11 The future of LGBTQ psychology

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Beyond the ‘usual suspects’

Until relatively recently, most research in LGBTQ psychology has relied on samples of primarily white, middle-class lesbians and gay men living in western countries such as Britain and the USA. There is now an emerging body of research documenting the experiences of LGBTQ people from a wider range of backgrounds. Although this is an important development in LGBTQ psychological research, and one that signals more adequate engagement with the diversity within LGBTQ communities, there remain issues in relation to the representativeness of the field that require attention.

One of these issues is the beliefs and values that have shaped the field of LGBTQ psychology. Not only has much of the knowledge that we have about LGBTQ people been derived from samples of the ‘usual suspects’ (i.e., white, middle-class, coupled lesbians and gay men), but this knowledge has primarily been produced in a framework of ‘white, middle-classness’: the theories, the models of identity and the methods of analysis that LGBTQ psychologists draw on are primarily based on white, middle-class beliefs and values. As we highlighted in Chapter 4, there are many social and cultural frameworks or identities through which the lives of LGBTQ people are shaped: race, religion, gender, ability, geographic location and, of course, sexuality. In this final chapter, drawing on Damien’s (Riggs, 2007a) work on racial norms (see also Chapter 4), we examine how norms of whiteness have shaped LGBTQ psychology. Obviously we recognise that many different identity categories shape the lives of LGBTQ people, but a focus on race provides us with a relatively straightforward example of how ingrained particular ways of seeing the world are within the field of LGBTQ psychology. The example of race also highlights...
the need to be critical of the social norms that underpin the work of LGBTQ psychologists.

Of course some researchers have already begun the process of reflexively engaging with the social norms underpinning LGBTQ psychology. For example, as we discussed in Chapter 9, psychologists such as Victoria (Clarke, 2000, 2002a, 2006, 2008) and Damien (Riggs, 2007b) and researchers in other disciplines such as sociology (e.g., Hicks, 2005b; Stacey and Biblarz, 2001) have critically examined the heteronormative assumptions about sexuality, gender and difference that have shaped much comparative research on same-sex parenting. Celia Kitzinger’s (1987) critique of the liberal founding assumptions of early ‘gay affirmative’ psychology is another example of this type of critique; as is lesbian feminists’ critique of the heterosexist assumptions that have formed the basis of much feminist psychology (Kitzinger, 1996a; Peel, 2001b), and Peter Hegarty’s (2007b) recent examination of the use of discursive and conversational analytic methods within LGBTQ psychology. However, on the whole, LGBTQ psychologists have less often engaged in much by way of reflexive critique (other than, of course, to highlight the heterosexism of psychology), unlike psychologists in related disciplines such as feminist psychology, who have engaged in thorough-going critiques of, for example, the male bias underpinning psychology. For instance, in her classic book The Mismeasure of Women, US feminist psychologist Carol Tavris (1993) argued that because most psychological models and theories have been normed on the experiences of men, women are typically and problematically seen as ‘different’ or ‘inferior’.

Although there have been some analyses of whiteness from within LGBTQ psychology (e.g., Greene, 2000; Riggs, 2007a; Tafoya, 1997), much analysis of whiteness has been undertaken by scholars outside of psychology working in disciplines and areas such as cultural studies, sociology, literary studies, queer theory, and the developing area of critical race and whiteness studies (see Riggs, 2007d, for an overview of this research). For example, US professor of English Greg Thomas (2007) provides a critical reading of western categories of gender and sexuality and the racial norms that inform them, both in the work of African American scholars and in literary representations of African people. Thomas argues that western binary models of gender overlook the fact that relationships between African people prior to slavery and colonisation were structured in highly different ways from relationships between people living in colonial nations. As a result, he argues that it is nonsensical (and potentially offensive) to use western gender and sexuality categories to account for the historical (and contemporary) experiences of African people. Doing so, he claims, can result in the inability to see individual differences within African communities on their own terms.

Another problem with western binary categories of gender and sexuality relates to attempts to understand the experiences of people who do not identify as ‘heterosexual’ within First Nations or Indigenous communities. In her examination of the terms used to describe the experiences of Navajo nádleehí, US anthropologist Carolyn Epple (1998) argued that words such as ‘two-spirit’,
‘gay’, ‘berdache’ or ‘alternate gender’ are all premised on a western binary model of gender, rather than on a Navajo worldview. Eppe proposed that the ways in which western researchers read the identities of First Nation and Indigenous people forces their bodies into a western framework, where particular markers (such as forms of dress, ways of movement, terms of reference) are taken as symbolising the same things across cultures, rather than having potentially different meanings across cultures. For example, she notes that the wearing of a dress by a person born with a penis may, in western cultures, mean that the person wishes to ‘become a woman’, or that they have a sexual fetish for women’s clothing. However, in non-western cultures, it may mean something entirely different (i.e., the dress itself may not be seen as gender-specific or clothing may have no relationship to gender identity). Anthropological research conducted with Samoan fa’afafine suggests similarly that western concepts of gender and sexuality and the use of terms such as ‘woman’ or ‘gay’ to describe the experiences of fa’afafine overlook the cultural specificity of their experiences of embodiment and identity (Worth, 2001).

Criticisms such as these of applying western categories of gender and sexuality to non-western people and cultures highlight the importance of LGBTQ psychologists engaging with the racialised (and other social) norms that shape our field. These criticisms also indicate the need to develop research frameworks in which a diverse range of participants can be represented. Furthermore, it is important to interrogate the reliance on the ‘usual suspects’ within LGBTQ psychology and the assumptions underpinning the theories and methods used by LGBTQ psychologists. For example, Indigenous psychologists in Australia such as Tracey Westerman (2004) have demonstrated that IQ tests are normed on the values and beliefs of white people. Correcting this problem requires more than simply applying IQ tests to people who aren’t ‘usual suspects’. Rather, it requires psychologists to rethink the limitations of the concept of ‘IQ’ and the cultural specificity of IQ measures, and to recognise the varied ways in which different groups of people understand their own capacities. In Box 11.1 key researcher Esther Rothblum reflects on the future of LGBTQ psychology in the USA and the need for US psychologists to embrace a plurality of research methods and approaches in order to achieve the goal of representing a diverse range of LGBTQ people.

Box 11.1  Key researcher: Esther Rothblum on her vision of LGBTQ psychology in the future

Imagine the reaction you would receive if you told your friends, colleagues and lecturers that you had interviewed eight extraterrestrials and submitted the results for publication in a psychology journal. That is a bit what the field of lesbian and gay studies was like when I first began conducting research. Once in a while, an article would appear in a psychology journal based on a few case studies of gay men and sometimes an even smaller number of lesbians (there was little research on bisexuals). The authors were psychologists who had
come across these individuals in their therapy practices and exoticised and pathologised their personalities. In short, the first wave of LGB samples was not so much science as science fiction.

My own research has focused on research methods and challenges when studying LGBT individuals. I have compared LGB people to their heterosexual siblings (e.g., Rothblum et al., 2006), and compared transgendered people to their conventionally gendered siblings (Factor and Rothblum, 2008). I've shown that when it comes to preoccupation with weight and dieting, it is people who are sexually involved with men (heterosexual women and gay men) who are more affected than people who are sexually involved with women (heterosexual men and lesbians; Rothblum, 2002). I've argued that focusing research on members of LGBTQ communities is important, and different from large population studies of people that include small numbers of individuals who have same-sex sexual partners and who may not identify as LGB (Rothblum, 2007). From these findings there are three key areas that I believe need ongoing consideration in the future of LGBTQ psychology:

**Language and identity.** In the future, researchers will have to take into account the ever-changing language about sexuality and gender identity over time and across cultures. Thus, old terms like ‘invert’ and new terms like ‘queer’ complicate research on sexuality and gender identity because inclusion criteria differ across place and time. People who are bisexual are less inclined to use labels for self-identity (Rust, 2000), possibly explaining the relatively small numbers of bisexuals found in research. New theory and writing from the trans movement will increase our understanding about the intersection of gender identity with sexuality.

**New research methods.** I would encourage researchers to write about (and journal editors to accept for publication) theoretical issues in the application of research methods for use with LGBTQ samples. Too often researchers are forced into a specific methodology (by their supervisors/academic advisors, funding bodies, and manuscript reviewers) simply because such methods are the status quo among the general population. Similarly, publishing anecdotal articles, pilot studies or results of a few interviews with LGBTQ people on new topic areas can be extremely useful in generating discussion among mental health practitioners, policy makers and researchers. Sometimes the most interesting parts of large, standardised, questionnaire studies are to be found in the comments written in by participants at the end of the questionnaire. Such qualitative impressions should be written up, and luckily there are now a number of LGBTQ journals across academic disciplines for submission of qualitative research.

**End of homophobia and transphobia.** Finally, a time may come when LGBTQ people are so assimilated into mainstream society that it will be difficult to conceptualise sexuality and gender identity as distinct categories. This will necessitate new methods for a new age.
Intersectionality and privilege

One response to the limitations outlined above, and one that we have discussed throughout this book, is to focus on the intersections of identities. The concept of intersectionality derives from the work of Kimberlé Crenshaw (1991), a US legal scholar and black feminist theorist. She coined the term to capture the overlapping marginalities that shape the lives of some of the most vulnerable people in society, and the ways in which differences between people intersect in institutional arrangements, social practices and cultural discourses. For example, when people go about their lives they are never just a ‘lesbian’ or a ‘transman’, but rather they experience their lives as a ‘black, middle-class lesbian in a couple relationship’ or a ‘single, white, working-class heterosexual transman’. These multiple identity categories produce a relatively coherent experience of self, and are not experienced in isolation from one another. As such, the concept of intersectionality opposes an ‘additive model’ of identity, which understands people’s experience of the world to be shaped by the summing of the different aspects of their identities (e.g., ‘black + working class’ = more oppressed than ‘white + working class’; see Clarke and Braun, 2009). In an examination of the implicit whiteness of much queer theory, US cultural theorist Ian Barnard (2003) suggests that one of the problems associated with additive models is that they always take socially normative categories as the basis for comparison. For instance, within an additive model, the identity ‘Chicana (Mexican) lesbian’ is treated as an identity that differs from the norms of whiteness and heterosexuality. Instead, Barnard asks us to consider how the category ‘Chicana lesbian’ may be an identity in and of itself – it is likely to be experienced as such by Chicana lesbians (see, for example, Espin, 1995).

Our discussion of intersectionality throughout the book has been less about examining different ‘axes’ of identity in isolation, and more about exploring the complex and intersecting ways in which identity categories simultaneously produce experiences. As such, we need to consider how, for example, racial categories are always sexualised (e.g., the colonial stereotype of the ‘virginal white woman’), and how social class is always gendered (e.g., the assumption that working-class men are all ‘rough’ and ‘butch’) and so forth. As Greg Thomas (2007: 68) argues in regard to identity categories: ‘There are never, ever merely girls and boys, men and women, without race and class. Analytically speaking, there are instead a legion of genders and sexualities, so to speak; and they cannot be reduced to the anatomy of any one white racist elite.’ Engaging in intersectional analysis requires that we understand individual identities on their own terms, rather than imposing a particular cultural framework on the lives of diverse groups of people.

Importantly, understanding intersectionality involves examining the ways in which different identities produce unique individual experiences of privilege and/or disadvantage. The concept of ‘privilege’ refers to the benefits or advantages that
accrue to particular groups of people as a result of social hierarchies around, for example, gender, race and class (e.g., men experience privilege in a male-dominated society). Privilege and disadvantage are intimately related; the former is normally productive of the latter (see Chapter 4). The concept of privilege is important not because it allows us to ‘pin the blame’ on those groups of people who experience privilege, but rather because it allows us to understand and analyse the behaviours of people that reflect and produce privilege. When we understand the relationship between privilege and disadvantage, we can see that a male-dominated society (for example) is orientated towards the needs or values of what is deemed to be ‘masculine’ and this results in relative privilege for all men. By viewing privilege in its social context, we can see not only how this benefits men (albeit in highly different ways according to their other intersecting social locations), but also how it disadvantages women, regardless of the intentions of individual men or women. Consider the example of a young heterosexual couple who are committed to equality and about to have their first child. They don’t want to use child-care and also don’t want to reproduce the conventional roles of ‘stay-at-home mum’ and ‘working dad’, but because the man earns more than the woman (as is generally the case), it makes economic sense for the man to continue working and the woman to stay at home and care for their child. The man might want to be an active parent but because he has to get up early to go to work his partner is generally the one who tends to the baby in the night. Because the woman spends more time caring for the child she becomes more knowledgeable about the child’s needs and routine – and thus the traditional roles of men and women are reproduced in spite of the couple’s intentions and desires.

As another example, when we talk about ‘racial privilege’ or ‘white privilege’, we are not accusing those of us who identify as white of being racist, or as seeking out privilege. Rather, these terms allow us better to understand the benefits that white people experience when living in a white-dominated society. Damien Riggs, in collaboration with the feminist psychologist Precilla Choi, examined how identifying as both white and gay produces a particular identity at the intersection of these two categories that results in experiences of both privilege (i.e., as a white person in a white-dominated society and a man in a male-dominated society) and disadvantage (i.e., as a gay man in a heteronormative society) (Riggs and Choi, 2006). Understanding the dual nature of privilege and disadvantage does not mean that we have to weigh up which experience has a greater impact on our place in the world (e.g., 2 parts privilege minus 1 part disadvantage = more privileged than disadvantaged), but rather it means that we can develop more complex and nuanced accounts of people’s experiences in the world.

Finally, in order to understand pluralities in relation to gender, sexuality, race and class (and so forth) we need to go beyond simply acknowledging the cultural specificity of the categories typically used in LGBTQ psychology research and the broad range of conceptualisations of identity that exist across many cultures. We must also develop accounts of how dominant-group members experience themselves as dominant-group members. In other words, although much existing
research in LGBTQ psychology has focused on the ‘usual suspects’, it has typically not explicitly analysed how race and social class (for example) shape the lives of white, middle-class LGBTQ people. Although the limitations of samples consisting of the usual suspects are usually noted, such samples are not explicitly examined for what they can tell us about the experiences of white, middle-class LGBTQ people and their racial and class identities (Greene, 2000). To counter this, some researchers, including Damien Riggs (2006b), have attempted expressly to examine the experiences of white, middle-class LGBTQ people as white, middle-class LGBTQ people. While this approach produces yet more research on white, middle-class people, it is important to examine race and class in the lives of white, middle-class LGBTQ people and how the identities of this group of people are formed in a relationship to both privilege and disadvantage.

In Box 11.2, UK psychologist Adrian Coyle, a key researcher in the field of LGBTQ psychology, argues that it is vital that we move beyond a focus on the lives of the ‘usual suspects’ and on sexuality as a primary lens, and consider the interactions of different social positions in the lives of all LGBTQ people.

Box 11.2 Key researcher: Adrian Coyle on his vision of LGBTQ psychology in the future

Thinking about future directions for LGBTQ psychology is interesting but challenging. When I entered the field as a PhD student in 1986, I am not at all sure that I could have envisaged the developments in LGBTQ possibilities and experiences that have occurred in parts of the western cultural world following hard-won socio-political advances and changed social contexts, with consequent implications for LGBTQ psychology. If I were exploring my PhD topic of gay identity today, the questions I would ask (and the ways I would conceptualise ‘gay identity’) would be quite different in light of these changes. Of course, legal and social acceptance and validation of LGBTQ life structures are far from universal. This means that some of the questions that were explored in the early years of LGBTQ psychology are just as pertinent today in many parts of the world. However, LGBTQ psychology now has a broader theoretical and methodological knowledge base from which to ask these questions and to make sense of the answers obtained. For example, today it would be difficult to claim to have adequately examined ‘sexual identity’ without considering how it interacts with other social positions such as gender, race, class and religion. Indeed, many LGBTQ psychologists would now query the idea of a stable, homogeneous ‘sexual identity’.

The diversity of LGBTQ psychology today is remarkable: traditional ‘scientific’ approaches involving measurement and experimental designs exist alongside research approaches which focus on how LGBTQ issues are negotiated in and through social interaction, especially in people’s talk. In some places, one approach is more dominant. For example, in Britain, LGBTQ psychology has become associated with ‘radical’ qualitative approaches. There are some risks
in this. If the advocates of one approach view other approaches as having little value or legitimacy, LGBTQ psychology could fragment into isolated sub-domains. Whatever possibility the area might have of influencing policy and practice in relation to LGBTQ issues would be lost: what policy maker or service provider would want to be guided by a rabble of conflicting voices? What I hope will happen instead is that scholars within LGBTQ psychology will routinely recognise that different theoretical and methodological approaches have something valuable to contribute to the emergence of increasingly complex and complete pictures of LGBTQ lives. The result could be a rich patchwork of insights that are useful for different audiences, even if the elements do not fit together tidily. This might sound idealistic but there is a lot at stake. Our diverse resources potentially place us in a strong position to do justice to new psychological questions in relation to LGBTQ experiences, to examine established questions in new ways and to produce useful knowledge for the benefit of LGBTQ people.

Applications of LGBTQ psychology

The findings of LGBTQ psychological research are applicable across the discipline of psychology. LGBTQ psychology is not simply a critique of heteronormativity in psychology, nor is it just an account of the lives of LGBTQ people (although it is those things too). It also provides us with very practical ways of creating change in the world, understanding people’s lives, and reflecting on the ways in which psychological and social norms can be detrimental to the lives of diverse groups of people. We now consider a few examples of LGBTQ psychological research, drawing on our own work – both published studies and our current projects – and the research of other LGBTQ psychologists, which highlight the relevance of LGBTQ psychology for key areas of psychology and the wider social contexts of law, policy and social change. These key areas of psychology include core areas of the psychology curriculum such as social and developmental psychology, applied areas like clinical and counselling, health, and educational psychology, and areas of psychology that intersect a number of different concerns such as the psychology of the family and relationships, workplace and leisure, and the media. This is not to suggest that our (or anyone else’s) research is definitive, but it will give you an idea of the breadth of application of LGBTQ psychology research, and how our own research connects with and references the histories of research in the discipline.

Social psychology

One of the central concerns of social psychological research has been measuring and understanding the attitudes of one group of people towards another group and
developing ways to combat negative and prejudicial attitudes. We all work within the field of social psychology, as do many other LGBTQ psychologists (indeed LGBTQ psychology is often viewed as synonymous with social psychology, Coyle and Wilkinson, 2002). Social psychological research has been vitally important in documenting the existence of homophobia and heterosexism, and understanding how these forms of marginalisation function, and the impact they have on the lives of lesbians and gay men. For example, Gregory Herek’s work on homophobic hate crimes influenced the decision of the US Government to include ‘sexual orientation’ in hate crimes legislation (e.g., Herek et al., 1997), and Ian Rivers’s work on homophobic bullying has influenced the development of policies on homophobic bullying in UK schools (e.g., Rivers, 2001).

We have all conducted research exploring homophobia and heterosexism – we have used both mainstream (Ellis, 2002a; Ellis et al., 2002) and discursive and qualitative approaches (Clarke, 2002b; Ellis, 2002b, 2004a, 2004b, 2004c; Peel, 2001a, 2009; Riggs, 2006a, 2006c) to examine the operation of homophobia and heterosexism within the wider (heterosexual) society. We have also (discursively) examined how lesbians and gay men resist and challenge heterosexism (Clarke and Kitzinger, 2005) and the success (or otherwise) of attempts to educate heterosexuals about the lives and experiences of lesbians and gay men (Kitzinger and Peel, 2005).

It is essential that such work continues (and expands to include a focus on biphobia and transphobia), so that we can continue to find effective ways to challenge the social marginalisation of LGBTQ people. It is also important to explore attitudes within LGBTQ communities towards various aspects of LGBTQ lives, and not to assume that LGBTQ people are homogeneous and all hold similar views. For instance, Damien Riggs and colleagues have examined attitudes within lesbian and gay communities to lesbian and gay parenting (Riggs et al., 2009).

**Developmental psychology**

This is another key area of psychology in which LGBTQ psychologists have made crucial interventions. As we discussed in Chapter 9, LGBTQ psychological research on lesbian parenting has had a significant positive impact on custody cases involving lesbian mothers and has been influential in lifting the ban on lesbian and gay fostering and adoption, and broadening the understanding of family, in many countries. Key researchers such as US psychologist Charlotte Patterson (2008) and British psychologist Susan Golombok (2000) led the way towards an inclusive approach to developmental psychology by publishing texts that feature LGBTQ families and parents. Research on lesbian and gay parenting has also highlighted the heteronormative assumptions underpinning many mainstream theories of child development. Both Victoria (Clarke, 2001, 2002a, 2002b, 2008) and Damien (Riggs, 2006c, 2008) have critically examined the construction of lesbian and gay parenting within psychology and the wider society. Although Victoria and Damien recognise the important political contributions made by...
mainstream work on lesbian and gay parenting, they have argued that even this ‘affirmative’ research is underpinned by heteronormative assumptions about gender and sexuality.

**Clinical and counselling psychology**

There is still much work to be done to remedy the legacy of the pathologisation of non-heterosexual and trans people within clinical psychology for much of the last century. As we noted in Chapters 1 and 6, LGBTQ psychologists have developed models for affirmative practice with LGBTQ clients (Milton and Coyle, 2003; Langridge, 2007b) and have been at the forefront of challenges to biased and non-affirmative psychological practice (including conversion therapy) with LGBTQ clients (Clarke and Peel, 2007c). LGBTQ psychologists have also examined LGBTQ people’s experiences of therapy and counselling (Malley and Tasker, 2007) and the processes and practices of counselling and clinical psychology training (Coyle et al., 2001; Moon, 2007). Damien has built on this important work in recent collaborative research on heteronormativity in psychological practice (Fell et al., 2008), which has developed tools for challenging heteronormativity among trainee and practising psychologists.

**Educational psychology**

LGBTQ psychologists have made significant contributions to the field of educational (school) psychology, and to teaching and learning in psychology more broadly. LGBTQ psychologists have developed inclusive curricula for degree-level psychology teaching (APA, 1998), and have critiqued the heterosexist and genderist foundations of many mainstream psychological theories and models. Psychologists have also examined LGBTQ students’ and academics’ experiences of higher education (HE), both in order to document these experiences, which are often invisible because of the ‘hidden curriculum of heteronormativity’ within HE, and to find ways to improve LGBTQ people’s experience of HE and make it more inclusive (Hodges and Pearson, 2008). For example, Sonja (Ellis, 2009) has surveyed LGBT students on their experiences of HE in the UK. Victoria, in collaboration with Virginia Braun, has interviewed LGBTQ (and heterosexual) academics in a number of different countries about their experiences of coming out in the classroom and managing heteronormativity, and LGB students in the UK and New Zealand about the positive and negative aspects of their experience of higher education (see Clarke and Braun, 2009). Among other things, this research aims to develop practical suggestions for avoiding heterosexist and genderist assumptions in all forms of teaching and learning at university (Clarke and Braun, 2006). Damien (Riggs, 2009b, 2009c) has added an extra dimension to this work, by exploring the importance of an intersectional lens through which to teach about non-heterosexual lives.
LGBTQ psychologists have also intervened in school-based education. For instance, Damien (Lovell and Riggs, 2009; Riggs and Augustinos, 2007) has explored how school books model particular understandings of difference and diversity that treat the experiences of white middle-class heterosexual people as the norm. Finally, LGBTQ psychologists have made important contributions to the development and evaluation of inclusive education and training programmes in a wide variety of contexts, including lesbian and gay diversity training in the workplace (Harding and Peel, 2007; Peel, 2002).

**Health psychology**

As we have documented throughout this book, LGBTQ people face considerable disadvantages that negatively impact on their health. LGBTQ health psychology research renders visible the disparities in health outcomes between heterosexual and non-trans people and LGBTQ people, and draws attention to the specific health needs of LGBTQ communities. For example, LGBTQ health researchers and activists have been key advocates for generating funds for researching HIV/AIDS within LGBTQ communities and have contributed significantly to what we know about the disease across all populations. Both Elizabeth and Damien are actively engaged in LGBTQ health research (see Peel and Thomson, 2009). For instance, Damien (Riggs, 2006) has explored what accounts of seroconversion among gay men (i.e., a change in the status of one’s blood from, in this instance, HIV negative to HIV positive) tell us about how gay men understand their relationships to others, to gay communities and to their health. Damien has also examined the experiences of gay male sperm donors (Riggs, 2009c). This research provides insight into the specific health and emotional needs of this group of men. For example, it highlights the emotion work that men engage when negotiating sperm donation and the need for reproductive health clinics to examine and challenge instances of homophobia and heterosexism in the delivery of their services.

As we noted in Chapter 6, LGBTQ people’s experiences of chronic physical illness (other than HIV/AIDS) has been a neglected area of research. Liz Peel and Adam Jowett’s (Jowett and Peel, 2009) groundbreaking research on LGBT people’s experiences of chronic illness highlights some of the barriers LGBTQ people face when living with a chronic illness. Similarly, Elizabeth’s current research on experiences of pregnancy loss among lesbian and bisexual women (Peel and Cain, 2008) highlights a neglected area of research and the barriers same-sex couples face in dealing with pregnancy loss. Such research has huge potential to impact positively on the delivery of health care services to LGBTQ communities.

**Psychology of family and relationships**

LGBTQ psychologists working in the domain of family psychology have made significant contributions to understanding the structure and processes of the families and relationships of LGBTQ people. They have also challenged the
heteronormative underpinnings of much psychological research on family and relationships, and the commonplace assumption that all families and relationships are heterosexual. Although LGBTQ people are sometimes viewed as ‘outsiders’ to family life, and LGBTQ families and relationships are perceived as bad for children, the work of LGBTQ psychologists has demonstrated the central and positive roles that family and relationships play in the lives of LGBTQ people. LGBTQ psychologists like Victoria and her colleagues Maree Burns and Carole Burgoynes (Burns et al. 2008; Clarke et al., 2008), Damien (2007b) and Elizabeth and Rosie Harding (2006; Peel and Harding, 2008) have demonstrated the creative ways in which LGBTQ people navigate heteronormative assumptions about family and relationships.

LGBTQ psychologists have also intervened in important debates about the legal recognition of same-sex relationships (Clarke, et al., 2006, 2007; Harding and Peel, 2007; Peel and Harding, 2004) and have argued that law and social policy need to take account of the ways in which LGBTQ people live their lives, rather than assuming that LGBTQ relationships and families can be forced into heteronormative models. The work of LGBTQ scholars has played an important role in the ever increasing legal recognition of same-sex families and relationships, and LGBTQ psychologists now have a new task – understanding the form and function of new social institutions like civil partnership and same-sex marriage, and the new rites and rituals that are developing around them. Elizabeth and Victoria are currently undertaking qualitative interview and survey research on civil partnerships in the UK, focusing on people’s reasons for entering into a civil partnership, the reactions of their family and friends to their civil partnership, and how the actual civil partnership and any associated ceremony or celebration unfolds (e.g., Peel and Clarke, 2007).

Psychology of work and leisure

Two growing areas of concern within LGBTQ psychology are the work and leisure of LGBTQ people. Research on the workplace has primarily focused on experiences of homophobia and heterosexism within the workplace (Harding and Peel, 2007; Kitzinger, 1991), and how some LGBTQ people negotiate a heteronormative work environment and achieve success in their careers (Rostad and Long, 2007). LGBTQ psychologists have also been at the forefront of challenges to heterosexism in the workplace more broadly. LGBTQ psychologists have developed and evaluated lesbian and gay diversity training programmes for a variety of different professions/ places of work (Kitzinger and Peel, 2005; Peel, 2002, 2005).

We know surprisingly little about the lives of LGBTQ people outside of the workplace or school and college/university (other than, of course, in relation to their families and relationships), and the ways in which LGBTQ people engage in sport and leisure. Most research to date has focused on sport and exercise. LGBTQ psychologists have examined, for example, the experiences of lesbian athletes and coaches, heteronormative sports climates and stereotypes of female athletes (Krane
and Kauer, 2007). Research has also focused on gay male athletes and their experiences of coming out to their sporting peers (Gough, 2007). This research highlights the challenges faced by non-heterosexual sportswomen and men in a world infused with ideals of hegemonic masculinity and heterosexuality; and in which sportswomen who display qualities associated with masculinity (such as aggression, strength and confidence) are (negatively) assumed to be lesbian.

Psychology of the media

Psychologists have long been concerned with the media, and the ways in which the media depict particular groups of people and things (such as violence), and the impact of these depictions on people’s behaviour. LGBTQ psychologists have been particularly concerned with the representation of LGBTQ people in the media. As Victoria (Clarke, 2001; Clarke and Kitzinger, 2004, 2005), Damien (Riggs, 2006c) and Sonja (Ellis and Kitzinger, 2002) have explored in their research, negative representations of LGBTQ people in the media contribute to widespread negative perceptions of LGBTQ people. Furthermore, both Damien (Riggs, 2007b) and Victoria (Clarke, 2002a, 2002b) have suggested that simply countering negative representations of LGBTQ people with (ostensibly) ‘positive’ representations may not be enough to prevent the former from occurring. Rather, there is a need to analyse the rhetoric of both negative and ‘positive’ or sympathetic media representations in order to understand in detail the often subtle and complex ways in which they work to portray LGBTQ people in a negative light (Peel and Harding, 2008). This process of analysis will help us to develop truly positive representations of LGBTQ people that are based on the reality of their lives.

Future directions

In addition to all of the gaps and absences we have highlighted throughout the book, we now make some broader suggestions about how the field should develop. We encourage readers to develop their own vision for the future of LGBTQ psychology.

- Representing diversity. There is a need to continue to develop sampling and analytic approaches that ensure the representation of diverse groups of LGBTQ people. It is also important that the research tools we use and the theoretical frameworks we employ reflect the actual worldviews of our participants, rather than reflecting a white, middle-class understanding of the world.

- Moving away from a white, middle-class norm. We need to ensure that ‘diverse samples’ include marginalised social groups and the ‘usual suspects’. Too often ‘diversity’ is treated as referring only to people who are not white or middle-class, which means that, for example, a focus on ‘race’ in LGBTQ psychological research tends to translate into a focus on the experiences of
non-white people. This of course overlooks the fact that white people are also members of a racial group. As a result of ‘race equalling non-white’, we know very little about how white, middle-class LGBTQ people live out their lives and do identity development and coming out, relationships, family and parenting, and ageing as white, middle-class people. This does not mean that we should continue to focus research on the most privileged groups of LGBTQ people, but that we should recognise that everyone occupies a position in relation to race and class (and gender, age ...) and we are all part of ‘diversity’.

- LGBTQ-positive mainstream psychology. There is a need to consider what an LGBTQ-positive mainstream psychology would actually look like. How could we re-envision psychology so that it would genuinely encompass a diverse range of experiences, rather than simply ‘adding-in’ LGBTQ people and leaving the heteronormative framework of mainstream psychology intact?

- LGBTQ-specific research and comparative research. We should continue to promote LGBTQ-specific research that celebrates the lives of LGBTQ people. At the same time, we should acknowledge the benefits of comparative research that avoids treating heterosexual people as the benchmark and seeks to identify actual and important differences between groups and the implications of these differences (e.g., the disparities between LGBTQ and heterosexual and non-trans people on key health indicators).

- An international approach. There is a need to develop a truly international approach to LGBTQ psychology that both recognises the cultural and national specificity of LGBTQ lives and allows for comparisons and collaborations between countries.

Main chapter points

This chapter:

- Outlined the cultural specificity of current research on LGBTQ people and the limitations of western concepts of gender and sexuality.
- Discussed the use of intersectional approaches within LGBTQ psychology and the relationship between privilege and disadvantage.
- Outlined some applications of LGBTQ research to a range of areas in psychology.
- Discussed some of the key directions for the future of LGBTQ psychology.

Questions for discussion and classroom exercises

1. Why do you think LGBTQ psychology is important? What are some of the key contributions that LGBTQ psychologists have made to understanding the lives of LGBTQ people and to psychology more broadly?
2. What questions do you think LGBTQ psychologists should ask in the future? If you were going to conduct a project in LGBTQ psychology, what would you investigate?

3. Discuss the pros and cons of the following two views of the future of LGBTQ psychology: (a) LGBTQ psychology should remain a separate, specialist area of psychology that focuses specifically on the needs and concerns of LGBTQ people; (b) LGBTQ psychology should be viewed as a central component of the discipline of psychology that has numerous implications for mainstream psychology and the various sub-fields and areas of research and practice that constitute it.

4. Consider how your own life is shaped through many different identity categories. What does it mean for you to experience the world through the intersections of all of these different aspects of your identity? If you were asked to rank the various aspects of your identity in order from most to least important, how would you rank them? Is this a difficult or easy thing to do? Does it limit your experience of the world?

5. Consider some of the non-western identity categories discussed in this chapter (nádleehı´, fa’afafine) and in Chapter 2 (tom, dee). What are some of the problems in labelling non-western people who identify with such categories with western labels such as ‘lesbian’, ‘gay’ or ‘trans’? Could (and should) the DSM diagnosis of ‘Gender Identity Disorder’ (GID) be applied to such people? What do non-western sexuality and gender categories reveal about the limitations of western categories?

6. If you were an educational psychologist reading this book how might the knowledge you have gained influence your practice? Consider the same question for a clinical psychologist/therapist, health psychologist, sport psychologist and occupational psychologist.

Further reading


Victoria Clarke and colleagues have explored how same-sex couples negotiate relational practices such as sharing (or not sharing) a last name. In this research they attempt to ‘get beyond’ a comparative paradigm (the study only includes same-sex couples), while also acknowledging that same-sex couples negotiate practices such as naming within a heteronormative social context. In so doing they explore how heterosexual conventions (such as name-sharing) inevitably form a backdrop to same-sex couples’ conversations about naming.
Ellis, S. J. (2009) Diversity and inclusivity at university: a survey of the experiences of lesbian, gay, bisexual and trans (LGBT) students in the UK. *Higher Education, 57*(6), 723. Sonja Ellis explores the extent to which universities in the UK are perceived by LGBT students as ‘gay friendly’. A sample of 291 students from forty-two universities completed an online survey which asked about their awareness of homophobic bullying on campus, the extent to which they felt able to be open about their sexuality/gender identity, and whether or not they felt that LGBT issues were adequately represented both in the curriculum and in the university’s practices. The findings showed that homophobia is still a significant issue in universities and is primarily perpetrated by students against other students. The paper highlights the importance of being more proactive in addressing diversity and inclusivity, because the absence of a zero tolerance climate has enabled homophobia on campus to persist.

Peel, E. (2009) Intergroup relations in action: questions asked about lesbian, gay and bisexual issues in diversity training. *Journal of Community and Applied Social Psychology, 19*, 271–85. Elizabeth Peel outlines the types of questions that heterosexuals ask about lesbian, gay and bisexual issues in diversity training about sexualities. She identifies six different themes in the questions (such as questions about the trainer’s life, experiences and practices) and compares ‘real’ questions and answers to the decontextualised questions provided in training manuals. This paper highlights the importance of ‘going where the action is’; Liz argues that ‘intergroup relations’ research should focus more on analyses of the ‘real’ social world in action, and rely less on reports of the social world.

Riggs, D. W. (2007c) Queer theory and its future in psychology: exploring issues of race privilege. *Social and Personality Psychology Compass, 1*, 39–52. Damien Riggs outlines six main ways in which research on LGBTQ people in psychology needs to pay attention to issues of race and race privilege, including the need to: (1) acknowledge the intellectual traditions that the field builds on; (2) examine how particular accounts of ‘the individual’ are racialised; (3) examine how sexualities are always racialised; (4) recognise the contingency of social constructionist critiques of race; (5) acknowledge the cultural contingency of terms used within LGBTQ communities; and (6) recognise the limits of assuming that there will always be easy connections between diverse groups of people within LGBTQ communities.