

Book Reviews

Out in the Antipodes: Australian and New Zealand Perspectives on Gay and Lesbian Issues in Psychology

Damien W. Riggs & Gordon A. Walker (Eds.)
(2004)

Bentley, Western Australia: Brightfire Press.
447 pages. Paperback. \$AUS42 (£17.91)
ISBN: 0-9750777-1-6

 Reviewed by Sonja J. Ellis

At the age of 27, and six months before emigrating to the UK, I 'came out' as lesbian in the provincial city of Hamilton, New Zealand. Having been born and bred in New Zealand but now living 16,000 miles away from my *turangawaewae* (home ground), the chance to review the only Australasian text on lesbian and gay psychology was too good an opportunity to pass up – especially when the title *Out in the Antipodes* is a clear 'play on words'!

The book begins with two introductory chapters which provide a useful framework for reading and understanding the book. The first chapter (by the book's editors) gives a reflexive overview of lesbian and gay psychology in Australia and New Zealand. This is then followed by a chapter by Rogers and Booth – entitled 'Queer Goings-on' – which gives a potted account of the historical progression of lesbian and gay perspectives within psychology more generally. Following these two chapters, the book is divided into five distinct sections, each including three chapters.

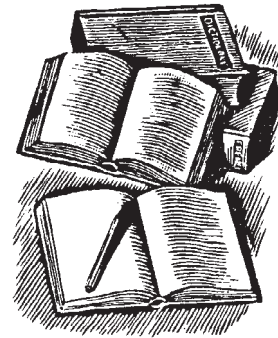
Part one of the book focuses on accountability and reflexivity in practice settings. The first chapter in this section is based on interviews with staff of public mental health services in New Zealand, and explores dominant discourses around homosexuality and mental health and how these discourses restrict/facilitate mental health workers' interactions with men who have sex with men (msm). Based on a case study the next chapter reflects on the impact on the thera-

peutic process of the therapist's unplanned coming out, and offers a nuanced account of the professional appropriateness

of being 'out' as a counsellor. The final chapter in this section evaluates the use of queer theory for practitioners and explores the utility of the Australian Psychological Society's guidelines for informing affirming practice with lesbians and gay men.

Part two challenges 'a priori' assumptions that surround understandings of the 'nuclear family' (p.122) and presents three excellent chapters on gay fathers. The first of these offers an exploration of heterosexually married msm's experiences and construction of identity; and includes an excellent reflective account of the author's own experiences. In a similar vein, the next chapter draws on the narratives of gay donor fathers and also includes a reflexive account of the author's own experiences as a gay donor father. The third chapter departs from this empirical and reflexive trend by offering a theoretical account of the personal, social and legal issues faced by non-resident gay fathers; and exploring the policy implications of these.

The next section – part three – focuses on health and includes three chapters which use differing methodological and epistemological approaches. It begins with a chapter reporting on a longitudinal questionnaire study of drug use among young women which offers a comparison of drug use patterns of lesbian/bisexual young women compared to their heterosexual counterparts. This is then followed by Adams, Braun and McCreanor's rigorous analysis of international policy documents on gay men's health, highlighting the absence of contextualised policy grounded in gay men's



experiences. The final chapter in this section offers a theoretical account of the complexities of being both 'gay' and 'Asian' and explores the limitations of the Health Belief Model and Theory of Planned Behaviour from a gay Asian perspectives.

Part four of the book focuses on identity and coming out. The first chapter comprises a contemporary re-evaluation of Cass' (1979) model of lesbian and gay identity formation by Vivienne Cass herself. In my opinion, this chapter is the book's weakest link in that it claims to be employing a 'social constructionist' approach when it seems simply to be offering a more socially informed or contextualised version of an essentialist stage model. In so doing, it ignores the epistemological incompatibility between the essentialism and social constructionism. The next chapter uses mixed-format questionnaires around coming out to test Cass' stage model as well as offering a narrative analysis of coming out stories. In this chapter the geographical context of the research is clearly highlighted, but the implications of the research findings could be better explicated. Based on interview data, the last chapter in this section explores the effect of expectations of celibacy on gay priests.

The final section of the book focuses on the politics of lesbian and gay psychology. This section begins with an excellent chapter by Sara MacBride-Stewart on dental dams and the promotion of 'safer' lesbian sex. This too uses interview data, to explore issues of exclusion of lesbians from safe-sex literature and the way in which dental dams function as 'a political means for controlling and regulating lesbian bodies' (p.374). The following chapter sets out to problematise gender and sexual identities by exploring the way in essentialist discourses of same-sex attraction construct sexuality and gender. The book then closes with a more informal piece – based on an analysis of a conversation between the authors, Damien and Lauren Riggs – which explores the way(s) in which heterosexist practices are located within talk.

Overall, this book offers a good balance between academic and practice-based work; between theoretical and empirical work; and between qualitative and quantitative approaches. I also liked the way in which the book employs a healthy dose of social constructionism and the way in which most authors have engaged reflexively with their work. However, the balance between Australian and New Zealand perspectives was not so good. My feeling is that this is likely to be a reflection of the geographical distribution of those working in the field – in particular, the relative dearth of New Zealand psychologists/practitioners working in lesbian and gay psychology – rather than an oversight of the editors. After all, New Zealand is a much smaller country than Australia! For me, other marginalising aspects of the book are far more troubling.

Despite the editors' acknowledgement at the outset that the book of the relative absence of cross-cultural and lesbian perspectives, this for me is the book's main weakness. Boldero's chapter on 'Gay Asian Australians' is the only one which explores non-white perspectives, and most of the other chapters fail to engage with their own white Australasian bias. Given what I know about the cosmopolitan nature of many of Australia's cities and the levels of cultural awareness among professionals in New Zealand, I find the absence of indigenous (i.e. Maori, Polynesian and Aboriginal) and other ethnic minority perspectives rather surprising. Also, for me (as a lesbian psychologist) the imbalance of gay male over lesbian perspectives is also problematic. Of the 17 chapters in the book, only two focus specifically on lesbians and although some other chapters appear to focus on topics applicable to both lesbians and gay men, they draw primarily on data collected from gay men. I am certain that these biases were not deliberately intended – the material in chapter one would seem to suggest this – but these are issues which need addressing in subsequent editions of the book.

The other weakness of this book is that in most chapters the way in which Australian or New Zealand perspectives might be distinct is not really explored. Typically, authors have assumed that because they work in Australia or New Zealand and have carried out research there, that their work is, therefore, Australasian. Whilst this is one way of contextualising research, many of the issues and points raised in the book do not look vastly different from those raised by UK and US researchers/writers. In this respect, the book could benefit from a more nuanced account which explicates the distinctly Australasian perspectives, and highlights the points of similarity with other contexts.

Having said all this, I liked the concept of a specifically Australasian text on lesbian and gay psychology. In this respect – whatever its limitations – this book puts lesbian and gay psychology in Australasia on the map and therefore makes a significant contribution to the field. Undoubtedly for those working in the field in Australia and New Zealand the book will be an invaluable homegrown companion to its UK and US counterparts: *Lesbian and gay psychology: New perspectives* (Coyle & Kitzinger, 2002), *Lesbian, gay and bisexual identities over the lifespan: Psychological*

perspectives (D’Augelli & Patterson, 1995), and *Lesbian and Gay Psychology: Theory, Research and Clinical Applications* (Greene & Herek, 1994) among others. However, academics, researchers and practitioners working in the UK, US and elsewhere will also find this book a useful supplementary reference to the burgeoning range of US- and UK-based texts in the field. There are a lot of good quality chapters in this book, and I will certainly be citing some of these in my own work.

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Where Do We Fall When We Fall In Love?

Elizabeth Young-Bruehl (2003)

New York: Other Press.

448 pages. Paperback. £36.95

ISBN: 1-59051-068-2

 Reviewed by Gareth Hagger-Johnson

Elizabeth Young-Bruehl is well known for her (1996) book *The Anatomy of Prejudices*, a discussion of sexism and homophobia in relation to other prejudices. She has also published biographies of Anna Arendt (1982) and Anna Freud (1988). Although currently a psychoanalyst in New York City, she has been a philosopher, biographer and psychoanalyst, ‘a decade in each role’ (p.x). The book is not aimed at a general reader-

ship, but at psychoanalysts. However, the title was seductive enough to appeal to me. The book as a whole is billed as ‘post-Freudian thinking’ on how Japanese psychoanalyst Doi’s concept of *amae*, the expectation to be indulgently loved, missing from the English language, can be integrated with psychoanalysis. In actuality, the book is divided into three parts: cherishment psychology (part one, chapters 1 to 6), sexual and gender identity (part two, chapters 7 to 9) and character theory and its applications (part three, chapters 10 to 13).

The first chapter, ‘Where Do We Fall When We Fall in Love?’, stands alone and gives the book its title, but serves as an important introduction to *amae* which will be repeated throughout the other chapters.