

# **Non-indigenous lesbians and gay men caring for Indigenous children:**

## **An Australian case study**

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### **Introduction**

Research on gender and sexuality has a long history of utilising case studies to inform the development of theory, the testing of hypotheses, and the illustration of paradigmatic cases. Classic examples of this in regards to non-heterosexual and/or non-gender normative people include the works of Freud (e.g., his 1920 paper *The Psychogenesis of a Case of Homosexuality in a Woman*) and Garfinkel (e.g., his 1967 discussion of the case of Agnes in *Studies in Ethnomethodology*), whose work was centrally informed by the close and in-depth examination and discussion of single cases. Yet with the rise of quantitative methods and the accompanying drive towards large sample sizes and statistical testing, case study research to a large degree has fallen out of favour within the social sciences. Whilst more recently discourse analysts have examined the experiences of non-heterosexual and/or non-gender normative people by utilising case study approaches (e.g., Clarke 2006 on lesbian mother families, and Speer 2007 on the experiences of trans people), case studies are still significantly underused within research on non-heterosexual and/or non-gender normative communities.. Flyvbjerg (2006) suggests that this may at least in part be due to a number of incorrect assumptions about case study research, assumptions that fail to comprehend the truly unique contribution it can make to the empirical study of objects in the world. With these points in mind, the present chapter first provides an overview of some principles for conducting contemporary case study research in the social sciences, before moving on to present one specific example of a case study in relation to non-heterosexual people.

## Case Study Principles

Flyvbjerg (2006) suggests five key accusations that are leveled against case studies: 1) as they are context-dependent, case studies contribute little to the accumulation of knowledge, 2) case studies are not generalisable, 3) case studies are only useful for generating hypotheses, not for testing them, 4) case studies are highly subjective, and 5) overarching theories cannot be developed from case studies. Flyvbjerg proposes a radical rethinking of the assumptions that underpin these types of accusations in suggesting the following correctives: 1) social scientific research, as research broadly focused on largely non-observable factors (e.g., attitudes, beliefs, emotions), cannot truly claim the capacity to make predictions. Instead, the strength of social scientific research lies in its capacity to describe context-dependent factors and the experience of them, 2) there is much to be *learnt* from case studies about the broader class from which the case is taken, even if the case study cannot *prove* anything, 3) case studies have long been used to test hypotheses and indeed, with their focus on the specificities of the case, may be the most appropriate means of hypothesis testing, 4) again following from benefits of the specificity of case study research, and whilst acknowledging that all research is subjective, case studies may be *more* rigorous in their examination of the null hypothesis precisely because they provide intricate detail about the specificities of the case, and 5) overarching theories are best derived from specific iterations of any given phenomenon: deriving theories from generalities will always leave a large part of the picture untold.

Of course it is important not to treat case studies as though all such studies are one and the same thing. Distinctions must be made between *how* each case represents its target object, as well as *who* each case represents. In terms of the *how*, Flyvbjerg (2006) suggests four categories: 1) extreme/deviant cases, which can highlight either the best examples of a

particular event/object/category or the worst 2) maximum variation cases, all of which share the same overall focus, but which each differ on one key point so that comparisons can be made, 3) critical cases, which allow for logical deductions about the wider population, and 4) paradigmatic cases, which provide an overall narrative for the class of cases. In terms of the *who*, this follows to some degree from the *how*. The *who* may be an individual (as indicative of the class of individuals), a group (as indicative of how similar groups function), or a particular phenomenon, event or document as it affects individuals or groups.

Obviously both the *how* and the *who* of case study research will be determined by the research question: there will be little point in looking at a group, for example, if the research question is focused primarily on the individual. Having said that, however, a series of case studies may be undertaken to answer any given research question. So, for example, a research question relating to the experiences of gay men living with hearing impairments might be best answered by three case studies: one that adopts a maximum variation approach to examine the impact of differing groups or social contexts upon gay men living with hearing impairments; a critical case examination of one public policy document that pertains to the lives of gay men living with hearing impairments; and a paradigmatic case study of one gay man and his experience of living with a hearing impairment.

It is also important to note that any research question should be clearly informed by a statement of, and discussion about, the epistemological framework adopted by the researcher. Case studies may be underpinned by either a realist or constructionist framework, but either way this must be discussed. Due to the fact that case studies focus on a small number of cases (often only one), there may be a tendency towards adopting a realist approach simply by nature of the fact that the focus upon one individual tends to reify the individual and their 'inner life' as the locus of the case itself. By contrast, a constructionist approach might

emphasise the individual as a case that epitomises the operations of broader social institutions and the role that relations of power place in the narration of any one case.

Having thus determined the epistemological framework, the research question, and the type of case study (or studies) best suited to answering the question, the matter is then one of data. As per the example provided above, data may come from either secondary sources (such as public policy documents, minutes of management meetings, or media reporting of an incident), or from primary sources (such as individual interviews, focus groups, or ethnographic observations). Just as research questions determine the type of case study to be adopted, so too do research questions determine the type of data.

Finally, the analysis and presentation of the findings must take as their central task the first point cited from Flyvbjerg (2006) above, namely the need to focus upon providing rich, in-depth, context-dependent information about the case. When selecting material to present for analysis, and when providing an overview of the case itself and the broader social context in which it sits, the researcher must remain focused on what is unique about the case – what the case has to tell the reader about the specificities of the case and why the specifics are more useful than generalities. As Flyvbjerg suggests, the strength of case studies are their in-depth nature, and hence the information that is selected for analysis must allow for the research questions to be answered with enough depth to facilitate the reader in moving beyond the individual case and to extrapolate to the broader class from which the case is taken.

In order to illustrate the points summarised in this section, a worked through example of a case study is now provided, beginning with a summary of the Australian context as it pertains to the case, then moving onto an outline of relevant previous research and a summary of the method, and then the presentation of the case and the analysis of it.

## **Context for Case Study Example**

Due to the ongoing high demand for placement options within alternative care services across Australia, growing numbers of agencies are recognising the important role that lesbians and gay men can play in meeting the care needs of children removed into care as a result of issues of abuse and neglect (Riggs and Augoustinos 2009). In many instances this results in significant and long-lasting relationships between adults and children, due to the fact that Australian foster care systems continue to primarily rely upon foster placements for the provision of long-term care, rather than extinguishing parental rights and placing children with adoptive families as is the case in the US and UK.

Yet despite the growing involvement of lesbians and gay men within Australian foster care systems, very little public policy or research has been devoted to this population, and none of this has moved beyond examining the lives of non-indigenous lesbians or gay men caring for non-indigenous children. In Australia, the term 'Indigenous people' refers to Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander people who are recognised as the First Nations people who, prior to colonisation by the British in 1788, lived as a members of one of over 200 nations located across the continent. Though Indigenous people never ceded their sovereign rights to land, claims to *terra nullius* ('empty land') meant that Indigenous people were forcibly dispossessed of their land by colonisers, which has had ongoing negative health outcomes for Indigenous people (HREOC 1997). Furthermore, the theft of Indigenous children from their families and placement in orphanages or with white foster families up until the mid 1960s has had a highly detrimental impact upon Indigenous families and cultures. An awareness of these issues is thus placed at the heart of the case study presented here, along with the suggestion that non-indigenous people (i.e., all Australians who are not identified as Indigenous, whether they be white or non-white) who currently care for Indigenous children must thus be aware of these histories and the impact they have upon

current removal rates of Indigenous children and the needs of Indigenous children placed in care with non-indigenous carers.

### **Relevant Research Pertaining to the Case**

#### *Non-indigenous lesbian and gay foster carers*

As a result of the specificity of Australian foster care services outlined above, only Australian research is presented here. Whilst it could be argued that international research on interracial adoptive or foster families could tell us something about the general issues facing (primarily white) adoptive or foster parents of non-white children in Australia, the suggestion made here is that including international research ignores the very specific context of Australia (as outlined above) and the unique demands it places upon non-indigenous foster carers who care for Indigenous children.

To date, only one author has written about non-indigenous lesbian or gay carers of Indigenous children. Fallon (2007), writing in the autobiographical mode, tells of her experiences as a non-indigenous lesbian woman raising an Indigenous boy. In her narrative, Fallon speaks of some of the issues associated with recognising her own privilege as a white woman, and reconciling this with the challenges of raising a foster child and in attempting to engage with the State for support in this. Fallon also shares her experience of supporting the child (now young adult) in reconnecting to his birth family and community. Fallon's writing is thus an important documentation of this much overlooked population of carers, and demonstrates the need for further research on this topic.

Other research conducted by the author focusing on non-indigenous lesbian and gay foster carers in Australia who care for non-indigenous children suggests that foster care systems across the country continue to rely upon heteronormative understandings of parenting and families. Participants in one study reported that they were required to account

for their capacity to provide opposite-sex role models and to prove that they were ‘just like’ heterosexual applicants (Riggs 2007). Participants also reported feeling an injunction to ‘teach social workers’ about the lives of lesbians and gay men in order to be assessed as viable applicants. Further research conducted by the author and colleagues found that once lesbian and gay foster carers have children placed with them they experience an ongoing requirement to accept particular normative outcomes, such as a willingness to promote gender normative behaviours amongst foster children (Riggs and Augoustinos 2009). Participants in this study also reported explicit homophobia from social workers as well as the refusal of some agencies to match adolescent children who identify as gay with gay carers. Yet more findings from a third study conducted by the author indicate that Australian lesbian and gay foster carers are very aware of their relatively precarious position within the foster care system, and that they feel reliant upon the ‘goodwill’ of individual social workers in order to facilitate their support within the system (Riggs 2010, 2011).

With the work of Fallon (2007) being a notable exception, whilst the small body of Australian research on lesbian and gay foster carers has much to tell us about the experiences of non-indigenous lesbians or gay men caring for non-indigenous children, it is silent on the experiences of such carers who care for Indigenous children. To understand what it means for non-indigenous people to care for Indigenous children, we must move beyond the literature on lesbian and gay carers and look to the broader Australian literature on foster care.

### *Indigenous children in care*

Whilst, as suggested above, there is little to guide us as to the specific care relationships that exist between non-indigenous lesbian or gay foster carers and the Indigenous children placed in their care, there are very clear policies about the care of Indigenous children in general. Furthermore, we know a lot about the population of Indigenous children removed into care.

For example, Indigenous children are five times more likely to be represented in out-of-home care (Higgins, Bromfield, Higgins and Richardson 2006). This represents an average of 23.7 per cent of Indigenous children per 1000 children in care across Australia (SNAICC 2005). The *Bringing Them Home Report* (HREOC 1997), an inquiry into the effects of illegal child removal as a practice of colonisation, suggested that up to one in every seven Indigenous children will have spent some portion of their early life in care.

Importantly, and in comparison to non-indigenous children, the current reasons for why Indigenous children are removed into care primarily relate to issues of neglect related to poverty, inadequate housing and poor living conditions, rather than physical or emotional abuse (the latter two causes being the primary reasons why non-indigenous children are removed into care). In other words, many Indigenous children are removed as a result of living in conditions that are a direct result of the ongoing effects of colonisation, rather than the poor parenting practices of Indigenous parents *per se*. Because of the lack of availability of sufficient numbers of Indigenous carers with whom to place Indigenous children, 21 per cent of Indigenous children placed in care are *not* placed with Indigenous families (though this rate varies significantly from state to state, Richardson, Bromfield and Higgins 2005).

These statistics are on many levels in direct contradiction to the Aboriginal Placement Principal, which states clearly that removal should always be the last option, that children should be placed within their own community or at the least placed with Indigenous carers outside of their community, and that parental rights should not be removed in relation to Indigenous children. In the face of poor compliance with the Aboriginal Placement Principal (SNAICC 2005), the further development of Indigenous-specific child protection agendas has focused upon the likely reality that many Indigenous children will be placed with non-indigenous carers.

One of the primary areas of focus in recent policies aimed at non-indigenous carers has been an emphasis upon the *rights* of Indigenous children to maintain connections to their culture and community (SNAICC 2008). This requires that non-indigenous carers must be willing to develop relationships with Indigenous communities and to act as partners in the parenting of children. It also requires that non-indigenous carers are aware of the ongoing effects of colonisation and the privilege that non-indigenous Australians benefit from at the expense of Indigenous communities upon whose illegally possessed land non-indigenous people live. Recognising the effects of privilege requires non-indigenous carers not to claim to ‘give up’ privilege, but rather to acknowledge the times when their own needs may come second to the rights of Indigenous children and their cultures and communities.

## **Method**

The case study presented here was collected as a follow-up to a large national qualitative study of foster care undertaken by the author and colleagues (e.g., Riggs, Delfabbro and Augoustinos 2008, 2009). Within that study, and as noted above, lesbian and gay foster carers reported relatively unique experiences of care provision that suggested the need for further attention. Furthermore, relatively little attention was paid to interracial placements within the broader study, and thus further attention was warranted as to the placement of Indigenous children with non-indigenous carers.

The case study undertaken was thus shaped by the research question of ‘what does it mean to be a non-indigenous lesbian or gay foster carer raising an Indigenous child’. Given the small population of such carers, and the difficulty in accessing potential participants, a critical case study approach was adopted, which as suggested earlier can allow for logical deductions about the broader population (i.e., non-indigenous lesbian or gay carers raising Indigenous children). The theoretical approach was one termed elsewhere a ‘pragmatic

constructionism' (Riggs 2011), meaning that whilst the focus was very much on the broad institutional power structures of race and sexuality that shape identities in Australia, this was paired with the aim of answering a very specific question about the lived experience of care provision as it pertained to one non-indigenous gay man involved in parenting an Indigenous child.

Contact was made by the author with a potential participant known to the author from the previous research mentioned above. The participant expressed an interest in the research and an interview time was arranged. A semi-structured interview schedule that elaborated on the general interview schedule of the original study was utilised. Specifically, questions were tailored to investigate the experience of being a non-heterosexual non-indigenous carer, and the experience of caring for an Indigenous child. The participant was also invited to share his narrative of care provision in general, with a view to providing the researcher with information that would facilitate a more in-depth understanding of his experience.

Once the interview was completed, it was transcribed verbatim by a paid professional. The transcription was then examined by the author, both in relation to the previous Australian research on non-indigenous lesbian and gay foster carers (e.g., Riggs 2007, 2010), and previous research on non-indigenous carers of Indigenous children (e.g., Higgins, Bromfield, Higgins and Richardson 2006), in order to draw out the unique ways in which these two research areas may intersect. The analysis conducted also drew upon the insights afforded by Fallon (2007), with attention paid to issues of privilege within non-indigenous communities, and a focus on connections to community for Indigenous children and the requirement for lesbian and gay carers to engage with the State, sometimes to their detriment.

In the analysis below a summary is first provided of the participant's narrative of care provision, which is followed by an examination of the main issues that were identified in the transcript via the approach outlined above. Direct quotes are included where appropriate to

demonstrate the specific ways in which the participant spoke about the key issues identified by the analysis. Pseudonyms are used throughout.

### **The Case**

Throughout the interview Ben spoke of his long-standing involvement with children and parenting and shared his story of coming to care for an Indigenous child. Through his relationships with both other non-indigenous people and his connections to Indigenous communities, Ben was presented with the opportunity to provide shared care to a young Indigenous boy who had previously lived in his community in a remote area of Australia. Over the period of a year Ben developed a significant relationship with the child, in which he was involved in meeting the child's developmental, health, educational and social needs with a specific focus upon connections to his family, community and culture. When the interview was conducted Ben was no longer involved in caring for the child, though his commitment to caring for children continued.

### *The rhetoric of 'protective behaviours'*

The first issue that was evident in the interview related to the difficulty for Ben of engaging with the rhetoric of 'protective practices' in the face of the specific needs of an Indigenous child. Training for foster carers in Australia emphasises the need to engage in parenting behaviours that both protect children who have experienced abuse from being placed in situations that may perpetuate or re-enact that abuse (particularly in relation to sexual abuse), and to protect carers from allegations of abuse or impropriety. Examples of protective behaviours include always being clothed around foster children, not sitting on foster children's beds, and not hugging children body to body (but rather doing it side-by-side).

In research conducted by the author and colleagues (Riggs and Augoustinos 2009), lesbian and gay foster carers reported feeling a heightened injunction to engage in protective behaviours, and to ensure that they were above any form of suspicion. This would suggest that such carers many still feel the effects of anti-gay parenting rhetoric and the equation of homosexuality with paedophilia (Hicks 2000). And it was perhaps with this in mind that Ben reported being very wary of some of the particular behaviours of the Indigenous child in his care, and more specifically their sleeping arrangements. As Ben stated: ‘[The child] had never been [out of their community] so things like traffic, buildings, structures and homes and your own bed, your own bedroom was very new and very scary. That was the first real problem. [Foster care agencies] are very strict with parameters between you and the children and I understand their genesis but in [the child’s] case it was not helpful and actually was very hard to manage... [The child] needed people around all the time. So same thing in the bathroom. I would be in the shower with the door closed and the child would open the door and come in.’

Here Ben is clear that whilst he is aware of the rhetoric surrounding protective practices, it is ‘very hard to manage’ in practice when caring for an Indigenous child who has spent all of their life living in close relationships with other family and community members. Whilst of course this is a problem presented to all non-indigenous carers in similar situations, it is also specific to Ben as a gay man who is aware of the ‘genesis’ of protective behaviour policies and their specific history in relation to abuse in care *by men*. Whilst Ben was elsewhere emphatic in the interview about the ridiculousness of anti-gay rhetoric, he nonetheless was careful in his negotiation of discussions of how he managed protective behaviours when faced with a child who desired proximity at all times, and the position this placed him in as a single gay carer.

### *The location of sexuality in care provision*

The above point about Ben's awareness of the scrutiny that foster carers (and potentially gay carers in particular) are placed under relates to the second key issue identified from the case study. This issue centred upon the ways in which Ben's identity as a gay man was variously positioned by other people who had a role in his care work and also by the child himself. Importantly, when discussing this Ben emphasised his recognition of the cultural differences between himself and the child in his care, whilst not essentialising those differences and thus making generalisations about *all* Indigenous people from his experiences with one Indigenous child.

In relation to the child, Ben reported an instance where the child saw him kissing another man on the lips. Whilst Ben reported that the child was aware he slept in bed with another man, Ben stated that this was not of particular note to the child who saw shared sleeping arrangements as the norm. What was *not* culturally normative for the child (in his particular worldview) was two men kissing. Again, it is important to emphasise the distinction between recognising this as the valid viewpoint of the child, and claiming that this viewpoint is shared by all Indigenous people. Nonetheless, what Ben was faced with was his own competing beliefs around talking openly with children about his identity as a gay man in positive ways, and the needs of this specific child and a respect for their worldview. As Ben said; 'I was always very careful about the things I was focusing on with [the child] and it meant you would often get criticism for that too because they would be rolling around on the floor or garden at a friend's house and people would say "aren't you going to stop [the child] from doing that." My response was "no, we are focusing on other things." So my sexuality became one of those things too, you know we are not quite ready for this and it is not that important for me to enter into at that point.' Here Ben appears to make a pragmatic decision

about his sexuality that places it alongside a list of other topics that are left aside in order to prioritise focusing upon specific behaviours exhibited by the child.

This dilemma for Ben exemplifies the challenge of matching up (or otherwise) best practice with (non-indigenous) lesbian and gay carers with best practice for Indigenous children. Whilst in another context it would be potentially inappropriate to ask a lesbian or gay foster carer to position their sexual identity as 'just another behaviour', in this instance it was important for Ben to prioritise the needs of the child in his care (and here his emphasis was upon connections to community and the practicing of culture). As such, caring for an Indigenous child as a non-indigenous gay man meant for Ben the need to prioritise the child's needs in ways that at times may have conflicted with his own needs or with his beliefs about social justice issues for lesbians or gay men.

Fallon (2007) similarly makes a point about having to weigh up her own politics as a lesbian with the demands of the State in relation to her care for an Indigenous child. Whilst she speaks of the negative effects of having to hide her relationship with a woman from the State when she first fostered the child, she nonetheless recognises the necessity of doing so in order to be able to foster an Indigenous child who, she was told, was 'profoundly retarded... there's no hope' and that someone should have 'put him out of his misery' (p. 11). Here again, non-indigenous lesbian or gay carers are at times required to place the needs of Indigenous children above their own.

### *Responsibility for privilege*

The final issue arising from the case study, and one again identified by Fallon (2007), was one in which Ben spoke often about being responsible for the privilege he benefits from as a non-indigenous man living in a colonial nation. Ben stated upfront that he was aware that one of the reasons why he was approached to provide care for the child was because other

Indigenous people wanted the child to “go to the best schools and have a privileged education” and that Ben could potentially facilitate that. Ben was very honest about his ability to provide that type of support and that part of the work of undertaking the care of an Indigenous child was finding ways to responsibly engage with his privilege rather than attempting to deny it or use it in paternalistic ways. In another instance Ben spoke about the foster care agency’s ‘stance on gay men’ (i.e., that they were somewhat wary of him as a carer) but that he was ‘willing to be managed around that,’ even though he didn’t understand why such wariness was warranted or considered acceptable. Again, Ben was mindful of the fact that his location as a non-indigenous gay man meant he needed to be sensitive to the challenges of caring for an Indigenous child in ways that at times required him to be less vocal about what he perceived as potential instances of heteronormativity or homophobia from workers.

Another example of Ben having to actively engage in being responsible for his privileged position and the conflicting needs of Indigenous communities and his own needs was in relation to working with an Indigenous carer in providing for the needs of the child. Ben reported that in some instances he engaged with the Indigenous carer in order to ensure that he was being respectful of the child’s cultural needs, but he was told by others that he needed to be responsible for his own knowledge. This certainly echoes the work of Indigenous scholars who have suggested that it is not the work of Indigenous people to educate non-indigenous people about racism or race privilege (Moreton-Robinson, 2000), Furthermore, it must be related to findings by the author that some lesbian and gay foster care applicants report experiencing an injunction to educate social workers and lesbian and gay lives (Riggs 2007). Ben reported that whilst he felt confronted by the competing requirements to consult with Indigenous people and communities over the care of the child but also to engage in his own learning, this could be reconciled by placing his own responsibility to the

child at the forefront. In other words, learning about cross-cultural engagement from a privileged position was necessarily difficult work – it was not something that could be side-stepped, and it was something for which Ben was willing to engage in discomfort in order to achieve the best outcomes for the child.

## **Conclusions**

From this single case study it is possible to see four broad areas that it can be suggested require further attention in relation to the care of Indigenous children by non-indigenous lesbians and gay men. First, is the need for acknowledging the limits of the rhetoric surrounding protective behaviours for all non-indigenous carers with Indigenous children in their care. Specifically in relation to gay men, it is important that agencies, policy makers and individual workers actively challenge the myths and stereotypes that continue to place gay men under unwarranted scrutiny, and to be open to ways of meeting the needs of Indigenous children that may not always match up with policies around protective behaviours. This would appear vital to meeting the requirement for culturally competent practice for non-indigenous carers who must support the continuation of Indigenous cultural practices and connections to community for Indigenous children removed into care. It is important to acknowledge here that the myths and stereotypes about relationships to children that negatively impact upon gay men may be quite different in relation to lesbian women. Nonetheless, this first point is a salient one in relation to both lesbian and gay foster carers; namely the need to focus attention upon the best interests of Indigenous children.

The second area requiring ongoing attention is the need for consideration of what is termed here and elsewhere (Riggs 2010) ‘pragmatic imbalances’. This term is used to refer to the fact that in some instances policies around recognition of lesbian and gay foster carers and their sexual identities may come second to the cultural needs of Indigenous children.

When viewed in a broader social context and histories of illegal child removal and colonisation, the requirement for non-indigenous carers to be open to a range of ways of enacting their sexual identities must be considered. Whilst it would typically be argued that being closeted is an unacceptable request of lesbian or gay parents, just as it would typically be unacceptable to require lesbian or gay parents to marginalise their own standpoints in regard to politics or activism, in the case of caring for Indigenous children, non-indigenous lesbian and gay foster carers must be open to the specific needs of each child and their community. Again, the point here is not to advocate for a policy of ‘don’t ask, don’t tell’, but rather one where lesbian and gay carers are respectful of the primacy of Indigenous children’s need for connection to community and for the continuity of their cultural practices. Equally important is the need not to essentialise or make generalisations about Indigenous communities and their beliefs: Like all cultures, Indigenous cultures are diverse and hold a wide range of views of non-heterosexuality (and sexuality itself).

The third and fourth points emphasise the need for responsibility for privilege amongst non-indigenous lesbian and gay carers. Such an approach could serve as a further framework for understanding the need for ‘pragmatic imbalances’. Being responsible for the privilege that non-indigenous people in Australia hold as a result of colonisation requires a willingness not to simplistically make paternalistic concessions for Indigenous people, but rather to be willing to acknowledge that Australian society does not operate through a level playing field, but rather it operates through one that privileges non-indigenous people. In this sense, engaging policies and practices that privilege Indigenous worldviews over non-indigenous worldviews is not a form of ‘reverse discrimination’ as some would have it, but rather an engagement with a mode of addressing the imbalances that have existed since colonisation to the disbenefit of Indigenous people. For non-indigenous lesbian and gay foster carers and those who support them, this means being willing to work through

discomfort in relation to conflicting needs, to actively engage with Indigenous communities and individuals to ensure best outcomes for children, and to be willing to undertake independent learning.

Of course it will be important that future work builds upon the case study presented here and upon the work of Fallon (2007). Further case studies that explore non-indigenous lesbian carer's experiences of raising Indigenous children, along with case studies that explore the experiences of Indigenous children and their families where the former are raised by non-indigenous lesbians or gay men will be vital to ensuring that the lens of the particular issues raised in this chapter is focused in all directions, not simply from the standpoint of those in dominant positions.

To conclude; this chapter has outlined a number of areas that require ongoing consideration in relation to the specific needs of non-indigenous lesbian and gay foster carers, the children in their care, and those who work with them. Moving beyond paternalism, much like moving beyond a non-pathology based approach to working with lesbian and gay foster carers, requires moving towards approaches that are grounded in the strengths and realities of individual people and their lives. Case studies such as this allow us to see how privilege, identities and rights play out in the lives of individuals, and the complex ways in which they negotiate the care needs of those around them. As such, this chapter highlights the ongoing utility of case study research in the field of gender and sexuality studies, and the specific role that such research can play in mapping out the contours of groups whose experiences are subject to multiple marginalisations.

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