



BOOK REVIEW

REVIEWED BY GEORGIA OVENDEN

Out in the antipodes: Australian and New Zealand perspectives on gay and lesbian issues in psychology. Edited by Damien W. Riggs and Gordon Walker. Perth: Brightfire Press, 2004, 447 pp., ISBN: 0-9750777

Addressing the dearth of literature concerning lesbian and gay issues in mainstream psychology, this extensive collection of readings critically examines the ways in which heteronormative constructions inform clinical practice and individual experiences of sexual identity in Australia and Aotearoa New Zealand.

In their introduction the editors are careful to elaborate on the double meanings evident in the book's title; 'antipodes' is defined as both a 'country on the other side of the globe' and 'anything opposite or contrary'. The deconstruction of the title is used to reveal both the cultural context in which the perspectives are drawn, and its 'contrary' theoretical position in challenging those 'disordered' understandings of gay and lesbian identifications in psychology's 'old paradigm'.

The scope of the book's chapters - which include reflexive pieces from clinicians 'on the couch' to participant's responses and stories of 'coming out' - enables readers to engage in perspectives both 'within and without' the bounds of psychology as a discipline. Although the editors appeal to wider political aims concerning the marginalisation and oppression of gay, lesbian and bisexual populations, the primary aim of the book is to encourage the development of a 'new paradigm' that reflects the diversity of lesbian and gay identities and prompts the further discussion of these issues in this region.

The chapter by Rogers and Booth maps out the central liberations, and the less celebrated 'diagnoses' of homosexuality, which have shaped the gay and lesbian identity in psychology. Interestingly, while the authors recognise the success of the queer movement in rallying for a more visible *expression* of sexual difference, they argue that a "deeply felt sense of identity" as homosexual men is often

best explained by biological origin (p. 32). Not surprisingly, their review of the latest 'evidence' concerning the genetic difference of the homosexual (man) and the potential misuse of this 'new biology,' only leads readers back to the dangers in seeking a biological 'origin' to explain sexual difference. Even still, while the authors remain cautious about the difficulties in speaking about gay and lesbian identity outside a socially constructed context, their appeal to a biologically determined identity might have been better supported by a more extensive discussion of the debates in this area.

Moving from the genealogy of lesbian and gay psychology, the first section points to some of the contemporary 'psy-discourses' that have structured mainstream psychological thought. Semp draws on interviews to demonstrate how some clinicians view the risks of disclosing their sexuality inside the therapeutic context, and the issues surrounding increasing 'queer visibility' during private therapy. Taking up a somewhat different position, Kane recollects his experience of self-disclosure and the positive results gained from following the APA and APS guidelines for working with lesbian and gay clients. Kane's thoughtful account of the sessions preceding his client's 'coming out,' and the caution taken in regard to his own disclosure, highlight some of the challenges faced by clinicians when weighing up the potential risks and benefits of self-disclosure.

Section two looks more closely at gay and lesbian challenges to the (nuclear) family structure. Higgins's chapter explores some of the dilemmas faced by men who have lived, or are currently living, in-between heterosexual and gay relationships. While Higgins underlines his role as a 'translator' of the participant's narratives and experiences, he does point to some of the potential dangers (in regard to safe sex practices) which may arise from men who chose to 'liv[e] with contradiction'. However, this chapter, which is interspersed with extracts from Higgins's own personal experience of marriage/ denial/coming out, succeeds in presenting a more intimate account of the some of the reservations and contemplations faced by men currently living

in-and-out of gay-and-straight identities. Drawing on interviews as well as his own experience as a gay donor to six children, van Reyk's chapter takes a more political stance on the current discriminations affecting gay male donor fathers. Defending criticisms that his donor role is "hardly the stuff of real fatherhood", van Reyk underlines the importance of gay men's involvement (and lesbians too, though not in the same ways) in reconstructing notions of 'the family' in Australia (p. 148).

In the following section, the authors examine the ways in which presupposed notions of 'risk' and 'deviancy' in health psychology have operated, albeit in different ways, to limit gay men and lesbians access to the (heterosexual) 'healthy body'. Engaging readers in a critical analysis of policy documents on gay men's health in New Zealand, Adam's, Braun and McCreanor underline the dangers in colligating gay men's health in terms of 'risk' and their health issues as exclusively HIV/AIDS related. Boldero's chapter on gay Asian-Australian men draws attention to the positive relationship between homosexual identification and safe sex practices as well as the problems faced by many Asian, gay men who have attempted to gain significance in both of these communities.'

The final two sections engage more closely in issues surrounding identity by addressing the ways sexual orientation is invariably constructed, 'staged' and *realised* in response to heteronormative understandings of sexuality and gender. Drawing on some intriguing interviews with lesbian women, MacBride-Stewart attempts to uncover why it is that many of her participant's had 'never heard' of dental dams. In her belief, the lack of awareness and access of the dental dam in lesbian communities draws attention to the monopoly of hetero-safe-sex in the public health discourses.

Following Cass's revised articulation of a stage model of homosexual-identity acceptance,

Jensen's chapter points to the potential benefits of using narrative to explore the more fluid and reflexive aspects of gay and lesbian identity formation. Following from this, Harwood and Rasmussen call on queer theory and Butler's notion of performativity to problematise essentialist notions of gender and sex that are often reified in clinical practice.

In the final chapter, Riggs and Riggs reflect on an 'everyday conversation' to demonstrate how gay and lesbian identities are caught up in the heterosexual matrix, and the binaries of 'us and them'. After some discussion on the politics surrounding gay and lesbian identity, they suggest that the 'doing of typically heterosexual things' (such as parenting) by queer people may work to challenge or subvert essentialist assumptions that surround what it means to be heterosexual or queer (p. 427).

Working through the broad terrain of both clinical and research-driven perspectives in psychology, this book opens a space for a more integrative and multidimensional conceptualisation of lesbian and gay sexualities. Locating themselves within their work as lesbian, gay and heterosexual clinicians and academics, the contributors rigorously address the ways in which psychological discourse may both interact and engage with wider cultural understandings of lesbian and gay sexual identities.

While this book achieves a great deal in questioning the *real* impact of normative understandings of sexuality on a broader social level, it also underlines the importance of fostering the new and emerging voice of lesbian and gay psychology in this region.

Author note

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