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Editorial

Looking back: from Lesbian and Gay Psychology to the Psychology of Sexualities over the last 20 years

Adam Jowett

As the new Chair of the Section, it is my pleasure to introduce this special issue of *Psychology of Sexualities Review* which celebrates two decades of the Section. The Psychology of Sexualities Section began life 20 years ago as the Lesbian and Gay Psychology Section in 1998, after almost a decade of campaigning and three unsuccessful proposals (see Wilkinson, 1999 reprinted in this issue). Anniversaries offer an important opportunity to take stock and reflect, to reconnect ourselves with our past and consider where we should be going in the future (Jowett, 2017).

So, in this issue we have personal reflections from two of our previous Chairs, Joanna Semlyen and Elizabeth Peel. Semlyen is a long serving member of the committee, having filled every role on the committee at some point in time. She was Chair of the committee from 2007 - 2010. Elizabeth Peel has also been an active member of the Section over the last two decades, notably in the role of editor of *Lesbian & Gay Psychology Review* (the Section's previous publication) and most recently as Chair of the Section from 2015 - 2017. Both share their memories of personal involvement in the Section and explain how the early years were largely concerned with legitimatizing the field and becoming 'established'. As Semlyen points out, the establishment of the Section created opportunities for the field to flourish within the UK.

Both Semlyen and Peel also reflect on the change in the Section's name from the Lesbian and Gay Psychology Section to the Psychology of Sexualities Section in 2009 (see also Jowett & Semlyen, 2016). Joanna was serving as Chair when the Section changed its name. She explains how the name was chosen to reflect the broadening of the field to include bisexuality (Barker, 2004; Petford, 2003) and other sexualities. As she explains, for her, it felt like a 'natural and comfortable fit'. Peel, meanwhile, recounts impassioned debate about the name change and how her own preference at the time was for a 'LGBTQ Psychology Section'. She explains that she was concerned that the 'psychology of sexualities' name could have led the

Section to drift away from a central focus on LGBT+ issues within psychology specifically (see also Clarke *et al.*, 2010). She does, however, acknowledge that ever shifting acronyms may have made 'sexualities' appear to be a more 'future proof' alternative. Interestingly, the original founders of the Section had considered the label 'Psychology of Sexuality' but rejected it on the basis that 'the term "sexuality" can be heard as implying a narrow focus on sexual practices, ignoring the broad range of psychosocial issues (employment, parenting, ageing etc.) which constitute the core of contemporary lesbian and gay psychology' (Kitzinger *et al.*, 1998: 531).

The troublesome issue of settling on a name is something that many LGBT organisations have had to consider and reconsider. For example, our counterpart across the Atlantic, the American Psychological Association's Division 44 has changed its name from the Society for the Psychological Study of Lesbian and Gay Issues, to include the word bisexual and later transgender, and then again more recently to the Society for the Psychology of Sexual Orientation and Gender Diversity. The name of the Section is something that is periodically raised both by our members and within committee discussions. Some understandably feel our current name does not acknowledge or reflect that issues of gender diversity have always been represented within the Section (e.g. Harris, 2001; Twist, 2017; Whittle, 2007).

While the committee remain open to further discussions about the name, there are institutional changes afoot and future uncertainties within the Society to consider. As you may well be aware, the BPS has for some time been undergoing a Structural Review which could have an impact on member networks such as this Section. One of the current proposals is to standardise the names of member networks to 'BPS X Psychology' (e.g. BPS Social Psychology, BPS Clinical Psychology etc). As such, it may be prudent to wait until the Structural Review is complete before considering a further name change. Another proposal currently being considered under the Structural Review is for some smaller member networks be merged with similar member networks. We will be keeping a close eye on developments in this area and will keep members informed.

Two decades of progress but we're not complacent

Much has changed over the last twenty years for LGBT people in Britain. Back in 1998, LGBT people had no legal protection from discrimination in the workplace or within the provision of goods and services; there was no equal age of consent for sex between men;

there was no legal recognition for same sex relationships (let alone marriage equality) and there was no Gender Recognition Act. The legal and social landscape for LGBT people in the UK has shifted dramatically. Many of our members and contributors have written about and applied their research to these areas over the last 20 years, from civil partnership and same-sex marriage (e.g. Harding & Peel, 2006) to lesbian and gay parenting (e.g. Clarke, 2005) and the Gender Recognition Act (e.g. Whittle, 2007).

Not only have our members contributed research to inform debate about these societal issues, they have also changed the (British Psychological) Society. Members of our section played a central role in developing BPS guidelines for working with sexual and gender minority clients (BPS, 2012) and our members have worked with the Society and other mental health professional bodies to produce joint statements against conversion therapies. We have pushed the Society to speak up for the rights, mental health and wellbeing of LGBTQ people and will continue to do so.

Some may say that now the major battles have been won, do we really need the Section? Those of us who teach students about LGBTQ psychology will be familiar with claims that 'we're all very liberal in our views' now (Clarke, 2005). Yet, heteronormativity remains pervasive even among younger generations (Clarke, 2018; Riggs, 2006). There remains a lack of coverage of LGBT issues within the training of psychologists and when it is included in the curriculum it can sometimes be viewed as controversial. For instance, in a recent student evaluation of my teaching, one student commented that they felt I was using lectures to 'campaign' because I used 'too many LGBT examples' (despite using many more examples of research with heterosexual samples within the same lecture on relationships). This is but one example among many instances of everyday heterosexism that I'm sure many members of the Section experience (see also Clarke, 2018). Furthermore, studying the psychology of LGBTQ lives does not cease to be important because we have equality! It is also important that we don't become complacent. As Semlyen rightly points out, rights can be lost as well as won. While it might seem unlikely today, Donald Trump's attempts to ban trans people from the military (which the BPS spoke out about thanks to this Section) demonstrates that we must be vigilant going forwards.

Looking back on our history and looking forward to our anniversary conference

We will be marking our 20th Anniversary Year with a two-day conference in London on the 5th and 6th July 2018 (just before London Pride which takes place on 7th July). It will be the biggest event in the Section's recent history. There will be a range of different presentation styles and we also have some very exciting workshops which will be of interest to practitioners and academics alike. We have three very special keynote speakers: Sue Wilkinson, Celia Kitzinger and Peter Hegarty. In anticipation of their keynotes, for this issue I have selected contributions from these three scholars from our archives for re-publication. All three have played a significant role in the Section's history and made major contributions to the field. Over the last two decades the Section has communicated with its members and disseminated research within the *Lesbian and Gay Psychology Section Newsletter*, the *Lesbian & Gay Psychology Review (LGPR)* and now the *Psychology of Sexualities Review (PoSR)*¹. The articles chosen for republication come from the *Newsletter* and *LGPR* from the first 10 years of the Section².

In an article from 1999, originally published in the *Lesbian and Gay Psychology Newsletter*, Sue Wilkinson looks back at the pre-history of the Section. She documented the struggle to establish the Section and recounts the barriers and prejudice that the Section's founders came up against. Wilkinson, together with Celia Kitzinger (who will be delivering a joint keynote at the conference) and a small group of others were founding members of the Section who campaigned for its establishment for almost a decade. Wilkinson brought with her the lessons she'd learnt as a founder and first Chair of the Psychology of Women Section (POWS), but she also discusses the tensions she experienced when POWS initially refused to support their proposal for a Psychology of Lesbianism Section. As the *Newsletter* predates the BPS' electronic archive, this is the first time this key article about the Section's history will be widely accessible online.

In addition to playing a central role in establishing the Section and being its inaugural Chair, Celia Kitzinger's most notable contribution to the field of LGBTQ psychology is most probably her book *The Social Construction of Lesbianism* (Kitzinger, 1987). So, for this

¹ Back issues of *Lesbian & Gay Psychology Review* and *Psychology of Sexualities Review* are available for members to download for free from the BPS Shop.

² It is important to note that as these are republished articles from some time ago, they may not reflect the current views of the authors

issue, I have chosen to reprint an interview between Elizabeth Peel and Celia Kitzinger published in a Special Issue of *LGPR* in 2005 dedicated to reappraising Kitzinger's classic text. Widely acknowledged as being ahead of its time, the book launched a provocative critique of 'gay affirmative' psychology based in liberal humanism that was taking place in the USA. In its place, Kitzinger offered a critical, radical feminist agenda based within a social constructionist theoretical perspective. Kitzinger's social constructionist perspective undoubtedly had a lasting impact on LGBTQ psychology within the UK, which continues to be much more informed by critical perspectives than LGBTQ psychology in the US. As Peel comments in her introduction to her interview with Kitzinger, 'There is no doubt that British lesbian and gay psychology might now look rather different were it not for *The Social Construction of Lesbianism*'. In 2017, Kitzinger's contribution to the discipline was recognised with a BPS Lifetime Achievement Award, following her nomination by the Section's committee.

Together, Kitzinger and Wilkinson are the epitome of 'scholar-activists'. After a decade of campaigning the BPS for a Section in the 1990s, the pair took on an even bigger challenge in the 2000s. Shortly after the Civil Partnership Act came into law in 2005, Kitzinger and Wilkinson took the UK government to court in an attempt to have their marriage (formalised in Canada) legally recognised as a marriage in the UK. They spearheaded a campaign for equal marriage rights (equalmarriagerights.org) and, for a time, made this the focus of their scholarship. Although they lost their court case (at great personal expense), their objective was ultimately realised in the form of the Marriage (Same Sex Couples) Act. For the third reprinted article, I have selected a paper by Kitzinger and Wilkinson published in 2006 within *LGPR* as part of a special issue on same-sex marriage. What I particularly like about this article is that they argue for marriage equality not only from their own position as a lesbian couple but make a broader argument about the way in which definitions of gender incorporated into marriage and civil partnership law obscured trans and intersex lives. They also note the invisibility of bisexuals in discussions about same-sex marriage (often referred to as 'gay marriage') and civil partnership.

It is interesting to note, that while marriage is now open to all irrespective of gender (or at least in England, Wales and Scotland), some of their arguments remain relevant today. Some aspects of marriage law apply only to different-sex couples (e.g. adultery) and civil partnership is only an option for same sex couples. As such, marriage and civil partnership

law continues to reinforce and institutionalise gender binaries. There continues to be, in Kitzinger and Wilkinson's words, 'no space here for recognition of more than two genders, or for acknowledging the possible irrelevance of gender'. Furthermore, while there is now a campaign for different-sex couples to have access to civil partnership as a modern form of relationship recognition, in reality it mimics marriage in almost every respect (Jowett & Peel, 2017). As Kitzinger and Wilkinson point out, the government 'missed out on the possibility of creating a new legal framework of relationship recognition that might have been open to everyone, irrespective of gender and sexuality...that would encompass all relationships of mutual care and commitment'. Instead, we have marriage and marriage-by-another-name. The arguments made by Kitzinger and Wilkinson in this article, therefore, are still relevant to debates about what should happen with civil partnership more than a decade on³.

Peter Hegarty is also a former Chair of the Section and I have chosen to reprint his first statement as Section Chair titled 'Getting past divide and conquer', originally published in 2004. I've chosen this as I feel Hegarty's message remains as relevant today as it was back then (if not more so). A key strength of our Section has always been that our members come from all areas of psychology and include both practitioners and academics. However, we also have a tendency to work in silos and the contemporary conditions within academia and health services have only made this worse. Hegarty points out that students often learn about LGBTQ psychology in isolated conditions with limited support and calls for improvement in the curricular within which psychologists are trained. While much has changed since the time this was written, unfortunately I feel these are still issues which we are faced with today.

In addition to his role within the Section, Hegarty has made significant and innovative contributions to the field of LGBTQ psychology. His work cuts across the fields of the history of psychology and the psychology of sexuality and gender. Since he was Chair, he has published several books which examine the history of sexuality within the discipline. *Gentlemen's disagreement* (Hegarty, 2013) traces how intelligence and sexuality were intertwined within the history of early American psychology and sexology (Hegarty, 2013) and last year, he published *A recent history of lesbian and gay psychology* (Hegarty, 2017). One particularly distinctive aspect of Hegarty's work is the way that he translates insights

³ Kitzinger and Wilkinson have now turned their formidable energies towards tackling end-of-life issues, conducting research in the area as well as founding a charity to assist with Advanced Decisions (adassistance.org.uk).

from queer theory and critical psychology into experimental social psychology (rather than rejecting quantitative methods). So, for this Special Anniversary Issue, I have chosen to republish an article by Hegarty published in 2003 on the use of significance testing within early experiments within the field of gay affirmative psychology by Evelyn Hooker. In this paper, Hegarty urges LGBTQ psychologists to examine the ‘performativity of quantitative work’ and for ‘critical engagement with the gutsy stuff of methodology (including statistical practices) through which all psychologists inevitably become political agents in history’.

To end this special issue, we have an event review and several book reviews. Eric Julian Manalastas looks back to review our 2017 one-day conference which may give you a taste of what you can expect in July. Both book reviews also have an element of ‘looking back’ to them. Nuno Nodin reviews a recently reissued edition of Ann Oakley’s *Sex, Gender and Society* (Routledge, 2015 - originally published in 1972), meanwhile Karen Pollock reviews *Trans Britain* (Unbound, 2018) which provides a historical narrative of trans people. I hope this (shorter than usual) issue will whet your appetite for our upcoming conference and as Chair I would like to warmly invite you all to attend and celebrate our Section with Pride. For more information about the conference or to register please visit: www.bps.org.uk/pos-jul18

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