



PERSONAL SPACE

IAN HODGES and JIM MCMANUS call for psychologists to be more proactive in challenging homophobia and sexual prejudice.

Psychology at the crossroads

THE recent histories of both psychology and the struggle for lesbian and gay rights are closely intertwined. Here we argue that psychology has long been, and unfortunately remains, profoundly ambivalent with regard to proper recognition and effective support for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) people. We offer some brief critical reflection on the role of psychology in effectively tackling homophobia and hate crimes and argue that we need creative and insightful psychological research to support struggles for policy reform and individual LGBT rights. In order for this to happen, psychology (and this includes all the subdisciplines and not only lesbian and gay psychology) must become much more proactive in the struggle towards the elimination of sexual prejudice and its effects on the lives of LGBT persons.

Policy and homophobia

Recent public policy changes have originated from the premise that homophobia and sexual prejudice are straightforwardly wrong. Often such a premise is derived purely from principles of equity and natural justice – LGBT citizens pay their taxes and are thus entitled in law to the protection from victimisation that such citizenship entails. These arguments may subsequently incorporate relevant social scientific data.

The role of LGBT agencies and academics in this process is often crucial, and the debates concerning psychological evidence – or lack of it – may play a decisive role. Thus, while we must never become complacent about psychology's (continued) role in the oppression of sexual minorities (in particular through the psycho-pathologisation of 'other' sexualities, including for example transgendered and intersex persons), it is also important to note the role psychology can play in comprehending and challenging various forms of sexual prejudice.

The prevalence of homophobic crime, by its nature, is difficult to identify in the absence of a national census. However, there have been a number of surveys conducted with an LGBT sample, and

prevalence rates range from 64 per cent to 72 per cent of male respondents and 21 per cent to 35 per cent of female respondents reporting one or more experiences of homophobic abuse or violence (McManus & Rivers, 2001). Prevalence of homophobia in the workplace is also difficult to determine (McManus, 2004), while understanding what constitutes a homophobic incident is itself a complex task. Homophobia is not restricted to a dislike of individuals; the dislike can be based on any sexual act or characteristic that the person associates with an LGBT person, whether or not any specific person performs that act or has that characteristic. That dislike does not have to be so severe as hatred. It is enough that people do something or abstain from doing something because they do not like LGBT people (Crown Prosecution Service, 2004). Herek *et al.* (1999) established that incidents that law enforcement personnel may not readily identify as homophobic can have traumatic sequelae for those experiencing them. Victims themselves have recounted that the process of reporting can repeat or reinforce the trauma they experienced, especially if the reporting process is unsympathetic or itself overtly or covertly homophobic (McManus, 2004).

Following this and other evidence, especially studies that have identified ways in which some organisations may be prone to homophobia at an institutional level, McManus and Rivers (2001) among others postulated that the MacPherson Inquiry's model of 'institutional racism' and definition of a racist incident – which was based on the perceptions of the victim – should be applied to both homophobia and sexual prejudice. While not unproblematic, this would enable practicable and effective interventions with victims and perpetrators and allow organisations – especially the police and local authorities – to identify and subsequently change aspects of their culture and practice to make effective responses to homophobia and homophobic crime more likely.

In fact, such an understanding of homophobic crime is now to be found in the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS)

definition of a homophobic incident; 'any incident which is perceived to be homophobic by the victim or by any other person' (CPS, 2002). Recent CPS and police policies, and the guidance to the judiciary in the *Equal Treatment Bench Book* (Judicial Studies Board, 2004), should mean that LGBT people are treated equally before the courts, with clear implications for the role of psychologists as expert witnesses. The latest CPS report of prosecutions for homophobic violence (CPS, 2004) showed that 70 per cent of anti-LGBT hate crimes reported to the police in England and Wales resulted in convictions.

The ambivalence of psychology

Given such clear condemnation in public policy of homophobia and homophobic crime it is useful to ask what role theoretical and applied psychology can play in upholding this. It has been argued elsewhere that the more 'direct' prejudice of the 1970s and 1980s, although still with us, has to some extent given way to an



ambivalent position towards LGBT persons (Hodges, 2003) and the discipline and practices of psychology are not exempt from this. Hans Eysenck's announcement in 1972 – upon being challenged by Peter Tatchell during a symposium on aversion therapy – that electro-shock and other similar behavioural therapies (for gay men) were 'just like a visit to the dentist' (Tatchell, 1972) is a historical example of right-wing moral condemnation operating under the veil of scientific/medical authority. Likewise, during the recent struggle to form the Society's current Lesbian and Gay Psychology Section, the Scientific Affairs Board and Council rejected various versions of the proposal on five separate occasions, while in response to the first proposal the Society 'changed its rules to make it harder to form a section' (Wilkinson, 1999, p.3). Moreover the final (approving) vote 'had more "anti" votes than had been recorded in any other subsystem ballot in the history of the society...' (Kitzinger, 1999, p.3) and members of the steering group received a stream of abusive hate mail from psychologists, which included 'don't solicit, bitch', 'you lot disgust me' and 'lesbians do not need psychology, they need a good stiff all round talking' (Wilkinson, 1999, p.5). Given the number and variety of Divisions and Sections in

place within the Society at that time, one is left to contemplate the motivations of those psychologists who voted against the Section. We argue that in these and other ways the discipline of psychology continues to view LGBT individuals and communities in a markedly ambivalent way.

This ambivalence must in part be understood by recognising how the moral and ethical positions found within wider society inform and sustain psychological theory and practice. Methodological debates have existed for some time concerning the extent to which psychologists should be more transparent and reflexive with regard to their own moral and ethical positions (in this case a heteronormative one, placing heterosexuality at the centre of understandings of love and sexuality). We believe that the practice of individual reflexivity is fundamental in enabling psychology as a discipline to move beyond its current ambivalent stance. In particular, psychologists, both academics and practitioners, need to candidly explore their own values and beliefs concerning gender, sexuality and sexual identity. It is no longer acceptable for psychologists to engage with LGBT research and experiences without a thorough and public exploration of their own part in the process, especially the

value systems and the moral and political positions from which they operate.

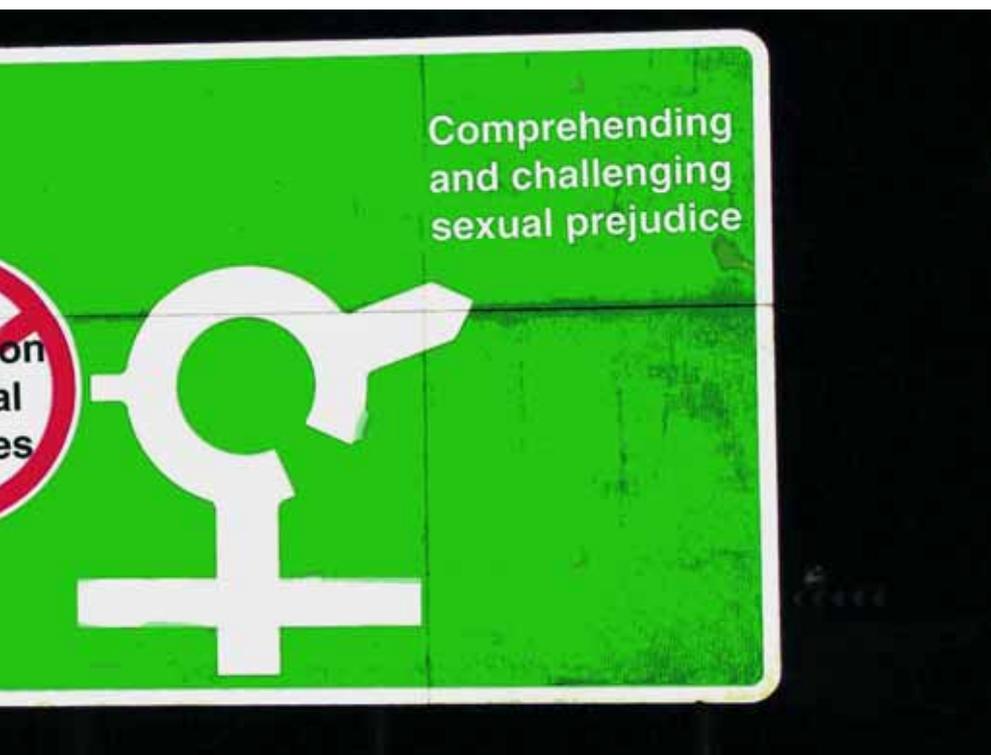
At the same time, these authors think that the British Psychological Society could be much more proactive with regard to public policy statements in support of LGBT rights. The Society's reluctance to make LGBT affirmative policy statements significantly contrasts with the American Psychological Association's (APA) regular involvement in debates which impact on the lives and rights of members of sexual minorities. The APA's three recent statements – in support of same-sex civil marriages, opposing discrimination based on sexual orientation in matters of adoption, and opposing discrimination in the military – provide apposite examples (see www.apa.org/pi/lgb).

The BPS's stance also contrasts with law enforcement agencies in the UK, which have consistently declared that homophobia and homophobic crime will not be tolerated. A recent policy statement from the CPS asserts that:

Prejudice, discrimination or hate of members of any part of our community based on their sexual orientation or gender identity has no place in a civilised society... The CPS has a vital role to play in delivering this aim, not only in terms of its own role but also in terms of advising its partners in the criminal justice system... that this sort of crime must no longer be tolerated. (CPS, 2003)

The role of research

There are a number of challenges for psychology, from understanding what constitutes sexual prejudice and homophobic crime to the imaginative development of interventions that may contribute to victim support, the rehabilitation of offenders and the prevention of recurrence. However, with regard to the role of research, if we are to tackle homophobia and sexual prejudice effectively – both within and without psychology – we must understand the complex relationships between lived experience (for example the experience of homophobic abuse) and the social and cultural processes (including the impact of public and other policy) that mould and shape it (Hodges, 2004). For example, we need to explore ways of tackling what has been termed 'compulsory heterosexuality'



(Rich, 1993). In other words we need to understand the significance of the compulsion in our society to adopt a heterosexual identity – which begins very early in childhood. The normality and moral superiority of heterosexuality (and the ‘normal’ family) is continuously promoted through socialisation, the media,

the law, religious teaching, education, peer-pressure, bullying, and so on. Ultimately it is within such social and cultural processes that we must search for an explanation of homophobia and sexual prejudice, including psychologists’ ambivalence towards LGBT persons.

However, despite this, the interconnectedness of self and society is often lost in psychological research, and we are then left with either an unduly individualised account of prejudice that remains more or less decontextualised, or a structural/discursive account of heteronormative talk or beliefs that runs the risk of failing to deal with, among other things, the motivations of prejudiced individuals. While there is no doubt that these frameworks are useful, neither is fully able to capture the lived experience of both the prejudiced and their ‘targets’. Thus, much psychological research on homophobia and sexual prejudice runs the risk of providing only limited practical utility to those fighting for policy reform or working with LGBT individuals who are struggling to come out and to build satisfying and meaningful lives in a society that routinely devalues and pathologises their experiences.

Unable or unwilling?

There are numerous challenges facing psychology if it is to engage meaningfully and effectively with the current needs of LGBT individuals and communities, (including more recent struggles against AIDS-phobia and trans-phobia). To be effective we require an understanding of the emotional and visceral as well as the ‘cognitive’ aspects of prejudice and discrimination (Hodges, 2004). However, the BPS seems to find itself unable or unwilling to properly play its part in implementing the principles already asserted in wider public policy. The defence that our charity status prevents this does not stand up on any view, especially when the Society has issued statements and

made submissions on a range of other issues (for example, the recent call for ‘more men and people from Black and Ethnic Minority groups to study psychology and pursue a career within the Health Service’; BPS, 2004). At a time when other organisations are having to consider the possibility that prejudice is systematised in their practices, the Society should examine this possibility with regard to institutionalised homophobia. The struggle for equality is far from over. Psychology has a range of resources that can help achieve sensible and equitable policy solutions. It is time to up our game, or risk being seen as an irrelevance.

■ *Ian Hodges is a senior lecturer in the Department of Psychology at the University of Westminster. E-mail: i.hodges@wmin.ac.uk.*

■ *Jim McManus is a public health specialist for Barking and Dagenham Primary Care Trust, and member of the Equal Treatment Advisory Committee of the Lord Chancellor’s Judicial Studies Board. E-mail: jim.mcmanus@bdpct.nhs.uk.*

References

- British Psychological Society (2004, 17 August). Society calls for wider representation [Press release]. Available via www.bps.org.uk/bps/media-centre/press-releases
- Crown Prosecution Service (2002). *Policy for prosecuting cases with a homophobic element*. Retrieved 19 October 2005 from www.cps.gov.uk/publications/prosecution/hmpbcrbook.html
- Crown Prosecution Service (2003). *Guidance on prosecuting cases of homophobic crime*. Retrieved 19 October 2005 from www.cps.gov.uk/publications/prosecution/hmpbcpol.html
- Crown Prosecution Service (2004). CPS publishes first homophobic crime data [Press release]. Retrieved 19 October 2005 from www.cps.gov.uk/news/pressreleases/archive/137_04.html
- Herek, G., Gillis, J., & Cogan, J. (1999). Psychological sequelae of hate crime: Victimization among lesbian, gay and bisexual adults. *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology*, 67, 945–51.
- Hodges, I. (2003). Explaining ‘new’ homophobia: A Q-methodological study. Paper presented at the BPS Social Psychology Section Conference, London.
- Hodges, I. (2004). Homophobia, disgust and the body: Towards a psycho-social approach to sexual prejudice. *Lesbian and Gay Psychology Review*, 5, 82–88.
- Judicial Studies Board (2004). *Equal treatment bench book*. London: Judicial Studies Board and Department for Constitutional Affairs.
- Kitzinger, C. (1999). Chair’s welcome. *Lesbian and Gay Psychology Section Newsletter*. Issue 1, pp.3–6.
- McManus, J. (2004). Homophobic violence, trauma and recovery. Paper presented at the conference of the British Society of Criminology, UK.
- McManus, J. & Rivers, I. (2001). *Without prejudice*. London: Nacro.
- Rich, A. (1993). Compulsory heterosexuality and lesbian existence. In H. Abelow et al. (Eds.) *The lesbian and gay studies reader*. London: Routledge.
- Tatchell, P. (1972). Aversion therapy is ‘like a visit to the Dentist’. Retrieved 28 September 2005 from www.petertatchell.net/psychiatry/dentist.htm
- Wilkinson, S. (1999). The struggle to found the Lesbian and Gay Psychology Section. *Lesbian and Gay Psychology Section Newsletter*. Issue 2, pp.3–5.

Speaking of sexual politics in psychology



PETER HEGARTY

In the last year or two there have been several occasions where 'science' and 'politics' have seemed to clash publicly over matters concerning sexuality, including the debate in the letters pages of *The Psychologist*. There is obvious disagreement about whether an issue is a 'scientific' one or a 'political' one, and accusations of personal bias are never far away. Clearly the boundaries of proper academic discourse are in debate here. Perhaps in this dialogue we can figure out a useful way of thinking about these kinds of events that doesn't boil down to absolute arguments that science is a form of free speech that ought never to be limited, or that all claims about sexuality are equally valid or truthful.

I am interested in why these clashes between science and politics often adhere to topics such as sexuality, gender and race. I think that it is usually understood that science represents things that cannot speak for themselves, and politics represents people's voices or interests. However, not all humans have always been considered political subjects, and the domains of 'science' and 'politics' are neither as exhaustive nor mutually exclusive as the rhetoric of these debates sometimes assumes. For example, many canonical democratic theories did not consider women to be political subjects, and some were even comfortable with the practice of slavery. Of course, psychology extends science towards the study of the human subject and so it has always been a hybrid of these two forms of representation.

Perhaps these debates cohere around topics such as sexuality because this is one domain where the category of political 'humans' has altered relatively recently. After all it is only some 30 years since lesbians and gay men were considered to be mentally ill. Perhaps it takes longer than that for psychological

THE debate in the letters pages of *The Psychologist* in late 2003 and early 2004 made it apparent that there are many points of tension between psychologists, not only over explanations of sexuality, but also over whether politics can, and should, be incorporated into psychological theory and research. Initially this was addressed in an interview Meg Barker conducted with Peter Hegarty (Chair of the Lesbian and Gay Psychology Section of the BPS) for this special issue (now published as Barker & Hegarty, 2005). However, following a review from David Hardman (author of one of the original letters) it was decided that a dialogue between Peter and David would enable a more in-depth consideration of some controversial issues about scientific and political discussions of sexuality. Here we present this discussion.

theories to assimilate the idea that sexuality is not grounds for considering one person more properly human than another. As many biological and psychoanalytic theories were formed at a time when it was assumed that homosexuality was an illness, scientists may often perceive that they are 'just doing science' when their work positions

lesbian, gay or bisexual people as abnormal. Perhaps also, professional lesbian, gay and bisexual people and those who specialise in the care of lesbian, gay and bisexual people will be most acutely aware of the way in which sexuality is used to dehumanise or abnormalise some people relative to others.



DAVID HARDMAN

It is inevitable that there will be clashes between science and politics, because they are two different forms of argument. A scientific argument requires any claim to be based on a combination of logical analysis and empirical evidence. One is not entitled to express a claim where one knows that claim to be clearly contradicted by evidence. This constraint does not apply to political argument. Although evidence may be incorporated into political argument, people are nonetheless able to give free rein to their beliefs in the face of contradictory evidence or in the absence of evidence. In fact, evidential support is often in the form of pseudo-evidence: a plausible scenario about causation (Kuhn, 1991). It often seems to me that the most strongly held beliefs are those where real evidence is highly uncertain or unavailable.

Of course, this is a simplified view of public discourse. Scientists may attribute more validity to certain evidence than is actually the case and this may be influenced by their private beliefs. They may also go on to make pronouncements

about how this evidence relates to public policy. In such a situation the boundaries between science and politics become blurred, the classic example being the IQ debate. Despite these realities, it is the virtue of science that its claims require a reference to evidence.

Why do clashes between politics and science occur in certain domains such as sexuality? Again, perhaps this is inevitable. As sexuality is central to all our lives, it is surely not surprising that we are so curious about it, that scientists want to study it and that people hold lay beliefs about it?

I am curious as to why you think that contemporary science positions lesbian, gay or bisexual people as abnormal. Homosexuality has been removed from the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* and British society has moved in a more socially liberal direction. Homosexuality is not regarded with the degree of opprobrium that has been evident in previous generations. This is not, of course, to deny the continued existence of prejudice and the consequent struggles faced by many gay, lesbian and bisexual people.



Implicit in your distinction between ‘science’ and ‘politics’ is the idea that science is a superior form of argument free of bias. Such claims can make us complacent about the ways that scientific work might – deliberately or inadvertently – contribute to prejudice and discrimination. I agree that scientists’ views can affect their theories, the kinds of studies they are willing and able to do, and the kinds of interpretations that they make of their data. However, I disagree that this is down to private beliefs. Such an interpretation disguises the fact that communities of scientists often share a sociological location or a world view, such that their shared personal interests express group-based interests and ideologies.

You mentioned IQ debates, and IQ is a field where more than the personal and private was at play. Scientific objectivity became utterly conflated with

white people’s views of intelligence; black psychologists could rarely achieve the training for PhDs, and their reports that poor rapport between white experimenters and black children were

‘the view that science is better...than politics can serve as a rhetorical defence of unjust practices’

depressing those children’s test scores were routinely dismissed (Guthrie, 1978; Richards, 1997). Unfortunately, the view that science is better, more logical and less interested than politics can serve as a rhetorical defence of unjust practices in such situations. In this case, it was even used to defend the view that the supposedly low IQ of black Americans warranted their disenfranchisement (e.g. Minton, 1988).

Regarding homophobic prejudice, there is convergent evidence that this is modernising rather than simply going away. One component of modern prejudice is the denial that prejudice still occurs. Perhaps that is one reason why

the Lyons letter (October 2003) offended so many; it presumed that sexual prejudice was a thing of the past.

With these concerns in mind – that science is a social activity and that sexual prejudice is modernising – I want to address your question of why I think that contemporary science continues to abnormalise lesbians, gay men and bisexuals. It is apparent that by ‘sex’ psychologists often mean ‘reproductive heterosexual sex’. This metonym conflates the particulars of the latter kind(s) of sex with the former more general category. This sets up homosexuality (among so many other forms of human sexual expression) as a ‘paradox’ that needs to be explained, a puzzle that cries out to be solved. We would not conflate ‘sex’ and ‘heterosexual reproductive sex’ if we were to assume that reproduction is not the sole function of sex. Indeed, many of my heterosexual friends go to considerable lengths to have sex without reproducing. Homosexuality is not a paradox to be solved but a reason to revise the assumption that the sole – or normative – function of those actions we call ‘sex’ is reproduction.

References

- Barker, M. & Hegarty, P. (2005). Queer politics, queer science? Meg Barker in conversation with Peter Hegarty. *Psychology of Women Section Review*, 7(2), 71–79.
- Blanchard, R. (2004). Quantitative and theoretical analyses of the relation between older brothers and homosexuality in men. *Journal of Theoretical Biology*, 230, 173–187.
- Cantor, J.M., Blanchard, R., Paterson, A.D. & Bogaert, A.F. (2002). How many gay men owe their sexual orientation to fraternal birth order? *Archives of Sexual Behavior*, 31, 63–71.
- Guthrie, R.V. (1976). *Even the rat was white: A historical view of psychology*. New York: Harper & Row.
- Hegarty, P. & Pratto, F. (2001). The effects of category norms and stereotypes on explanations of intergroup differences. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 80, 723–735.
- Herrnstein, R.J. & Murray, C. (1994). *The bell curve: Intelligence and class structure in American life*. New York: Free Press.
- Kuhn, D. (1991). *The skills of argument*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Minton, H.L. (1988). *Lewis M. Terman: Pioneer in Psychological Testing*. New York: New York University Press.
- Neisser, U., Boodoo, G., Bouchard, T.J., et al. (1996). Intelligence: Knowns and unknowns. *American Psychologist*, 51(2), 77–101.
- Richards, G. (1997). *Race, racism and psychology: Towards a reflexive history*. London: Routledge.
- Ridley, M. (2003). *Nature via nurture: Genes, experience and what makes us human*. London: Fourth Estate.
- Sternberg, R.J. (1996). *Successful intelligence*. New York: Simon & Schuster.



If I understand you correctly, you are concerned that the results of science may be used to support oppressive ideologies or practices; specifically, you seem to be arguing that certain ideas may claim a spurious objectivity by calling upon particular scientific results. There are two initial responses I would make to this line of thought. Firstly, in my view, arguments that call upon science to justify public policy are more properly called political arguments (as when politicians say ‘We have relied upon the best scientific advice available’). Nonetheless, although such forms of argument may be used to support some form of ideology, it is greatly preferable that political argument does call upon the results of science rather than not at all. This allows all concerned parties to debate something real, as opposed to merely exchanging different forms of pseudoevidence (untested scenarios).

For example, it would be quite easy to challenge the use of intelligence research to

support racist arguments. This could be done by pointing to factors such as (a) the known influence of the environment, (b) the difficulty of achieving ‘culture-fair’ tests, (c) the fact that the mean Japanese IQ is higher than the mean US score, or (d) the

‘it is greatly preferable that political argument does call upon the results of science rather than not at all’

fact that there are many aspects of intelligence that are not captured by standard psychometric tests. There is no shortage of eminent white researchers willing to make these points (notably Sternberg, e.g. 1996) and, indeed, these were among the points made by the APA’s task force (Neisser et al., 1996) in response to the publication of *The Bell Curve* (Herrnstein & Murray, 1994) just over 10 years ago.

My second response is to ask what it is that you are expecting of scientists. Do you want them to stop doing research whose results may be used for undesirable purposes? There are people who hold this view, but I regard it as dangerous. Prejudice does not exist because of science; indeed, it is likely to flourish in the absence of relevant science because there is then no possible way for argument to be constrained by evidence.

I do regard homosexuality as a puzzle to be explained, but that does not imply that I must therefore regard homosexuality as abnormal (I do not). You propose an alternative resolution: to regard homosexuality not as a puzzle, but 'a reason to revise the assumption that the sole – or normative – function of those actions we call "sex" is reproduction'. This strikes me as a very unlikely hypothesis. In evolutionary terms, universal behaviours or feelings (sexual desire, anger, hunger, etc.) exist because they increase the likelihood that our genes will be passed on into future generations. It hardly seems credible that evolution would have equipped us with the whole apparatus of sexual reproduction (sperm, eggs, penises, testicles, vaginas, fallopian tubes, and so on) if reproduction were not the intended end result of evolution's 'design'.



Evolution has endowed us with capacities for myriad non-reproductive sexual pleasures. Why should it be axiomatic that so much sex is anomalous? Feminists countered Freud's description of women as the 'dark continent'. Why should gay/lesbian people accept the status of evolutionary puzzle instead of revising the sex = reproduction



It seems to me that your wish to revise 'assumptions' about sex would merely create an even bigger puzzle that gays and lesbians would still be a part of. In humans, sexual orientation seems to be mainly or totally fixed before birth, and there are reasons to suspect that some instances of male homosexuality are the result of a perturbation in the processes of prenatal development (e.g. Blanchard, 2004; Cantor *et al.*, 2002). It is not hard to see that such findings could ultimately lead to biological or genetic engineering, something that many people would find objectionable.

assumption? Sound methodology should produce theories that distinguish the attributes or experiences of privileged groups (such as heterosexuals) from 'human nature'. My experiments show that people overlook this distinction, and that stereotypes then affect scientific explanations (Hegarty & Pratto, 2001). I ask not for censorship but for higher standards of explanatory coherence.

I suspect this concern lies behind the objections of some people to research into sexual orientation.

But censorship is not the answer, and I am glad you oppose it. The demise of Soviet biology under Lysenkoism was an object lesson in the deleterious effects of censoring scientists (e.g. Ridley, 2003).

■ *Dr Peter Hegarty is in the Department of Psychology at the University of Surrey. E-mail: p.hegarty@surrey.ac.uk.*

■ *Dr David Hardman is in the Department of Psychology at London Metropolitan University. E-mail: d.hardman@londonmet.ac.uk.*

Sex diversity and evolutionary psychology

FOR contemporary Western society, 'sexuality' has come to define, as Foucault (1980) argued, the 'truth of ourselves'. Evolutionary psychology is one increasingly cited and powerful theory concerned with the 'aetiology' of homosexual behaviour. I argue that two broadly competing evolutionary theories offer radically different accounts of the evolution of homosexual behaviour: the more traditional emphasis on evolutionary theory as a set of law-like parameters obscures the emphasis on sex and sexual diversity outlined by competing evolutionary theories. I suggest that psychologists need to acknowledge these competing accounts, and I extend an invitation to explore more recent evolutionary theories which argue that homosexual behaviour requires no 'special' explanation at all.

Debates in *The Psychologist* in the last few years attest to the enduring interest of psychologists in the aetiology of homosexual behaviour, and more specifically to the salience of evolutionary theory in guiding this interest. People are much more likely to be familiar with theories that emphasise homosexual behaviour as 'abnormal' and thus in need of explanation. Within this approach, some researchers argue that homosexual behaviour is adaptive (Ruse, 1988; McKnight, 1997), others claim it is maladaptive (Gallup & Suarez, 1983) and still others maintain homosexual behaviour is simply neutral (Futuyama & Risch, 1984). Critics of evolutionary psychology argue that the first two kinds of explanation ultimately come to grief both in the specificity of their assumptions (for instance, homosexual non-human animals do not sexually reproduce), and more broadly because these studies operate within a paradigm structured by heteronormativity (a structured hegemonic privilege systematically given to



MYRA J. HIRD on what psychologists can learn from the huge range of non-human design and behaviour.

heterosexuality that also systematically explicitly or implicitly disadvantages all non-heterosexual practices). Critics further contend that traditional evolutionary theories enjoy endorsement within the popular press, and society generally, because all operate within a heteronormative paradigm. Because theories are paradigm driven (Kuhn, 1962), it is this paradigmatic dependence upon heteronormativity that critics emphasise, and seek to challenge with an alternative paradigm that emphasises diversity.

I intend to introduce findings from competing interpretations of evolutionary theory. These theories focus on fundamental aspects of Darwinian evolutionary theory, such as variation as the baseline upon which natural selection operates, and the contingency of selection due to environmental change over long periods of time. In short, rather than assume that sexual dimorphism and heterosexuality are the evolutionary norm, these theories take diversity as the anticipated starting point for critical inquiry.

Empirical tests of these theories tend to rely upon evidence garnered from the observed behaviour of non-human living organisms. This is partly because such organisms have existed on earth far longer than humans and thus provide the kind of time-frame required for evolutionary speculation, and partly to challenge the popular societal belief that homosexual behaviour does not exist in non-human species, and is therefore, evolutionarily speaking, 'unnatural'. While the weariness

of LGBTQ persons of their constant comparison to fruit flies and rats is well taken, I argue with a number of feminist science studies scholars (Haraway, 2003; Kinsman, 2001; Kirby, 1999; Wilson, 2002) that it is appropriate to learn from non-human animals, but that we must always be cognisant of the paradigms that inform these studies

Sex diversity

An aetiological approach to homosexual behaviour is predicated on the assumption that 'sex' involves only two distinct (and 'opposite') entities (female and male) and that these two sexes behaviourally complement each other. Yet, from an evolutionary perspective, it is not clear why sex exists. Evolutionarily speaking, sex is a recent phenomenon. Margulis and Sagan (1986) argue that sexual reproduction evolved by accident as a necessary by-product of the evolution of multicellularity and cellular differentiation. In multicellular organisms, cells begin to specialise and carry out different functions: mixis (the production of a single individual from two parents by way of fertilisation occurring at the level of fused cells or individuals) 'becomes a consequence of the need to preserve differentiation...mixis itself is dispensable and...was never selected for directly' (Margulis & Sagan, 1986, p.180).

Put another way, 'multicellularity provided evolutionary advantages and sex came along for the ride' (Fausto-Sterling, 1997, p.53). Thus, rather than deliberate on how most living organisms are able to reproduce without 'sex', scientists are more

puzzled by those species that *do* engage in sexual reproduction. Sexual reproduction consumes twice the energy and genes of parthenogenic reproduction (Bagemihl, 1999). After an extensive search of the biological literature on sex, Mackay concluded:

The most intriguing aspect of my research was why we have sex at all. After all, sexual reproduction in animals started only 300 million years ago. Life on earth got on pretty well for 3000 million years before that with asexual reproduction... [Sexual reproduction] takes more time, it uses more energy, and mates may be scarce or uncooperative. (2001, p.623)

Virtually all plant and many animal species are intersex. That is, living organisms are often both sexes simultaneously, which means that there are not really ‘two sexes’ at all – the mushroom *Schizophyllum* has more than 28,000 sexes (Laidman, 2000). Many animal species routinely practice transsex, by changing from one sex to another, either once or several times. In some families of fish, transsex is so much the norm that biologists have created a

term for those ‘unusual’ fish that do not change sex – gonochoristic. Other animals practise transvestism by visually, chemically or behaviourally resembling the ‘opposite’ sex. And over 4000 known species are parthenogenic: all the organisms are female and they reproduce without sex.

Sexual diversity

Not only are living organisms sex diverse; they are also sexually diverse. Homosexual behaviour occurs in over 450 different species of animals, is found in every geographic region of the world, in every major animal group, in all age groups, and with equal frequency amongst females and males (Bagemihl, 1999; Hird, 2004). Homosexual behaviour in animals is enormously diverse, and in some species is more diverse than heterosexual behaviour (Pavelka, 1995). Lifetime pair-bonding of homosexual couples is not prevalent in mammal species, but nor is heterosexual lifetime pair-bonding. More than half of mammal and bird species engage in bisexual activities. Non-human animal homosexual behaviour varies in frequency within and between species from non-existence (that is, it has not been observed

DISCUSS AND DEBATE

To what extent are evolutionary psychologists aware of, and to what extent do they incorporate into their research, competing theories emphasising sex and sexual diversity?

Why don't more studies focus on the aetiology of homosexuality?

Have your say on these or other issues this article raises. Send letters to psychologist@bps.org.uk or contribute to our forum via www.thepsychologist.org.uk.

by zoologists) to levels that meet or surpass heterosexual behaviour.

Sociobiologist Edward Wilson notes that ‘monogamy, and especially monogamy outside the breeding season, is the rare exception. Parent–offspring bonds usually last only to the weaning period and are then often terminated by a period of conflict’ (2000, p.315). Single parenting, or indeed no parental investment at all, is the norm in the non-human living world (only 5 per cent of mammals form lifetime heterosexual pair bonds – Wilson, 2000). Amongst non-human living organisms, daycare, fostering and adoption are common, as are infanticide (many parents eat their children) and incest (Bagemihl, 1999).

Nor do many animals have sex solely or primarily in order to reproduce. Although generally ignored, pleasure is an organising force in relations between non-human animals. Many female animals engage in sex when they are already pregnant, and many animals masturbate (Bagemihl, 1999). Birth control is not restricted to human animals: many non-human animals practise forms of birth control through vaginal plugs, defecation, abortion through the ingestion of certain plants, ejection of sperm and, in the case of chimpanzees, nipple stimulation (Bagemihl, 1999). Trans-species sex also occurs. Sexual behaviour between flowers and various insects is so commonplace that it is rarely recognised as trans-species sexual activity. Other examples now appear in the literature; for instance, Krizek (1992) observed and documented a sexual interaction between two different orders of insects – a butterfly and a rove beetle.

Stuck in heteronormative ways?

The sex and sexual behaviour of living organisms is far more diverse than theories that operate within a heteronormative

paradigm generally acknowledge. This diversity confronts cultural ideas about family, monogamy, fidelity, parental care, heterosexuality, and 'sexual difference'. It is incumbent upon psychologists to consider the extent to which their current practices are indebted to heteronormative evolutionary psychology. Psychologists need to be aware that considerable debate exists within evolutionary theory about homosexual behaviour specifically, and sex and sexual practices more generally. The 'abnormality' of homosexual behaviour is axiomatic to traditional accounts, whereas competing critical research favours the acknowledgement of sex and sexual diversity among living organisms. From the perspective of this latter approach, the continued emphasis on attempts to 'explain' homosexual behaviour belies a cultural impetus rather than one based on evolutionary theory.

■ Myra Hird is in the Department of Sociology, Queen's University, Kingston, Ontario E-mail: hirdm@post.queensu.ca.

References

- Bagemihl, B. (1999). *Biological exuberance. Animal homosexuality and natural diversity*. New York: St Martin's Press.
- Fausto-Sterling, A. (1997). Feminism and behavioral evolution: A taxonomy. In P. Gowaty (Ed.) *Feminism and evolutionary biology: Boundaries, intersections, and frontiers*. New York: Chapman and Hall.
- Foucault, M. (1980). *Herculine Barbin: Being the recently discovered memoirs of a 19th century French hermaphrodite*. New York: Pantheon.
- Futuyama, D.J. & Risch, S.J. (1984). Sexual orientation, sociobiology, and evolution. *Journal of Homosexuality*, 9, 157–168.
- Gallup, G. & Suarez, S. (1983). Homosexuality as by-product of selection for optimal heterosexual strategies. *Perspectives in Biological Medicine*, 26, 315–321.
- Haraway, D. (2003). *The companion species manifesto: Dogs, people, and significant otherness*. Chicago: Prickly Paradigm Press.
- Hird, M. (2004). *Sex, gender and science*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Press.
- Kinsman, S. (2001). Life, sex and cells. In M. Mayberry, B. Subramaniam & L. Weasel (Eds.) *Feminist science studies*. New York: Routledge.
- Kirby, V. (1999). Human nature. *Australian Feminist Studies*, 14(29), 19–29.
- Krizek, G.O. (1992). Unusual Interaction between a butterfly and a beetle: 'Sexual paraphilia' in insects? *Tropical Lepidoptera*, 3(2), 118.
- Kuhn, T. (1962). *The structure of scientific revolutions* (3rd edn). Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Laidman, J. (2000). Reproduction a touch-and-go thing for Fungus. *Nature*, July 24, 1–3.
- Mackay, J. (2001). Why have sex? *British Medical Journal*, 322, 623.
- Margulis, L. & Sagan, D. (1986). *Origins of sex. three billion years of genetic recombination*. New Haven, CN: Yale University Press.
- McKnight, J. (1997). *Straight science? Homosexuality, evolution and adaptation*. London: Routledge.
- Pavelka, M.M. (1995). Sexual nature: What can we learn from a cross-species perspective? In P. Abramson & S. Pinkerton (Eds.) *Sexual nature, sexual culture*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Ruse, M. (1988). *Homosexuality: A philosophical inquiry*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Wilson, E.O. (2000). *Sociobiology: The new synthesis* (25th Anniversary Edition). Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Wilson, E. (2002). Biologically inspired feminism: Response to Helen Keane and Marsha Rosengarten, 'On the biology of sexed subjects'. *Australian Feminist Studies*, 17(39), 283–285.



The
British
Psychological
Society

BPS/POST Postgraduate Award



This scheme is intended to aid the dissemination of psychological research into public policy areas, to raise public awareness, and to increase the input of Society members into policy debates. It provides an opportunity for a postgraduate psychologist to be seconded to POST, where he or she will assist in providing timely and objective briefing material for MPs and Peers.

The Parliamentary Office of Science & Technology (POST)

POST is an office of the two Houses of Parliament (Commons and Lords), charged with providing balanced and objective analysis of science- and technology-based issues of relevance to Parliament. It employs a broad definition of science and technology and carries out studies in areas that range from defence and new technologies to the environment and health.

The focus of POST's work is to provide background summaries of research on specific topics, such as food contamination or computer security, and to identify issues arising from this work that are of parliamentary interest and relevance. Further details of POST's work are available at: www.parliament.uk/post/home.htm

Award: Three-month secondment to POST. An allowance equivalent to three months of a research council studentship will be provided to fund this period.

Eligibility: All postgraduate students registered for a higher degree by research (PhD or MPhil) in their second or third year of full-time study (or part-time equivalent) at the time of application.

Requirement: To produce a concise (no more than two sides A4, typed) summary of any aspect of psychological research that the applicant considers and shows to be relevant to public policy, including an explanation of why parliamentarians should be interested in this topic.

Guidelines and application forms will be available from 1 June 2006.

Postal/telephone/e-mail requests should be made to Lisa Morrison Coulthard, at the Society's Leicester office (lismor@bps.org.uk).

The winner will be expected to start his or her secondment on an agreed date between October 2006 and May 2007.

Closing date for applications: 31 August 2006



Why I study...

Bisexuality and beyond

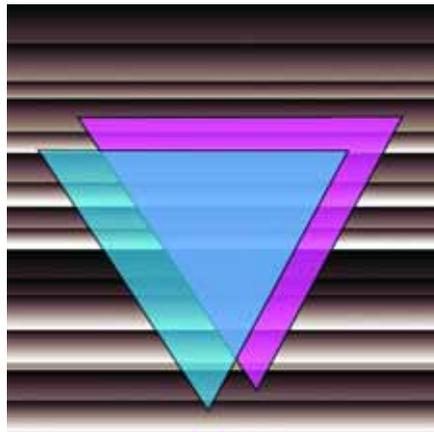
'BRITISH homosexual psychologist favours multiple sex partners'. This was the headline that an online American newspaper gave their report on a talk I gave at a BPS conference (Barker & Ritchie, 2004). The report went on to explain that my work illustrated 'the repercussions incurred when God's truth is suppressed for a lie' (Traditional Values Coalition, 2004).

The headline displays the confusion that still surrounds minority sexual communities. Sadly, these misunderstandings are not confined to the extreme fringes of Christian fundamentalism. A flick through mainstream psychological textbooks suggests that bisexuality, non-monogamy and SM (somasochism) remain largely invisible within British psychology. If they are ever considered, it is as abnormalities or pathologies rather than as legitimate sexual identities and practices (see Barker, in press, for an extensive review of psychology textbooks). One of my main reasons for beginning to study this area was the gulf between such representations and the experiences of people within the communities themselves.

The newspaper report states that I am 'homosexual', presumably because my conference paper mentioned my female partner and it is assumed that sexuality is dichotomous: that people are either heterosexual or homosexual. Such an assumption was also implicit in the debate in the letters page of *The Psychologist* over the causes of sexual orientation, and it is perpetuated in most mainstream undergraduate psychology textbooks. If they consider non-heterosexual sexuality at all, they compare lesbians and gay men to heterosexual people in the context of sexual orientation, relationships, child development, and so on. For example, Shaffer (1996, p.538) states that a minority of adolescents are 'attracted to members of their own sex...accepting they have a homosexual orientation'.

Petford (2003) argues that such assumptions may well contribute to the discrimination experienced by many in the

bisexual communities, and the myth that bisexuality is 'just a phase' on the way to a mature straight or gay identity. My discussions with attendees at the annual UK BiCon suggested that rather than seeing themselves as being attracted to 'both' men and women, many do not perceive gender as the defining feature in their attraction. Perhaps, rather than ignoring bisexual experiences, psychologists could learn something from them about the potential flaws in their dichotomous theories of both sexuality and gender. I certainly welcome Coyle's (2003) call for more British psychological work on bisexuality and



recent moves to incorporate 'bisexual' into the name of the Lesbian and Gay Section.

When I began my research, I was also spurred on by a growing awareness that psychological theories of attraction and love excluded people in openly non-monogamous relationships. Erikson's theory is still the most frequently mentioned in undergraduate textbooks, presenting the formation of a monogamous long-term relationship with one person of the opposite sex as an integral part of healthy development (e.g. Malim & Birch, 1998). If anything other than monogamy is considered it is in the context of infidelities; honest non-monogamy is seldom mentioned. Like the headline I began with, people generally assume that any kind of 'non-monogamy' is about a desire for sex. However, my studies with openly non-

monogamous people in the UK (Barker, 2004) suggest that they often present their relationship networks as 'families of choice' (Heaphy *et al.*, 2004) downplaying the sexual aspect of them. Non-monogamy has also been demonised by links to the risk of HIV infection (Crossley, 2004), with some advocating 'faithfulness' and 'monogamy' to stop the AIDS pandemic (e.g. Shelton *et al.*, 2004). However, given that dishonest infidelity occurs frequently within committed relationships (Vangelisti & Gerstenberger, 2004), unsafe sex with one 'trusted' partner is likely to be more risky than safe sex with many.

As well as bisexual and non-monogamous groups, I now conduct research within SM communities. Unlike the previously mentioned sexualities, SM is explicitly pathologised in the American Psychiatric Association's *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual* (DSM-IV-TR), with sexual sadism and masochism being listed as 'paraphilias'. This categorisation is unquestioningly reproduced in most abnormal psychology textbooks (e.g. Durand & Barlow, 2003).

It is important to remember that homosexuality was classed as a disorder under the DSM until 1973, and when it was removed it was initially replaced with a category of ego-dystonic homosexuality (DSM-III): homosexuality which distresses the individual. Similarly, the definitions of sexual sadism and masochism have changed over the years to explicitly state that the person must be caused significant distress or impairment. However, ego-dystonic homosexuality was eventually eliminated because it 'suggested to some that homosexuality itself was considered a disorder' and 'all people who are homosexual first go through a phase in which their homosexuality is ego-dystonic' (DSM-III-R, cited in Kutchins & Kirk, 1999). Kutchins and Kirk also point out that heterosexuality that was 'unwanted and a persistent source of distress' was never included in the DSM.

Similarly with SM the remaining classification under DSM-IV suggests that SM in general is a disorder and/or

References

- Barker, M. (2004). This is my partner, and this is my... partner's partner: Constructing a polyamorous identity in a monogamous world. *Journal of Constructivist Psychology, 18*, 75–88.
- Barker, M. (in press). Heteronormativity and mononormativity in psychology textbooks: A bisexual polyamorous perspective. In V. Clarke & E. Peel (Eds.) *Out in psychology*. London: Wiley.
- Barker, M. & Ritchie, A. (2004, July). *Hot bi babes and feminist families: Polyamorous women speak out*. Presentation at the Psychology of Women Section Conference, Brighton.
- Barker, M. & Evans, M. (in press). Counsellor understandings of same-sex and non-monogamous relationships. In L. Moon (Ed.) *Feeling queer or queer feelings? Counselling sexual cultures and identities*. London: Brunner-Routledge.
- Bridoux, D. (2000). Kink therapy: SM and sexual minorities. In C. Neal & D. Davies (Eds.) *Pink therapy 3: Issues in therapy with lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender clients*. Buckingham: Open University Press.
- Butt, T.W., Burr, V. & Bell, R.C. (1997). Fragmentation and the sense of self: Constructivism. *The Human Sciences, 2*, 12–29.
- Coyle, A. (2003). Editorial. *Lesbian and Gay Psychology Review, 4*(2), 3–4.
- Crossley, M.L. (2004). Making sense of 'barebacking': Gay men's narratives, unsafe sex and the 'resistance habitus'. *British Journal of Social Psychology, 43*, 225–244.
- Durand, V.M. & Barlow, D.H. (2003). *Essentials of abnormal psychology*. Pacific Grove, CA: Wadsworth/Thompson Learning.
- Heaphy, B., Donovan, C. & Weeks, J. (2004). A different affair? Openness and nonmonogamy in same sex relationships. In J. Duncombe, K. Harrison, G. Allan & D. Marsden (Eds.) *The state of affairs: Explorations in infidelity and commitment*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.
- Kutchins, H. & Kirk, S.A. (1999). *Making us crazy – DSM: The psychiatric bible and the creation of mental disorders*. London: Constable.
- Langdridge, D. & Barker, M. (2005). Contemporary perspectives on sadomasochism (S/M) [Special issue]. *Lesbian and Gay Psychology Review, 6*(3).
- Malim, T. & Birch, A. (1998). *Introductory psychology*. Basingstoke: Macmillan.
- Moser, C. & Levitt, E.E. (1995). An explanatory-descriptive study of a sadomasochistically oriented sample. In T. Weinberg (Ed.) *S&M: Studies in Dominance and Submission*. New York: Prometheus Books.
- Petford, B. (2003). Power in the darkness: Some thoughts on the marginalisation of bisexuality in psychological literature. *Lesbian and Gay Psychology Review, 4*(2), 5–13.
- Shaffer, D. (1996). *Developmental psychology: Childhood and adolescence*. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth/Thompson Learning.
- Shelton, J.D., Halperin, D.T., Nantulya, V. et al. (2004). Partner reduction is crucial for balanced 'ABC' approach to HIV prevention. *British Medical Journal, 328*, 848–849.
- Traditional Values Coalition (2004). *British homosexual psychologist favors multiple sex partners*. Retrieved 18 July 2005 from www.traditionalvalues.org/modules.php?name=News&file=article&sid=1748
- Vangelisti, A. L. & Gerstenberger, M. (2004). Communication and marital infidelity. In J. Duncombe, K. Harrison, G. Allan & D. Marsden (Eds.) *The state of affairs: Explorations in infidelity and commitment*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.

abnormal behaviour. As with homosexuality, there are still strong taboos around SM in our culture; many SM practitioners are likely to go through a stage of being distressed about their desires, which may pass, leaving them happily and non-problematically involved in SM activities. SM may cause 'significant distress or impairment in... functioning' (DSM-III-R) precisely because of the stigma, social unacceptability, discrimination and prejudice that surrounds it.

There is little psychological research on SM taking anything other than a clinical perspective, and most such research assumes that people engaging in SM are psychologically unwell, despite evidence demonstrating their relative psychological health (e.g. Moser & Levitt, 1995). Much of the literature on SM searches for one encompassing explanation for why all people engage in such activities. My own research so far suggests that SM practitioners themselves perceive multiple overlapping reasons for their (and others') engagement with SM practices. For example, being the submissive party in an SM scene may allow someone to let go of the responsibility they usually have, to gain control in one specified area as they negotiate the scene, to increase their sense of intimacy with the others involved, to break taboos, to prove their ability to endure what is happening to them, to enjoy a pleasurable physical sensation, or to induce a meditative state (see Langdridge & Barker, 2005, for detailed discussions).

To return to the question posed by the title of this article, I began research in these areas of human sexuality because I felt that they were underresearched and largely misunderstood in the existing psychological literature. As I have continued my studies I have come to the conclusion that these identities and practices may also have important implications for general psychological theories of sexuality, gender, attraction and relationships. If people can be attracted to others regardless of gender, or with the focus being on something else entirely (e.g. certain sensations, submission and dominance), and if people can form more than one romantic relationship at a time, or even relationships which involve three or four people, this suggests that we should re-evaluate psychological theories to ensure that they encompass such possibilities.

Another avenue I have recently begun

to explore is the potential that bisexuality, non-monogamy and SM have for challenging theories of self-identity. The traditional way of viewing the self is as one coherent whole but, as constructivist and constructionist theorists have pointed out, this can be an unhelpful view leading to conflict over what the 'real' self is (Butt *et al.*, 1997). It seems that bisexuality, non-monogamy and SM have the capacity to help people become aware of different facets of themselves and perhaps come to a different understanding of identity. Bisexual people can form deep relationships with more than one gender, which may draw out different aspects of their identity. Non-monogamous people might see themselves reflected differently in the eyes of those they are closely involved with. SM enables the exploration of different kinds of dominant and submissive states of mind.

A final reason to continue to research and write about these communities relates to understanding amongst applied psychologists. Preliminary research (Barker & Evans, in press) suggests that many counsellors and psychologists still have little awareness of the issues faced by same-sex couples, and even less those in multiple relationships. Bridoux (2000) argues that there is also a lack of understanding about SM amongst most psychologists and therapists, and a tendency to assume that if a client is involved in SM that is part of their problem. Psychological understandings of sexualities beyond heterosexuality and homosexuality are also relevant to other applied areas since they should inform organisational equal opportunities policies, sex education in schools, and legal debates around recognition of relationships and the treatment of those who engage in consensual SM practices. As well as publishing my research in psychological journals and presenting it at conferences, I am beginning to run training sessions for practitioners based on the accounts of those I research, and to write more popular, journalistic pieces based on my findings. Hopefully this will go some way towards countering some of the common myths that still abound about the communities I study.

■ *Meg Barker is a senior lecturer at London South Bank University and is the Honorary Secretary of the Lesbian and Gay Section of the British Psychological Society. E-mail: barkermj@lsbu.ac.uk.*