was, further, no particular terminology to describe sexual acts between women. Ellis's use of the term, 'homosexuality', was no mere linguistic curiosity; rather, it marked a stage in the process whereby individuals identified or were identified by their socio-sexual identity; people who were identified by their homosexuality came to be known as homosexuals. Since that time, there have been other terms which people have used to denote such a socio-sexual identity. Some of the terms have been used by people to identify themselves; some of the terms have been used by legal and medical authorities to identify those individuals for whom they have a professional responsibility and over whom they may also have authority. Some of the terms have been used by people who seek actively to discriminate against people whom they perceive to have a socio-sexual identity which they consider ought to be stigmatised. Some of the terms have been developed by one group of people and used occasionally by others for their own purposes. The emergence of what was then called gay liberation politics in the early 1970s marked an important turning point in the definition of terminology by the people who were described by it. Self-identification has been a central part of the development of politics, community development, policy development and language since then to the point where there is a widely accepted usage of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender to encompass the principal population groups of this sexuality coalition.

2.2 The fact that we are using the particular terms, 'lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender,' indicates that we are using definitions that are widely (but not always consistently) shared in the vocabulary of civil society in much of the English speaking world in the early years of the twenty first century. The use of the acronym, LGBT, reflects the fact that, within civil society, there is currently a coalition that focuses upon issues of sexuality and, to a lesser extent, gender. It is a coalition that engages with social, political and cultural issues that go far wider than anything that might have been associated with the term, homosexuality, as it was used in the period before gay liberation. However this adoption of what Epstein (1990) identified as a proto-ethnic identity has its limitations. The development of the identities within the LGBT coalition have been contested and Berube (1996), Parmar (1993), Skeggs (1999) and Whittle (1996) have, from different perspectives, examined the homogenisation of LGBT narratives and the ways in which that can exclude less powerful sections of this population group on grounds of class, ethnicity, gender and transgender identity. The addition of terms such as 'two spirits' (Jacobs et al 1997) in some contexts acknowledges the experiences and narratives of Native American cultures, as does the term 'Khush' (Parmar 1993) in relation to people from South Asian backgrounds. These also reflect the wider narrative that the voices of people from cultural backgrounds outwith the English-speaking world have often been excluded from debates within the LGBT world. In some parts of the world, the terms, LGBT, are used with the full awareness that they have been imported as a result of previous colonial relationships (Narrain and Bhan 2005; Cambra 2008); sometimes these terms indicate the continuing economic dominance of the developed capitalist world despite the fact that these socio-sexual identities may have an uneasy relationship with more locally

developed identities and practices (Miller 1994).

2.3 This Special Section does not adopt the terminology of the advocates of Queer Theory, such as Sedgwick (1993), who are active in a number of English-speaking universities. We are not seeking to reject Queer Theory – and a number of the authors in this Special Section acknowledge its influence and identify with it to varying degrees, and use their contributions here to engage critically with it in places – but at this point in history its terms of reference have limited acceptance in civil society. Our own writing histories indicate interests in both civil society and in the academy, as well as the application of sociological theory in the contexts of policy, practice, activism and everyday life. We aspire to having a readership that consists not only of other academics but also of practitioners, teachers, community activists who engage with the concerns and aspirations of the populations under discussion here while also expecting research that is rigorous and accountable. The language used by that readership encourages us to use a known term such as LGBT.

2.4 It is important to note that these issues of definitions and the choice of terms are not to be taken lightly. The contextualised use of particular terms can have very real material consequences, sometimes positive, sometimes negative, within 'civil' society.

2.5 Much of the literature around the HIV epidemic focused on gay men in an epidemiological sense. The research about health promotion particularly identified issues of sociological interest in the context of the sexual relations and social networks of men who have sex with other men. The terms of reference of this research have very often been about the connections among men who do not identify as 'gay' and identify themselves as having other socio-sexual identities; the terms, 'men who have sex with men' and 'men who are homosexually active', had their origins in a medical framework and particularly in the 1990s (see <http://www.sigmaresearch.org.uk>) became important definitions for a particular population. Although many of the men studied in that literature continued to identify themselves as 'gay', the overall terms of reference of this literature were defined by the policy makers and funders of agencies which had the responsibility of containing a health epidemic from a medical perspective.

2.6 There is further a growing body of literature into homophobic bullying in schools (Thurlow 2001; Warwick et al 2001). Some of it particularly engages with questions of homophobic language and Epstein et al (2001) indicate that abusive terms not only include words such as 'poof', 'queer' or 'bumboy' but also the word, 'gay'. The term which was claimed as a means of self-identification by the liberation movement of the 1970s has been transmuted into something hateful within particular social contexts by the culture of bullying. It is an indicator, if nothing else is, that language, in the context of socio-sexual identification, is the object of ongoing change, of the very material effects of its usage, and the situated nature of its functioning.

Deconstructing identity

3.1 Moving on from questions of definition towards those of methodology, it is useful to consider first understandings of identity, agency and the subject that attend questions of methodology. How these are theorised and understood, whether explicitly or implicitly, is important in understanding some of the methodological challenges posed.

3.2 The terrain in which most of the papers in this Special Section locate themselves is one that might be described as postmodern, where the refusal of a definitive adherence to essentialism, other than through the possibilities created by strategic essentialism, open the field for agency and the possibility of change, or as hooks (1990, para 10-11) expresses it:

"Postmodern critiques of essentialism which challenge notions of universality and static over-determined identity within mass culture and mass consciousness can open up new possibilities for the construction of the self and the assertion of agencyContemporary African-American resistance struggle must be rooted in a process of decolonization that continually opposes reinscribing notions of "authentic" black identity. This critique should not be made synonymous with the dismissal of the struggle of oppressed and exploited peoples

to make ourselves subjects. Nor should it deny that in certain circumstances experience affords us a privileged critical location from which to speak. This is not a reinscription of modernist master narratives of authority which privilege some voices by denying voice to others".

3.3 The difficulties of speaking of that which is constrained, constructed and re-constructed discursively in ways that re-create the possibility of agency and change has lead theorists to draw on a selection of metaphors in an attempt to capture a new or different understanding. So Haraway (1985: 181) offers us the metaphor of the cyborg, drawn from science fiction and mythology:

"Race, gender and capital require a cyborg theory of wholes and parts. There is no drive in cyborgs to produce total theory, but there is an intimate experience of boundaries, their construction and deconstruction. There is a myth system waiting to become a political language to ground one way of looking at science and technology and challenging the informatics of domination - in order to act potently. ...Cyborg imagery can suggest a way out of the maze of dualisms in which we have explained our bodies and our tools to ourselves."

3.4 Alternatively, there is the metaphor of the rhizome described by Deleuze and Guattari:

"The rhizome is altogether different, *a map and not a tracing*. Make a map, not a tracing. What distinguishes the map from the tracing is that it is entirely oriented toward an experimentation in contact with the real. The map is open and connectable in all of its dimensions; it is detachable, reversible, susceptible to constant modification. It can be torn, reversed, adapted to any kind of mounting, reworked by an individual, group, or social formation. It can be drawn on a wall, conceived of as a work of art, constructed as a political action or as a meditation. Perhaps one of the most important characteristics of the rhizome is that it always has multiple entryways; in this sense the burrow is an animal rhizome, and sometimes maintains a clear distinction between the line of flight as passageway and storage or living strata ... A map has multiple entryways, as opposed to the tracing, which always comes 'back to the same'. The map has to do with performance, whereas the tracing always involves an alleged 'competence'." (Deleuze & Guattari 1988: 12-13)

3.5 In terms of the theorisation of the agentic subject, Hill-Collins (1991) talks of adopting a "both/and conceptual orientation", working from an "outsider-within perspective", as a way of reconciling subjectivity and objectivity and subverting dichotomies. De Lauretis (1990) offers a similar description of a feminist subject who continually operates both from within and outside of traditions and communities, an "eccentric" perspective in her words. If all this begins to sound at once difficult and uncomfortable, as Sawicki (1991: 108) puts it "Identity formation is both strategically necessary and dangerous."

3.6 In theorising identity and the subject, Butler argued (1990: 142) that:

"there need not be a 'doer behind the deed', but that the 'doer' is variably constructed in and through the deed. This is not a return to an existential theory of the self as constituted through its acts, for the existential theory maintains a prediscursive structure for both the self and its acts. It is precisely the discursively variable construction of each in and through the other that has interested me here."

3.7 And (Butler 1990: 147) also argued that

"the reconceptualisation of identity as an *effect*, that is, as *produced* or *generated*, opens up possibilities of 'agency' that are insidiously foreclosed by positions that take identity categories as foundational and fixed. For an identity to be an effect means that it is neither fatally determined nor fully artificial and arbitrary. That the *constituted* status of identity is misconstrued along these conflicting lines suggests the ways in which the feminist discourse on cultural construction remains trapped within the unnecessary binarism of free will and

determinism. Construction is not opposed to agency; it is the necessary scene of agency, the very terms in which agency is articulated and becomes culturally intelligible."

3.8 The above should point to our understanding of the necessity of a dynamic, flexible and adaptive use of theory, while some might criticise this as eclectic (or even a-theoretic), we see it as a very necessary response to understanding the complexities in the field of study, of responding to the highly heterogeneous 'nature' of LGBT communities, and to the aim of understanding the complexities of the interactions of gender, ethnicity, class, sexuality etc. - in the words of the title of Dann Hoxsey's paper in this special section - mixed communities require mixed theories. This is not to espouse a position of 'anything goes', rather to call for a detailed attention to questions of theory, epistemology and their careful use in research. There is a productivity in allowing ourselves to work with standpoint theory (see Mike Homfray's paper in this special section), with positivist approaches (see McCarry et al in this special section) as well as social constructivism of many different flavours - a productivity in a plurality that refuses to slip into a series of either/or choices.

3.9 The oft-assumed discomfort or groundlessness of such theoretical pluralism leads us to wish to address questions of epistemology and truth, where comfort can be found in Rorty's pragmatism:

"We need to make a distinction between the claim that the world is out there and the claim that truth is out there. To say that the world is out there, that it is not our creation, is to say, with common sense, that most things in space and time are the effects of causes which do not include human mental states. To say that truth is not out there is simply to say that where there are no sentences there is no truth, that sentences are elements of human languages, and that human languages are human creations. Truth cannot be out there - cannot exist independently of the human mind - because sentences cannot so exist, or be out there. The world is out there, but descriptions of the world are not. Only descriptions of the world can be true or false. The world on its own - unaided by the describing activities of human beings - cannot." (Rorty 1989: 4-5)

3.10 Such an understanding, while ascribing a humbling and bounded nature to our theorising efforts and our research endeavours, should not make the engaged and activist academic despair, instead it opens up increased possibilities for change:

"To accept the claim that there is no standpoint outside the particular historically conditioned and temporary vocabulary we are presently using from which to judge this vocabulary is to give up on the idea that there can be reasons for using languages as well as reasons within languages for believing statements. This amounts to giving up the idea that intellectual or political progress is rational, in any sense of 'rational' which is neutral between vocabularies. But because it seems pointless to say that all the great moral and intellectual advances of European history - Christianity, Galilean science, the Enlightenment, Romanticism, and so on - were fortunate falls into temporary irrationality, the moral to be drawn is that the rational-irrational distinction is less useful than it once appeared. Once we realize that progress, for the community as for the individual, is a matter of using new words as well as of arguing from premises phrased in old words, we realize that a critical vocabulary which revolves around notions like 'rational', 'criteria', 'argument' and 'foundation' and 'absolute' is badly suited to describe the relation between the old and the new." (Rorty 1989: 48-9).

3.11 In the context of this Special Section, we take Rorty's approach as the basis for allowing us to sidestep the old unhelpful binary oppositions of essentialism-constructivism and embrace instead a more pluralistic approach that allows us more productive work – a move that refuses either/or in favour of both/and.

Debates around methodology

4.1 Turning now to questions of methodology, the foregoing exploration of the importance of language in the construction of subjects, identity and agency highlights the importance of qualitative research methods in

studies of LGBT people. Pope and Mays (1996: 4) have recognised that a key value of qualitative research lies in the fact that it gives 'due emphasis to the meanings, experiences and views of all the participants.' Strauss and Corbin (1990: 17), in arguing that qualitative research is 'about persons' lives, stories, behaviour, but also about organisational functioning, social movements, or interactional relationships', illustrate the range and the complexity of which it is capable. While qualitative researchers engage with the voices of populations which are often unheard, we would argue that they must, however, display the same degree of rigour and accountability with their data as would be expected of any other researcher.

4.2 Quantitative and qualitative research are all too often perceived as antithetical; however quantitative research is deeply dependent on qualitative, interpretive processes at all of its stages. For example, Farran (1990) discusses how the process of 'data collection' within a piece of traditional, quantitative research, is effectively 'data *construction*'. She explores how, as the researcher, her coding of the data cannot be viewed as objective; instead it is an interpretive process.

4.3 The issue of the power dynamics within interviews has been raised by a number of feminist writers. In particular, Oakley (1981) argued that, because there is a shared identification between women researchers and women interviewees the resulting rapport between them is likely to generate better data than would have been the case with a male interviewer. Wise (1987) argued that there were other dynamics, in addition to gender, at work in any interview situation and Silverman (1993) argued that 'all data are mediated by our own reasoning as well as that of participants.' The work of Truman (2000: 34) has been particularly important, insofar as she identifies what she calls 'an emancipatory/anti-discriminatory research paradigm'; in her discussion of her work with a gay men's health agency, she reflects on her perception that she was able to undertake research with a gay men's health agency on account not only of her knowledge and skills but also because of both her lesbian identity and her professional status as a university academic. We share her view that it is important to acknowledge transparently the multiple layers of identity of any researcher as a means of providing insight into the research process rather than as a means of justifying any prescriptive model about the data collection process.

4.4 All of the foregoing point to the importance of a critical scrutiny of the construction of the subject/identity and the operation of power, as the point of its operation is also the point at which resistance is/can be sited. Three of Foucault's methodological precautions in looking at power are of particular pertinence here: to examine domination and the material operators of power; to study "power at the point where its intention ... is completely invested in its real and effective practices" (Foucault 1976: 97); to analyse power as something that circulates, recognising that "individuals ... are always in the position of simultaneously undergoing and exercising ... power. They are not only its inert or consenting target; they are always also the elements of its articulation. In other words, individuals are the vehicles of power, not its points of application" (Foucault 1976: 98).

4.5 Following Gordon's discussion of Foucault (Gordon 1980), we argue that our understanding of the constructed nature of subjects/identity requires an exploration of the historical conditions of possibility of present social/human science in relation to (against and with) the exploration of a vast array of practices and techniques, both discursive and non-discursive, that contribute to the disciplining, surveillance, administration and formation of groupings of individuals, at levels from the smallest unit of the family through communities to national populations. This in turn requires setting aside the ethical polarisation of the subject-object relationship which privileges subjectivity as the form of moral autonomy, in favour of a conception of domination as able to take the form of a subjectification as well as of an objectification; and secondly, the rejection of the assumption that domination falsifies the essence of human subjectivity, and the assertion that power regularly promotes and utilises a 'true' knowledge of subjects and indeed in a certain manner constitutes the very field of that truth. Note here that the 'subject' is thought of by Foucault as a constructed entity. What is important here is methodological scepticism about both the ontological claims and ethical values which humanist systems of thought invest in the notion of subjectivity.

4.6 The productive uses of the sort of research described here is summarised well in a final quote from Foucault:

"Maybe the target nowadays is not to discover what we are, but to refuse what we are. We have to imagine and to build up what we could be to get rid of this kind of political 'double blind', which is the simultaneous individualization and totalization of modern power structures. The conclusion would be that the political, ethical, social, philosophical problem of our days is not to try and liberate the individual from the state and from the state's institutions, but to liberate us both from the state and from the type of individualization which is linked to the state. We have to promote new forms of subjectivity through the refusal of this kind of individuality which has been imposed upon us for several centuries." (Foucault 1982, page 216)

The papers in this special section contribute in various different ways to exploring these new forms of subjectivity in both theory and practice.

The contributions

5.1 Julie Fish explores how intersectionality theory can, in the context of healthcare research, be used to explore how diverse identities and systems of oppression inter-connect. The use of this theoretical approach arises from a concern that some health research homogenises LGBT communities and it further offers possibilities for understanding multiple inequalities without abandoning the politics of social movements.

5.2 Alan Yip reflects on two studies of population groups of LGBT Christians and Muslims and explores the theme of researching meanings and lived experiences sensitively. He concludes with an appreciation of the value of intersectionality as a way of enhancing insights into such diverse groups and he calls for LGB research to take seriously the role of religion/spirituality in LGB lives and politics.

5.3 Jin Haritaworn reflects on the role of difference, similarity and change in the production of queer knowledges and suggests that the anti-racist and feminist principle of positionality is fruitful for such a queer methodology of change. Drawing on his own fieldwork with interracial families in Britain and Germany and his own coming out as a transgendered/genderqueer, he goes on to explore a number of empirical and cultural texts.

5.4 Kath Browne explores how the application of queer understandings can impact upon quantitative research studies. In particular, the paper reveals the contingency of research design in terms of excluding the term, queer, from the design and questions categories of sexualities as fixed variables. It juxtaposes the apparent stability of quantitative research with the transgressive potentials of queer moments in (re)making such research.

5.5 Mike Homfray shows how he used standpoint theory in his study of gay men and lesbians in the North West of England. He perceives queer theory as being largely irrelevant to the lives of gay men and lesbians and argues that an engaged and practical sociology, which engages with categories of identity rooted in lived actuality, has the potential for application by the communities it observes.

5.6 Dann Hoxsey advocates a mixed method approach to analysis to generate an appropriately pluralistic representation of someone from a pluralistic background. He further argues that a mixed method approach should include both a micro and macro analysis and posits the benefits of combining the theoretical approaches of Mills and Goffman to this end. He emphasises the benefit of a flexible epistemological approach to data analysis.

5.7 Adrian Lee reflects on the implications of shared gender and sexuality by the informants and the interviewer in the context of his qualitative study into British older gay men. He argues that the shared gender and sexuality assisted them to feel valued and empowered and he concludes that increasingly reflexive research assists in the development of methodologies which are inclusive and capable of standing up to rigorous scrutiny.

5.8 Brian Heaphy engages with social conceptualisations of lesbian and gay sexualities as reflexive forms of

existence. He argues that sociological narratives about lesbian and gay reflexivity often fail to account for the significance of difference and power in shaping these experiences. He goes on to argue that the commitment to be affirmative can confuse analysis with prescription and actualities with potentialities. The article calls for an approach that is oriented more towards reflexive sociology than the sociology of reflexive sexualities.

5.9 Kathryn Almack begins by questioning the suggestion that there is an advantage in the researcher and respondents sharing the same sexual orientation. Drawing upon her own into the family lives of twenty lesbian parent families in the UK, she concludes that there is enormous complexity in the role of the researcher in relation to the insider/outsider dynamic and argues that that complexity should be reflected upon in the context of choosing research topics.

5.10 Melanie McCarry, Marianne Hester and Catherine Donovan discuss the development of a survey to explore same sex domestic violence in relationships involving individuals who identify as LGBT or Q. Their methodology built on previous research, attempting in particular to overcome the limitations of earlier studies and to produce data that could be compared with existing data on domestic violence in both heterosexual and LGBT&Q communities.

5.11 There is no paper exploring the implications of developing an inclusive methodology which ensures that LGBT informants in mainstream research studies are able to contribute as fully as other informants in research studies. That will surely be the subject of future debates.

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